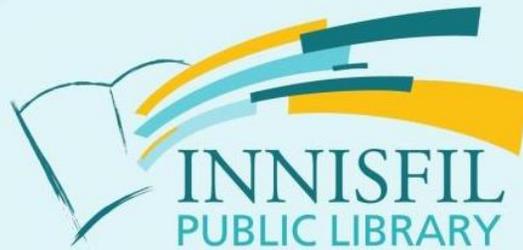


what's your story?



2013 Seepe Walters
Short Story Contest



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**Produced by Innisfil Public Library
November 2013**

Seepe Walters



Seepe Walters was a well-respected and dedicated member of the Innisfil community until her death in 1995.

She was involved in many different facets of Innisfil life: the Historical Society, 4-H, the Women's Institute, her Church, her family and various political arenas.

It was her love of writing and all things literary which led her to journalism at the University of Toronto, to a job as a freelance correspondent with the *Daily Construction News*, to teach English to immigrant children, to work with the Barrie Literacy Council and to ultimately help found the Innisfil Friends of the Library.

Seepe Walters' commitment to her community and specifically her legacy to the Library, which is now supported by two incredibly dynamic Friends of the Library groups, is being remembered through the Innisfil Public Library's Seepe Walters Story Writing Contest.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Innisfil Public Library would like to congratulate all the students who entered the 12th edition of the Innisfil Public Library's Short Story Contest. This contest has been known as The Seepe Walters Short Story Contest since 2004, in memory of the woman who was a driving force behind the creation of the original Friends of the Innisfil Public Library group.

The contributions of many have made this contest and this publication a reality. The Innisfil Public Library would like to thank the Friends of the Library, the Ferraro family, and Staples for their ongoing support and sponsorship; as well as the judging panel: Eileen Cook, Jill Jambor, and Brenda Wood for accepting such a difficult job; and of course, the efforts of all the incredible young writers who submitted entries. Although there is only one name on the Seepe Walters Award plaque, you are all winners for having the courage to pursue your writing dreams.

Many thanks to all those involved. And to everyone else, we hope you enjoy the stories submitted to the 2013 edition of the Seepe Walters Short Story Contest.

Wendy Ricciardi
Innisfil Public Library

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Seepe Walters Short Story 2013 Winner

My Camping Adventure **By: Bronte VanKesteren (Gr. 5)**

It was Friday night in Innisfil, and Linzi was so excited because the night was finally here. She finally got to go camping all by herself in her backyard. Her father promised that, when she turned eight, she would be able to camp all by herself like her older, bully brother, Logan, did before her.

She bounced on her bed while watching out her window, waiting for her father to get home from his work. At 6:45 p.m., she finally saw her father's bid, dirty, gray truck come bumping down the dirt road in a cloud of dust. She jumped off her bed, raced to the front door, and pounced out the door, not even caring to put on shoes. She ran down her long, dirt driveway to meet her father half way. As she ran beside her father's truck, she waved her hands to try to get him to roll down his window. He rolled it down at the top of the driveway and said, "What's the matter?" Linzi breathlessly said, "I turned eight yesterday! Do you remember what that means? It means that, today, I get to sleep in the tent all by myself!" said Linzi. Her father replied, "Why are you just standing there then? Let's go set it up!"

While her father started to set up the little, blue and gray tent in the backyard, Linzi ran inside to get her things for the night. When she returned, she saw the tent half way set up.

“Father!” she said, “It’s almost done! Here, let me help.”

After the tent was finished, Linzi jumped with joy, unzipped the zipper of the tent, grabbed her stuff, and started to organize the inside. She laid her chilly, silky sleeping bag on the cold, hard ground and tucked her favourite, over-stuffed teddy bear, Chuzzy, into its bed.

When it was bedtime, and the moon was shining bright in the dark, muggy sky, she put on her fuzzy, penguin pajamas. Her mom, dad, and Logan came out to the tent to say goodnight. “Sweet dreams”, said her mom. “Don’t let the bedbugs bite”, said her dad.

“Watch out for the wolves and bears!” teased Logan, trying to scare her.

After everyone went back inside, she curled up into her sleeping bag. As she lay there cuddling Chuzzy, she listened to the whistling of the soft wind as it tickled her tent. After a bit, the wind got stronger. It began to blow harder and harder. It whirled around and rattled her tent. Linzi lay there panting, wondering if she should hide under her covers or dive out of her tent and dart to the back door. All of a sudden, Linzi found herself sprawled with her tent flopped on top of her. It had blown over, and now the wind was finally stopping. Next, Linzi heard the sound of sniffing around her tent. She crawled to find the zipper of the tent and slowly unzipped it a bit to peak outside. She was hoping it was just the neighbour’s dog.

When she peered outside, a big, dim forest lay in the distance that was not there before, and her tent sat in a field that was swarming with bugs. She saw something like a dog run into the

forest. Linzi clutched Chuzzy and ran after it. As she walked into the muddy, dusky forest, she saw a little campfire with the dog sitting there, so she tiptoed up to it with the leaves crinkling underneath her feet. As she got close, she softly said, "Hello." The dog looked at her, and she realized that it was not a dog. It was a wolf. Linzi sat beside the camp fire wondering how the wolf made this fire. The wolf just sat, staring at the fire. Out of nowhere, a little, black bear waddled up to the fire, pulled out a stick, and poked the fire to make it bigger. Linzi stared at the bear with her eyes wide and shuddered, "Do you know where I am?" The bear didn't answer her. Then Linzi said, "Do you know where Innisfil is?" The bear looked surprised and said, "Innisfil?" Innisfil was the name of a big, mean bear that bullied the forest. "Why would I know where Innisfil is?" questioned the bear. The wolf spoke for the first time and said, "Follow me" in a deep, creaky voice. Linzi left the fire to follow the wolf. She followed the wolf deeper into the forest.

Finally, they came to a trickling brook that glowed in the light of the moon. "Is this water clean? I'm really thirsty". "Yes", said the wolf. Linzi knelt beside the brook and scooped water with her hands. It was cool, clean, and fresh water. While she was bent over drinking, a bitter stench suddenly filled her nostrils. She heard a low, whispering growl behind her. She stood up and whirled around, and her eyes met with a hairy, mammoth bear. It was Innisfil. She screamed. The wolf bounded to her side. "Get on!" yelled the wolf. Linzi jumped onto his back and grabbed his thick, grey fur. He ran through the forest as fast as he could while the Innisfil pounded behind them. They made it back to Linzi's collapsed tent and squirmed inside. Linzi lay

there curled up, shaking with the wolf panting and cuddled beside her. Eventually, Linzi drifted to sleep.

After a while, Linzi was awakened by snapping sounds. She slowly crawled and peaked out of her tent to see her mom and dad sitting in lawn chairs by a crackling campfire they had built in the back yard next to Linzi tent. She ran up to them panicking, telling them of the large bear she had encountered. Her father hugged her and calmed her down. Her mother said, “You have just had a bad dream. We should take you inside”. “Okay”, said Linzi breathlessly. Her father carried her to the house. As he did, she thought about the terrible dream that she had or was it a dream.

THE END.

Time

By: Ethan Leung (Gr. 6)

Time is awesome. It really is. But, it can be bad, too. You know how I know? I've really been through time. My name's Tim, by the way. It all started when I was ready to start summer, and then, a big burst of blue lightning blasted up from the ground. I saw a guy standing there. It looked like he was expecting me. "Hello, me." He said. I was speechless. But, when I looked closer, I figured out it was me. Me from the future, to be exact. I was confused until he told me that he was recruited from the Important Missions for the Future Heroes (I.M.F.H.) and that a dangerous villain: the Time Tyrant appeared on the Time Cameras, security cameras taken through time and installed with a special device that sends messages through time. "The Time Tyrant is a level 20 dangerous villain. He must be stopped." The future Tim said. "How do we get there?" I replied, not knowing the physics of time travel. The future Tim brought out a button and pressed it. Suddenly, we were engulfed in a big ball of blue lightning. Everything was spinning. And then, the world disappeared. You know how after a really fast roller coaster ride you get queasy? Well, imagine that, except 100x dizzier. We ended up going to the time of the 70s. Bathrooms weren't as good as now, but I just ran to the nearest one while the future Tim interrogated some suspicious-looking people. While he did that, I had to go in a long line just to use one stall. My stomach had the worst timing ever. I couldn't hold it much longer. Whew! What a relief! I felt better, but the guy in front of me didn't. He turned around. "I-I-I'm sorry, sir! I--!" When he turned around, he tore off his face. A disguise! As soon as I saw who he was,

my face turned pale. ½ hour later, I dashed into my future self. “Hey, Tim?” I started. “Hmm?” the future Tim replied. “Does the Time Tyrant have red eyes?” “Yes, he does.” “Does he have sharp claws?” “Yup.” “Does he have fangs?” “Uh-huh.” “Does he have weird-looking legs and a tail?” “Definitely.” “Does his breath smell like garlic, socks, and onions?” “Yes. Why do you ask?” “Cuz’ I think I found him.” When the future Tim turned around, the Time Tyrant, in all his ugliness, was standing there with an evil grin. He swung his needle-like tail and aimed at me. “So, Tim, we meet again. And this time you brought a 6th grader? Hah! Pathetic!” He brought out a laser gun and zapped the future me. “An energy zapper. It freezes you in a blast,” The TT explained. “It’s amazing how technology evolves! Now for you, Past Tim!” I looked around for something to use. That’s when I noticed something sticking out of future Tim’s pocket. I grabbed it and read the title of the object. Lightning Taser, 2067 edition. I zapped the Time Tyrant, causing electricity to wash over him. He was able to press a button on his belt. That made a red ball of lightning engulf him. When the ball disappeared, TT was gone. So, just for fun, I grabbed an air horn and blasted the future Tim. Then, he fell down. So, I guess, air horns disable the effects of the energy zapper. We heard a voice over the Time Communicator: “Agents Tim, we caught the Time Tyrant in the act. He is at the time of the Ice Age.” “So,” I asked the future Tim. “Got a winter jacket, boots, and a grappling hook?” 100,204,350 years ago, we arrived just on time to see the Time Tyrant put a woolly jacket on. It was clear that he stripped the wool off of a woolly mammoth. A naked mammoth was lying there, ashamed of itself. “It doesn’t have to be this way, Time Tyrant!” the future Tim yelled. “Oh yes it can!” the Time Tyrant yelled back. He pushed a button on a small device. Then, everything started shaking. And then, the snow started to fall down. Not as in the weather, as in—“AVALANCHE!!!!” I screamed in horror. The future Tim and I ran as fast as our heavy-duty grip snow boots would let us. We managed

to stay ahead of the disaster by 100 feet. That gave us enough time to think up a plan for 30 seconds. “We could use this bark,” I suggested. “As a tobogganing sled on a hill.” “Or,” the future Tim said, “We could climb up the tree.” “There isn’t enough time!” I complained. “Okay, let’s do it your way,” future Tim said. “But HURRY!” We grabbed a big chunk of wood from a tree and jumped in it the second the avalanche hit us. A red flash appeared and disappeared. “After him!” I yelled. We went to the time before the world was created. “Hey!” I yelled. “Who turned off the light!?” Suddenly, a loud voice as loud as thunder said, “Let there be light.” Great. First I don’t have any light, and now I have more than enough. Then, I saw what would be Earth. “Tim?” I asked. “Are you sure that this is TT’s location?” “Whoops.” The future Tim said. “Wrong coordinates.” So, we went forward in time to the time of knights. Then, this red knight tried to slice me into human sushi! Luckily I dodged, but not enough. It was getting chilly. Or, at least I was. “Do you feel cold?” I asked. So, I turned around and noticed that the back part of my shirt was torn. Eventually, I had that fixed. But then, something bothers me. When I ducked, I noticed red eyes and a tail on the knight. Suddenly, it occurred to me—“THAT KNIGHT IS THE TIME TYRANT!!!” And then, the future Tim pulled out two bars. He handed one to me and said, “Press the blue button, but not the green one.” I was curious to find out what the green button did, but I just pushed the blue button. And then, a blue motorcycle design burst out and transformed into a real motorcycle based on the design. The future Tim did the same. Together, we chased the Time Tyrant until a red flash appeared. I tossed out a blue bomb and a blue ball covered both of us. We followed the TT to the – that’s weird. We went to where the future Tim came from. Then, the Time Tyrant appeared in a big, hulking robot. “Uh, oh. We’re in big trouble!” I said as I grabbed a laser gun and blasted the metal shell. It didn’t work. “Yikes!” After using all of our weapons, I freaked out and hid. The

future Tim fought the Time Tyrant while I hid in the office spaces.

When I came out 10 minutes later, the Time Tyrant was beaten up by the future Tim with boxing gloves on top of him. “How did you beat him?” I asked, astonished. “I have my ways.” The future Tim answered. “Well,” I said, stretching. “Looks like the world’s saved. Can you drop me off back home?” “In a flash” was his only answer. In an eye-blink, I flew back 10 years and landed on the sidewalk of 2013. And that, readers, is the story of time.

The Chosen Hero

A Rhyme of Action

By: Mark Kogan (Gr. 6)

In a world, in a place much like our own lived a boy named chase who called this place home.
He lived in a house, with a mom and dad, they were both oh so nice but chase was still sad
Chase longed for adventure, he longed for a fight, but he always stayed quiet, he kept out of
sight.

One day chase was walking, he went out the house door, when he noticed a cave, and it wasn't
there before

So chase braver then smart, went in the cave, when he was whisked through the air before he
could say "hey"

So chase was surprised, chase was scared, he had trouble speaking as he sat and stared.

In front of him were people, they looked just like him, but they were stronger then chase, chase
couldn't win

So as chase was sitting, looking stupid on his bum, the four people asked "are you the chosen
one?"

Chase almost said "what? I don't understand," but thanks to quick thinking he said "why yes, yes
I am"

Then all four said "prove it, prove it then please" and chase almost smiled he had a trick up his
sleeve

For chase was always ready he was always prepared, he remembered with him was a bone from a bear

The bone was dipped in vinegar and now it was soft so to get their attention chase quietly coughed

“You see my dear friends this is a bone but with tremendous strength I will bend it alone”

So all four just stood there surprised and amazed, as chase bended the bone, and with ease and with grace

“Sorry” said all four, clearly shook to the core ‘our names are Lee, Sophie Rebecca, and Noor”

“Okay” said chase happily “you’re in my command you’ll do what I tell you or else, understand?”

“Not so fast master” said Lee with a frown, “come with us to war or they’ll burn every town”

“Whose they” Chase asked with an uncertain smile “well they’re the evil black night” said Lee after a while

“Fine” said Chase “we have towns to save but before we fight lets go back to the cave”

For Chase wanted to run, although this was fun chase was an ounce scared or maybe a ton

So they went to the cave but before chase could run they saw a strange boy who had snuck up to them

“Hello” said the boy “my name is rue I’m the chosen one I can prove it to you”

Rue grabbed a huge boulder, picked up in the air then dropped and made it turn into a pear

Lee and the girls just looked and stared is he the one they thought with some fear

Then chase quickly said He can’t be I swear “well let’s take him along” said Sophie with care’

Rue might be the chosen one maybe he’s not maybe you both are wouldn’t that rock?”

So reluctantly both boys came along to the land where the war was coming along to a stand

“Come on” said Rebecca ‘let’s go and let’s fight’ with a lion’s heart and a hyena’s bight”

For a second chase was paralyzed with fear, but he was determined to leave with no tears

So chase started fighting fight he did all right, Chase was pretty good with his fists and a knife

But then out came Kyle (the bad guy with no wife) and he started fighting with all the strength in his life

Kyle could fight and was beating Chase too until the hero came along (the hero was Rue)

So together with teamwork The Chase and The Rue defeated Kyle (at least they thought they did, oops)

So as they celebrated there was no dark Chase felt in his back something cold and sharp

So chase didn’t live he was no chosen one, hi story, his era was finished was done

You might think it’s weird that the main character died but I can’t tell you why so this is goodbye.

October

By: Kayla Warburton (Gr.6)

My electric toothbrush died three seconds into my twenty-minute tooth cleansing. “Great,” I thought. “Now it feels like I’m chewing centipedes instead of bubble gum.” I had skipped brushing my teeth for two months before Halloween so that I could have greeny- yellow, crawly, grimy teeth just like the hulk, which I was being for Halloween. I was just starting to have second thoughts about giving in and brushing my teeth, when my best friend Andy bust down the front door screaming “DREW! You’re late for the Halloween party! C’mon, man! Hustle!”

The Halloween party! I had completely forgotten. Andy and I had agreed to go together to the school’s annual Halloween party. This year we were holding it in the party room of the local hockey arena, three blocks away. “Hold on, let me just get my costume!” I called. As I was pulling on the mask, it seemed to tighten a bit around my head. I didn’t see it as a big deal; it probably just shrunk a bit from all the ironing it had to go through from being stuffed into my drawer for three months.

As we were pedaling towards the arena, I saw a strange- looking elderly woman selling what looked like bottles of old fashioned soda. Her cart was rusting and missing two wheels, one on each side. Her hair was jet-black and matted and her clothes were torn and stained. “Excuse me ma’am,” I called ‘but what flavours of soda are you selling over there?’”

The woman said nothing, just murmured a few words under her breath, then turned and walked away.

At the party, I got more compliments than I could count on my hulk costume. Comments included: “it all looks so real!” or “I can’t tell where the costume stops and where you start!” I was so proud of myself I almost didn’t see the old lady from the soda stand slip through the far wall of the room. I couldn’t believe my eyes. “Andy!” I cried “you’re never going to believe this!”

As we approached the wall, it felt as if my costume was shrinking onto my skin. I still didn’t see it as strange; Andy was probably just grabbing the back of my costume in fear. I would have done the same. We had entered some kind of ancient dungeon system. Its floors were scattered with bones and all the dead rodents who had dared enter the room. The cells were made out of stone with old rusted metal doors. As we worked our way through the long, twisted halls, we kept hearing the same pattern of sound. Scream, thump, moan. Sometimes the thump was louder than the scream, and sometimes it was the scream that sent shivers down our spines. It got harder and harder to breathe as we descended a long, deep, stairwell. The moans got louder and louder the further down we went. Finally we came across a deep cavern that protected a large clearing on the other side. All of a sudden, something started crawling out of the cavern. Andy and I both screamed. It swept our legs out from underneath us. We fell to the ground with a big thump. I heard Andy moan. It was when I opened my eyes that I realized we had fallen to the bottom of the cavern. When I felt my head to take off my mask, I realized... there was no cloth.

Saving the Day...Again! (The Spy!)

By: George Diab (Gr. 6)

I'm George. I'm ten years old and I have a secret. I'm a spy for the CIA (Children Involved Adventures). My father, Bill, has gone off to find out about Area 51 for the *other* CIA but I am "too little" to go with him. Unfortunately, I can't tell anyone, not even my mom. The only reason I know he works for the CIA is that one time I had trouble with my homework and I went to ask him for help, but he had pulled "The War of 1812" book which flipped the hidden staircase and took him to his secret headquarters. While I was walking, I tripped and fell and when I was fumbling for a handhold, I caught the book, which flipped down and showed me his HQ. It had every gadget you could think of: jellybean shooters, Kool-Aid packs that froze when you shook them, and my favorite, the poison slushy machine. This made up my mind and I decided to join "Children Involved Adventures", a group for children like me. That's how I ended up here, in the Bermuda Triangle, looking like something straight out an Indiana Jones movie. But it's not! I had a machete (kind of like a sword) and a whip. The whip can be curled, hidden, used like a rope, for grabbing enemies' weapons, you name it, it has tons of uses.

So here I am in the middle of the ocean in a dirty, dingy old boat (the CIA didn't have a lot of money) when, thud! When I looked out, I didn't *see* anything but when I swung my sword it hit something and sparks flew! I thought "What?" and stuck out my hand and felt something. I thought "Well, that's odd" and then noticed something on the side of my peripheral vision. I turned and saw something about the size of a saucer, then it crashed into the water. It must have been going 60-70 maybe even 80 miles an hour but when it hit the water it didn't splash, it just sank. "That's really odd" I said, and I took my whip and cracked it ten feet in above me. Like I

expected, it dropped down and fell for about 5 feet. For an instant, the whip hung there and then there was a surge of power, not one that you saw, but one that you felt and a five foot wave came and washed my boat twenty feet back. I thought a moment. Then I had an idea, I drove slowly, cracked my whip and just floored it! As I expected a 5 foot wave came and I rode it up, up, up ... and over! Past that barrier, I kept going when I thought of something. That UFO I saw - maybe they were aliens with technology we could never have and the aliens could've died in the crash but the ship would still be intact and scrambling other ships' signals! Then I noticed that there was a fine mist clouding the water. Just then I realized a plane can be flown by the pilots or the instruments if the pilots can't see in front of them, but if my theory was correct that meant that if the space ship scrambling the instruments then the pilots would have to fly. Then I saw two things wrong with this; if the plane was doing a nosedive and the instruments say they're fine the pilots would have to control the plane on gut feeling *and* gut feeling isn't always right. Plus the mist might obscure their field of vision. Without realizing that I had said it out loud, I felt another ship bumping alongside mine and a gruff hand pointed a gun at my face. I immediately put my hands up. I mean, what else are you going to do? A guy said "Yeah and it helps to know that the police aren't coming, huh?" Another guy said "Toss him in the back!" And I was tied up and thrown in the back of the boat with a bunch of other guys that I realized were cops. "So that's what he was talking about!" I thought as they were tying me up. After a little while one of the cops told me that the other guys were smugglers and had us hostage to ransom us and then they were going to kill us once they had the money so they were the only ones who knew the secret of the Bermuda triangle. I thought "Well, okaaaay" and stood up and the ropes fell at my feet. As they were talking I had rubbed my wrist against a nail, fraying the ropes until they broke and I stood up. "Don't!" yelled a cop but it was too late! As I stood up

and heard a clanking noise. I turned around and saw a rifle descending from a metal rod pointed at me. I hit the deck and an instant later a shot rang out and...missed. The smugglers came back and found a bunch of frayed ropes and some cops. You see, I had climbed up the door frame and I was on top of it, one hand keeping my balance the other with a crowbar. The smugglers were kind of dumb in leaving stuff around that way, I decided. The smugglers were trying to get where I was out of the cops. There were two of them but with a swoosh and a clang, there was one. Number One turned around and I jumped, in the same movement flipping. While I was flipping I swung the crowbar knocking the gun out of his hand then I turned while still flipping, positioned my body so my feet slammed against his skull knocking him out as he fell, landing on my feet. "Game on," I said and realized that the bullet had missed me when I ducked, but hit the hull and now water was gushing everywhere. The bullet itself was small, but the impact on wood blasted a hole about the size of my fist and water was flooding fast! I ran to the cabin and yelled "Mayday! Mayday! Mayday!" into the radio and found that there was a helicopter tailing us! Then I realized the cops must have been tailing us to rescue the other cops and now they were all scrambling up the ladder and the helicopter was going away. "Wait!" I yelled and ran to the end of the boat just as the smugglers opened fire on the helicopter and they fired back and I cracked my whip on the last rung of the helicopter as it was going up. I was yanked off my feet and as I glanced back, I saw a barrel of gasoline and realized that the smugglers were smuggling gasoline and if the helicopter was opening fire... I was jolted out of my thoughts as I saw Number One. The smuggler had aimed his rifle at me and pulled the trigger. My arm exploded with pain, and that pain drove me crazy. I was writhing all around and suddenly I was falling... there was a boom ... falling ... hitting something ... something near my face ... biting it ... and then I opened my eyes and found my father staring at me. I said "Hi, dad". 10 seconds later it

hit me – DAD!?!? Five minutes later I got the full story. The CIA Area 51 team had been investigating the Bermuda Triangle too, and my whip had wrapped around a piece of their ship and I had been healing on their army boat with the hospital on it and they had saved me and treated the bullet wound and now I was healing quickly.

3 weeks later

Right now I was on the top deck of the boat and my arm was perfectly fine (The Area 51 boat had alien technology had a method that made the healing ten times faster than normal) when the mist came down again. I had on a cowboy hat and a leather jacket with green cargo pants, (the sun was hot and there were only army caps except for this cowboy hat and any leather jacket looks cool.) The bullet that I had been shot with had been drilled in at the base. I now wore it around my neck. Anyway, the fine mist had settled when I remembered what I found out and raced to the cabin. Before I got there, I noticed a green glow coming from the mist to starboard. I yelled a warning then raced to the nearest officer, grabbed his binoculars and peered at the glow. I saw a weird green alien with no hair or ears and those creepy eyes you see in every fake photo of an alien and ... was he staring at us? All of a sudden there was a giant whirlpool that grabbed the ship like it was a toy and sucked us into the center and we were under water for a few breathless moments (I meant that literally, we were underwater, remember?) and then we were spat out in a totally different place. I looked around and saw some teeth and cliffs and I realized that this was in those myth books the Percy Jackson series that I read. That meant that up there was Scylla the snake that ate sailors or the whole ship. “Everyone below deck!” I yelled and open the starboard porthole windows and get ropes ready. Amazingly they did it then when Scylla lifted the ship to swallow it we would be swinging on ropes into the caves on the cliff.

“My plan worked!” I thought, as we ran through the caves. It worked! Then we found the CIA helicopter waiting on the other side of the cliff so we hopped in and went home.

The Summer of Surprises

By: Story Quibell (Gr. 7)

"This summer is going to be amazing!" I sang to my best friend Jenna. We skipped to my house. Now that we were 13, our parents agreed to let me stay for 2 weeks at Jenna cottage instead of just a weekend.

When we arrived at Jenna's house her parent were packing the car. I said hi and gave Jenna's dad my bag. Jenna and I were stuck in the back seat behind her younger siblings, Amy and Joshua, in the van. The one thing I don't like about going to Jenna's cottage is her younger siblings. They are so annoying; Amy is adorable, but all she does is cry and cry and then when you find something that amuses her she makes you do it over and over and over again until you want to scream. Joshua -- don't get me started on him. Last year he was picking his nose and he found this huge booger; he put it on his finger and stuck it right in my face and said, "It reminds me of you."

I didn't know how to respond to that so I pushed his arm away and hid in Jenna's and my room till Jenna got home from waterskiing. When I told her what happened we both laughed our heads off.

After dinner, Jenna and I went for an evening swim. The lake at Jenna's cottage is really deep and dark; I've dived in a thousand times trying to touch the bottom, but I can't hold my breath that long. Two years ago, Jenna and I thought of a challenge that we had to do the first swim of every summer. You have to dive as deep as you can, twirl 6 times underwater swim

straight in whatever direction you landed in for 9 kicks of your feet and then swim straight up as fast as you can. Jenna always beats me because she is a competitive swimmer.

"Ready -- 3, 2, 1 go!" Jenna said. She dove in, and then I belly flopped after her. My stomach stung, and I was struggling to hold my breath. I sunk down a little, and tried hard to twirl, getting dizzy. I kicked as fast as I could, and then tried to swim up. I panicked; I was kicking, but the surface was miles away, so I closed my eyes and kicked harder. Suddenly, pain shoots through my skull into my spine; I hit my head on the bottom of the dock. The blast of pain lit up my eyes with little stars like fireworks. Jenna was probably worried about me. I mumbled, "I'm sorry," and closed my eyes.

Wait, what was that? Was that a bright lime green seahorse coming towards me? Was this a dream? The sea horse was right in front of me. I reached out; everything went dark.

A fish rubbed against my arm, waking me. Were there fishes in Heaven? I tried to swim to the dock, but my legs wouldn't move. I realized I couldn't feel my legs; I looked down, grabbing at where my legs should be – they were gone; in their place was a long shiny aqua fish tail. It moved easily, and I shot through the water. My eyes seemed to adjust, and my vision became clearer. Under the water, I could clearly see the dock; there was no one there. "Good," I thought, "Now no one will see that I am half fish."

I struggled to pull myself up onto the dock; the tail was longer than my legs, and much heavier. I just made it out when Jenna saw me.

"Emma!" She yelled, and called to her parents. I panicked – what would they think about this tail? But when I looked down, my legs were back to normal and dry. Could this have been just a dream?

Jenna rushed to my side, "Are you ok? What happened?"

I told her most of the truth; I really wanted to tell Jenna about my dream but it wasn't the right time. We got back to the cottage, and soon went to bed; I got in my pj's, hit the mattress, and fell asleep.

In the morning, I woke up to Amy screaming over pancakes. I stumbled out of bed, got dressed, and went to the kitchen.

"Hurry and eat breakfast! We're going tubing today." Jenna smiled.

I got in my board shorts and swim shirt. I jumped in the boat, since Josh wanted to go first. Josh bounced around on the tube making Amy laugh; her laugh is so cute.

When it was almost time for Jenna's and my turn, I watched Josh and Amy climb, dripping wet, into the boat. I suddenly wondered *what if it wasn't a dream. What if when I touch water I turn into a fish?* They will think me turning down tubing is weird so Jenna got on the tube and I followed.

"Ready!" Jill called from the boat. We gave them a thumbs-up. The boat started and I got a splash of water on my face and I looked down to see that I didn't have a tail! It must've been a dream. Jenna stuck her arms up and cheered and I put my arms up; her dad drove the boat fast, and I flew off the slippery tube into the water. I stuck my hand up giving a thumbs-up to show that I was ok. As I tread water, my legs went numb. I looked down to see that I have a mermaid tail where my board shorts should be.

"Are you alright, sweetie?" Jill asked.

"Yes, I'm fine -- as I was falling my shorts slipped off so my lower half is...."

Jill smiled, "Oh, I get it." She put a towel on the side of the boat, and they all looked away. I pulled myself and my heavy tail up onto the boat. The moment the tail wasn't in the water, my legs turned back to normal. I wrapped the towel around my waist, noticing that there

wasn't a drop of water on me anywhere. No one else noticed. I spent the rest of the day tanning on the boat.

There was a hot tub at the cottage. Jenna and I always go in together after a day of tubing. I realized that I would have to tell Jenna about my fishy secret if I went into the hot tub. I stepped in carefully.

"I have to tell you something," I said when she stepped in across from me.

"What's wrong?" She was worried.

I slipped under the bubbly water; just as expected, my leg went numb and in their place was the sparkling aqua blue mermaid tail. When I lifted my tail out of the water, her jaw dropped.

"When I was trapped under the dock, I thought I was dreaming – I touched a tiny green seahorse, and then everything went dark, and this tail appeared." She looked at me, shocked, slowly touching the tip of my fin.

"It disappears when I get out of water," I explained. She looked at me like I was crazy. I flopped out of the tub, and in a second, I was completely dry and I had my legs back. Jenna was shocked.

At the cottage, Jenna and I liked to take the paddle boat out. There was a small island out in the middle of the lake; we called it *Lover's Island* ever since the time that we met up with a guy named Luke who had kayaked there. Jenna and him hit it off; she had a crush on him ever since. While Jenna was still amazed over my fishtail issue, we decided to go to the island. We pulled the boat to the shore, and checked if anyone else was around. Seeing that the island was empty, I jumped into the water, leaving Jenna on the shore.

Once again, my legs turned into a tail. I could see clearly under the water; the sandy bottom of the lake was covered in shells. I found a huge pearly shell and brought it back to Jenna on the beach, but there she was with Luke.

I quietly watched them, trying to keep my tail hidden. She was blushing and flirting, twirling her long, blonde hair around her finger. I slowly backed away to give them some time to talk. Plus, I didn't exactly want to explain this tail to Luke.

Under the water, I felt something on my tail. I felt something grab and pull me; I froze in terror.

"Do not be afraid," said a strong, male voice.

"Who are you?" I demanded.

"What were you doing swimming so close to the shoreline?" I could hear his voice clearly under the water. I stared at the young merman in front of me; he had deep blue eyes and a strong, muscular chest. Long dark hair floated around his perfect face. My heart pounded in my chest so loud I could hear it.

"Are you listening?" He said, "Don't you know it's not safe?"

"Wha-at?" I stammered, sounding like an idiot. Even under the cool water, my cheeks burned with embarrassment.

"I'm Bay," he said.

I tried to talk, but my tongue was like a cotton ball in my mouth. I was so embarrassed, I swam away.

"Wait! There is still a girl up there!" He called. I peeked above the water and saw that Luke had left. Jenna was sitting by herself. I pulled myself onto the shore, and my legs quickly appeared. In the distance, Bay was watching. He looked amazed, and then disappeared below

the water. I told Jenna about Bay, and she told me about Luke. He was coming to meet her there the next day.

When we got there the next morning, we swam for a while together. I decided to stay out of sight when Luke got there. I watched him approach Jenna, both of them smiling. I went to explore the lake. I had been coming for years, but seeing it from below; it was an entire new place.

I found Bay, sitting on an old beach chair that had sunk to the bottom of the lake.

“Hey,” he grinned, “Look who’s back.” I smiled.

“Sorry about yesterday,” I blushed. “My name is Emma. I just found out about this a few days ago.” I pointed to my tail.

He nodded. “Maybe you should come with me, then.”

“Where are we going?”

“Follow me!” With a flip of his tail, he was off. I followed him, swimming as fast as I could, barely keeping up with him.

At the bottom of the lake, Bay disappeared into a big pile of rocks. There was a narrow opening that led to a whole undersea village! Sunlight streamed through a rocky ceiling. Colourful coral was everywhere, covering little houses and shops that were lined up along a little street. All around us were mermaids and mermen. They looked at me and whispered.

I looked away from the merpeople into a store window. I saw a beautiful coral necklace with a tiny blue pendant shaped like a seahorse.

“See something you like?” Bay asked. I nodded, pointing to the necklace.

He went in quickly, and bought it for me. “Thank you,” I said and put it on.

The mermaid at the store looked at me closely, “Do you know Lorelei and Melody?” She asked, studying my face. I shook my head slowly, although the name Melody was familiar. I knew my mother had a sister named Melody, but she had disappeared before I was born.

“Take her to Melody Rivers,” the woman told Bay. He nodded. I followed him to a little house. Bay knocked. A young mermaid opened the door. It was like looking in the mirror; although she was slightly older than I was, we had the same long brown hair, the same green eyes. She even had the same, wide lips. She stared.

“Lorelei,” I heard a woman’s voice call. Then, an adult mermaid came into the room. “Emma?” She looked at me in surprise.

“How do you know my name?” Melody told me to sit down. She explained everything. Melody was my mother’s sister. My grandfather was a merman and my grandmother was a human. My mom was born a normal girl, and Melody was like me, a *merson* --her legs turned into a fish tail when she was wet. When my Mom gave birth to my sister, Lorelei, and saw that she was a mermaid, she gave her to Melody to take care of. When I was born, mom thought I was normal, so my Mom kept me.

I was shocked and upset, and I needed some time to think about all of this. I swam away quickly.

“Emma – wait!” Melody called, but I rushed away.

Only Bay followed me. “Are you ok?” he asked.

I nodded. “I didn’t know about any of this – I am just trying to get used to it all.”

He held both of my hands into his. I looked into his deep blue eyes. “Everything will be all right,” he said.

Jenna was on the shore, waiting for me. We paddled home to the cottage.

On our last day at the cottage, Jenna and I paddled to *Lover's Island* one last time. I needed to talk to Melody again; I wanted to see Lorelei, my sister. Most of all, I wanted to talk to Bay.

I swam slowly back to where Bay had shown me the secret entrance. I reached the town and it broke my heart thinking it would be the last time I ever saw them. I reached the house, swallowing back the tears I knocked.

Melody answered the door and I hugged her tight . “Goodbye,” I let the tears fall. “Tell Lorelei I say goodbye,” I sobbed into her shoulder.

“Where are you going?” Melody asked.

“Home,” I left on my search for Bay.

I found him on the street said goodbye and kissed him on the cheek, swam away as fast as I could back to Jenna's cottage.

I got in the car and drove home.

My parents weren't home.

At home all I wanted was to be back in the water, swimming, being a mermaid, with Melody and Lorelei but most of all with Bay.

But I was born to be a human so a human I will be.

To be continued...

The Great Offering

By: Noah VanKesteren (Gr. 8)

Long ago around 1000 B.C. there was a small nimble tribe named the Cysler's who lived in the Angaro Desert. This tribe only had about 100 people inhabiting the village. There was a rapid river, however, called the Calante River that flowed through the middle of the village. This was the only water and food supply for the people. The mineral rich water was plentiful with Silver-Finned fish which they ate. The prolonged river flowed from the Bano Kingdom which was fifteen miles away. This kingdom was located on fertile ground which was the main source for the minerals in the Calante River. The Bano Kingdom was known for their everlasting supply of gold that was mined under their kingdom. Hundreds of toiling men worked in the gold shafts each scorching day. This made the kingdom very rich and, every rich kingdom needs a greedy king. King Duval was a tall, burly, fierce man with a long, brown, greasy beard and a booming voice like thunder. No other kingdom would dare stand against the Bano kingdom because of their cutthroat and ferocious army.

The Cysler's were very smart and agile. They knew how to make the foremost tools. Most of the tools were made of thick stone or tough, solid wood. They could also make weapons such as spears for hunting made with a sharp, pronged tip. Roots were tightly sewed together to make nets for catching loads of fish in the river. Many other tribes traveled miles for these tools, for they were the finest made tools around. The king of the Bano Kingdom came every month with his precious gold to trade for premium tools and weapons. They lived simply in small one roomed houses that were built from compact planks of wood. In the center of the town, however, there was a lustrous temple made from the costly gold they got from King Duval. This sacred

place was supposedly the home for their god, Huron. In this glamorous temple, there was a bottom floor and a top floor. The bottom floor was where the villagers congregated. The top floor was very sacred and was where Huron lived. Every week the finest tools made by each family during that week would be brought to the temple to be offered to Huron and burned. Cysler believed that the smoke from the fire would rise up to the top floor, and if all the tools were made superior, Huron would be happy. If any tool that was brought was poorly made, Huron would be angry. The entire village would be punished for the actions of that one family. Everyone in Cysler feared Huron's wrath and wanted him to be content.

One humid, hot summer day, King Duval and a few other men came to Cysler to trade goods, but this time, they had no horses hauling sacks stuffed with gold. Two Cysler men went out to the edge of the village to meet them with barrels full of durable tools and fine weapons. As the men walked up, they noticed something was amiss with King Duval's caravan, but they did not say anything. King Duval stood dauntless as he checked the enormous amount of tools. He chose only the very finest from the two barrels, for he was very greedy and wanted only the very best. After he had casually searched through the tools, he turned to leave, but the two Cysler men stopped them from leaving. They wanted to get their share of the trade, but King Duval rebuffed them. He would not give them anymore precious gold, for he was The Great King and should not have to give any of his wealth to any filthy, poor villagers like the Cysler's. The two men were aghast with anger, but they could not get the king to listen. King Duval fearlessly strode away as his men pushed the two Cysler men to the ground and veraciously kicked dust on them. This was witnessed by an adventurous, eight-year-old village boy named Mahut who was peering around the dull corner of his home. He saw the two men gradually get to their feet and hobble back into the town.

Five years later, in the Bano Kingdom, King Duval was getting greedier. One day, he sat on his throne thinking of the shiny, golden temple in Cysler and all the gold he traded with them for their weapons. As he thought he grew bitter and enraged. He sprung out of his throne in a flash and called his guards with a boom of his voice. They lined up in order standing tall and stable. He ordered them to get the horses tacked up and ready. They were to go and pillage Cysler. King Duval had a very mischievous plan with the hopes of forcing them out of there small village, leaving the temple and all his gold behind.

A large cloud of dust trailed behind as the guards raced off on their horses, heading for the small village of Cysler. King Duval had a corrupt look on his face as he watched the men disappear over the horizon. He turned, once the men were out of sight, and ordered for his best engineers to come forth. He wanted them to build a dam that blocked the water from flowing down through Cysler. King Duval knew the Cysler people could not stay if the river was dried up. The sun set swiftly, and it was pitch black in Cysler. Mahut, who was now thirteen years old, and his family was just about to go to sleep. Like a jaguar stocking its prey, the guards of King Duval quietly crept into the village. The sound of a horn went out, and all the guards started boisterously yelling at the top of their lungs. Crackling screams came from the homes in Cysler as the guards spread throughout the village. The guards took everything the Cysler people had and carried it off back to the Bano Kingdom where King Duval awaited. Now nothing was left for the Cysler people to offer to the God Huron that week.

Back at the kingdom, the engineers busied themselves on the dam. They toiled all through the night in hopes that, by sunrise, the wooden dam would be complete. The engineers could work very rapidly, and they finished the dam with plenty of time before sunrise. This gave the water time to drain out from the river at Cysler before anyone in the village could notice.

The sun rose deliberately, and the morning birds started to chirp in the tree tops. All the Cysler people came out of their empty homes that had been freshly plundered. One man headed out of his home to collect some water in a pot that the guards had missed, but to his trauma, there was no water flowing in the river. The man yelled out to everyone in the village that there was no water in the river. Everyone rushed to the river shore to see nothing but the depressed sight of a muddy bottom. Tons of dead fish lay scorching and arid under the hot, summer sun. Sobbing among the people broke out, once again, for their main food and water supply was lost. Everyone started to panic, and no one knew what to do. Everyone assumed that it was Huron's wrath that brought this catastrophe.

In the middle of the crowd, Mahut squeezed his way out. He wanted to go explore up the river. He wanted to see if the entire river had dried up. His eyes scanned the length of the river as he walked swiftly along. Five hours later, Mahut could see tall building tops in the distance. He wondered if he was getting close to Bano. As he crept closer to the large village, he heard the sound of water rippling. There, he saw a bunch of women in white dresses collecting water in big, colourful pots. Then, he saw a big wooden structure, a dam, standing in the way of the water flow. Water rose higher up on the other side of the dam wall. Some even splashed over the dam, but was immediately choked by the hot, stinky ground. Mahut hid behind a tall Fem tree as he watched in disbelief. He had to go back to Cysler and tell them about what he had seen. It was noon, by now, and Mahut had to run hastily to get home before nightfall.

He arrived in Cysler panting and out of breath. A man came up and asked him what the matter was. Mahut took a moment to catch his breath, and then told the man that there was a dam blocking the river flow. When the man heard the news, he ran into his home to tell his family. A few other men overheard Mahut and the man's conversation and ran to go tell the others. The

village men gathered outside by the temple, and because they are such a nimble people, they immediately began to outline a way to get their water back.

It was now midnight. Mahut and some men headed out with torches toward Bano. Hours went by, and Mahut and his men finally came to Bano. As quick and as reticent as possible, Mahut and the men split up and went into the kingdom in search of their weapons that had been stolen from them. They slipped quietly through the streets until they came upon a sleeping guard outside the arsenal. They slipped the key from the sleeping guard's belt and unlocked the door. They grabbed as many, of their weapons, as they could. Quietly sneaking back out through the kingdom streets, they headed for the dam. The men began to scale the dam and jab the best spears they had retrieved into the side of the dam. Once that task was completed, Mahut, the bravest of them all, performed the most dangerous task of all. He proceeded to climb along the dam with a lighted torch and lit every spear that was jabbed into the dam on fire. What an offering to Huron this would be. The dangerous task was safely completed, and Mahut joined the other men and ran from the blazing dam to head back to Cysler. As they ran, Mahut turned. He could see the flames from the dam glowing, and the smoke rising into the night sky. He wondered if Huron would be pleased?

The Best Worst Day Ever

By: Hailey Stefaniak (Gr. 8)

Walter strutted down the street. Walter, if you're wondering, is a cat.

As he strutted down the street his brown and white fur tossed as he walked when all of the sudden he felt a breeze down his back. He looked up and out of nowhere he saw a bird swoop down and try to scratch him with his long sharp talons. He missed Walter by just a few centimetres.

The bird looked angry and mean. It had dark beety eyes that followed you where ever you walked. And thick black feathers that looked old and beaten. And lastly to top it all of he had giant razor sharp talons that looked like they could cut a log in half in one try.

It flew back up into the air and Walter thought it was gone. But just a few minutes later the same exact bird came swooping down and this time managed to nick Walters skin a little causing a little pink scratch to appear on the top of his head.

"OW!!" Walter said bringing his paw up to touch the scratch and see how big it was. He winced once he touched it. It was small but it still hurt.

Walter looked up to see if the bird was still there and he saw it flying away in the distance laughing.

Walter had no idea who that was and why he wanted to scratch him.

Walter brushed the thought away and proceeded walking. Walter couldn't wait to get to his destination which just so happened to be his house. He couldn't wait because today was Thursday and he knew every Thursday his owner got him a new collar and Walter loved collars.

He waited all week to add one to his collection and wore a different one every day. Today he wore a white one with glitter on it that sparkled from the sun, and a name tag on that had his name and address on it. He always thought it was nice that his owner got the address put on it incase Walter couldn't remember, or at least that's what Walter thought was why his owner put it on the tag for. But whatever the reason Walter thought his owner was just the best.

Just as Walter walked past a puddle a big red truck drove by and drove right through the puddle and soaked Walter with the water it splashed up. Walter spit out the dirty puddle water that got in his mouth and shook out his fur trying to get some of the water out of it.

As Walter was shaking out his fur he slipped on a patch of mud and tumbled into the ditch.

Walter had mud and dirty water all over him now. His once perfectly white patches where now dark chocolate brown, and his ears had turned black from the mud and gunk covering them. As he stood up he tried to move but he couldn't. He then realized his paw was stuck in the mud.

He tried digging out the mud from around it but whenever he took some away more would come in.

As he tried one last time to pull his foot out it actually did. Walter was ecstatic... for about two seconds. Because right after he pulled his foot out he went face first into a pile of mud.

As he sat face first in the mud he thought out the cliché words,

"Could this day get any worse?"

But just like in the movies it did as soon as he said that.

The rain poured down hard as if he was standing right under Niagara Falls.

Walter slowly dragged himself out of the ditch and trudged down the road. He shook his body in an attempt to get all the mud off him.

As he continued down the road he could see a wheat field in the distance. Walter knew that it was a shortcut home but he had never used it before. All the other cats said it was scary and easy inside, but Walter thought it looked warm and inviting from the outside and it was starting to get dark so Walter thought he would use it.

He walked over to the field and cautiously stepped in. Right away he could tell it was not what he expected. It wasn't warm and cozy, but dark and cold.

Walter ventures further into the field thinking that maybe it would get better but it didn't. The deeper in he went the darker and colder it got until it got unbearable and Walter wanted to rip out his fur.

He wanted to go home to be with his owner wearing his new collar, but it was too late he had made his choice and couldn't turn back now. It was like he was stuck in a maze with no ending.

He was lost.

No matter which way he turned there was no exit. He began running desperate to find a way out.

Walter had only been in the field for a few minutes and already felt like going insane.

He began running faster, pushing his legs harder, heart rate increasing along with his breath when all of the sudden he tripped.

He didn't want to get up mentally and he actually couldn't physically he had pushed himself too hard and couldn't get up.

He just laid there he, he had given up hope of finding home.

He had just started crying when all of the sudden, a warm had wrapped around his stomach and gently picket him up. They placed him on his shoulder and started walking.

Walter was too lazy to resist. But as he took a deep breath in to sigh he realized that the smell of the person carrying him was familiar. He used all the strength he had to lift his head and looked at the persons face. And sure enough it was the person he thought it was, it was...

HIS OWNER.

And at that moment he was so happy he could burst, and despite everything that happened right at that moment with his owner carrying him and the knowing the fact that he was heading home, that day easily turned into the best worst day ever.

The End

Friends in a Bank Robbery

By: Abigail Hariprashad (Gr. 8)

Julie's point of view

Hi, my name is Julie Roberts. I am 21 years old and I have 3 really cool best friends, Bob, Jim and Rebecca. I've known Bob and Jim ever since high school, but Rebecca recently moved here, to Innisfil, from Florida so she's pretty new to our group. Bob and Jim recently met Rebecca but Jim seemed to be more interested in her than Bob. All four of us are going on this awesome trip to the Bahamas for 2 weeks. Bob, Jim and I have been planning this trip for 2 years and we invited Rebecca to join us. I was so excited and pumped to go on this trip because it would be the first trip I would ever go on. I couldn't wait. Also, I've been having a crush on Bob for quite some time.

When we first met, I wasn't too sure that I should be friends with him, but when I got to know him more, he seemed like my type. We both have the same personalities. We are both funny, smart, out-going and fun to hang out with. He was always there for me too. We met when we were in high school. We had science class together and we were partners for a science experiment. He was really helpful. Then I introduced him to Jim. We had a lot of fun times together.

Rebecca and I are pretty good friends too and we both work at Pizza Pizza together. I helped train her and she also lives near my house so we hang out almost all the time. Rebecca said that she used to work in a smoothie shop in the mall in Florida. She told me about her friends and that they used to hang out and have fun too. She said that she went on other trips but not to the

Bahamas. We were talking about how much fun we would have. "The Bahamas has scuba diving and cave diving!" Rebecca said. "Cool we should try that out!" I said. "After work we're going to meet Bob and Jim at the bank, right?" Rebecca asked. "Yea, we'll have to take out one thousand dollars each." I replied. "So after work we'll walk there." The bank was only 10 minutes away and we finished work at 11:30am, so we would be there before lunch. While we were walking to the bank, we saw my neighbor and we started talking. We were talking for about 5 minutes then she had to leave. We got to the bank around 11:40am. When Rebecca and I walked through the door, we saw Bob and Jim.

They were already in line to see the teller, so we waved to each other. Right after I heard the bank door open and close, a woman behind a counter screamed "Gun!", and I heard a deep, male voice yell "Everybody on the ground! Give me your wallets and Jewellery! Open the safe and no funny business!" After I heard that, I turned around and saw 2 male figures. They were both wearing all black and one of them had a big, black bag. I was in shock and I froze until I saw both of them step out of the door way. All I was thinking was "I have to get out of here.", and so I bolted through the door.

I got out, but my 3 friends were left in there. I ran to the window and ducked under it. When I peeked through, I saw Bob and Jim lying on the floor beside each other near a counter. Their faces were frozen with shock and fear. Rebecca was on the ground, but near the door. She was looking around the building but I didn't know what for, I was so scared for them.

The male figures were walking around the building collecting everyone's jewellery and wallets. When Rebecca saw me, she motioned to call 911. Then I remembered . . . My phone! I called 911, my hands were trembling. The phone started to ring. A female voice came on and asked

"What's the emergency?", "There is a robbery going on at the Royal bank of Canada! I'm under the window outside of the bank. They have guns! "Help!" My voice was trembling and I was talking so fast. "Ma'am, please calm down. I have the police coming as fast as they can. "Help is on the way.". "Okay", I replied, feeling a bit relieved. One of the tellers was opening the safe until a police officer showed up and yelled "Boys, drop your weapons! Put your hands on your heads and step out of the building!". "Sorry, can't do that!", the same deep male voice yelled back. "We have you surrounded!", replied the police officer. The robber's sneered, "Well, you'll have to come get us!", "Okay! Get ready!". The police officer and 4 others started walking slowly, both hands on their guns.

When the first police officer opened the bank door, there was silence. Everyone just looked at him and the others as they were coming in right behind him. The 2 burglars were hiding and one of them stepped out from behind the counter and started shooting. All I heard was Bang! All 3 shots missed and the police officer shot back. They were shooting at each other like a big shoot out. Bob ran behind the counter and took cover, Jim was lying on the floor watching everything in shock and I didn't know how but Rebecca got a gun and started shooting at the other burglar that was trying to sneak through the back to escape.

I was so scared and impressed that Rebecca had such good aim. After the burglars finished all the bullets in their guns, they had to give up. They were both handcuffed and were put in a police car. When the rest of the police officers were investigating the scene, I went in the bank and saw Rebecca. She was so scared, Jim was still on the floor in shock and Bob came out from behind the counter and said "Julie, you saved our lives, thank you.". "He is right, if you wouldn't have run out the door and called 911, nobody would have known we were in hostage.", Rebecca said. "Well you helped stop one of the burglars from escaping. " I said back. Then the police officer

came and said "You saved everyone's life, thank you." I said "Thank you for saving my friends lives.". Then Jim got off the floor and we all left the bank and walked back to Pizza Pizza and had lunch.

The Last Gathering

By: Reed Percival (Gr. 11)

My first impression of Jeremiah Kingston was that he was a kind man with an enticing charm and a lust for life.

Jeremiah had arrived in our little burg of Royal Rock, SK, population 128, in late July. No one in town had ever heard of him. He had bought the old Newbury place, an antiquated three-story cottage situated on the town's namesake Royal Rock, a seventy-six meter tall cliff above the rocky shore of Lake Groves. The Newburys were an elderly, rich, British couple who had died within eight months of each other of heart disease thirty-one years before I met Jeremiah Kingston. I barely remember the Newburys, having been in grade school when they gave up the ghost. But from my limited recollections, and my Irish granny's many (mostly exaggerated) tales, I knew them to be miserable, snobby old recluses. No one was sad to see them go.

Some folks said the house was haunted. Still, this only added to the curious visitors to the abandoned cottage. The tourists who frequented Royal Rock each summer came for the lake, the Rock, and the Newbury house. For thirty-one years, the house was on the market, and for thirty-one years, and possibly a thousand visitors, no one wanted it. Until Jeremiah Kingston bought it for what was rumored to be close to a million dollars. Far too much for a rickety old shack, despite the location. Unlike the cottage's previous owners, Kingston was oft seen around town that summer, and was as friendly as a man could be. He swam in the lake every day, had daily suppers at the local restaurant, The Dalton Inn, and made a point to say hello to every soul in

Royal Rock each day. Everybody liked him, even old Mrs. Peabody, another hateful old woman, who had had Kingston mow her lawn every week, and even invited him in as a guest for tea.

I met Jeremiah for the first time the day he moved in. I was curious to see what kind of man would want to live in that old hovel on the Rock. I assumed it would be some idiot American or Ontarian tourist. He was unpacking boxes from his Ford pickup when I called out to him.

“How ya doin’ there, partner?” I said.

Jeremiah looked up at me from his work. He walked over and shook my hand.

“Just fine, pal. Name’s Jeremiah Kingston, but everyone calls me Jerry. Nice to meet you,” he replied with a smile.

“Bob Redding, likewise. You from ‘round here, Jerry?”

Jeremiah had straight, ruddy-blond hair and shiny white teeth. He was tall, clean-shaven, and had a small beer belly. He looked about ten years younger than I, and I guessed that he was popular with the ladies. He looked a little like Leo Dicaprio, and had a firm handshake. I liked him immediately.

“Just moved up here from Saskatoon. I figure I’ll like the country life a lot better than the city. I won the sweepstakes back home, and I think it’s about time to retire,” he answered.

“Well, good for you. It’s quiet up here. Not a lot goin’ on. I think you’ll like it. Need any help with those boxes, Jerry?”

“I think I got it, thanks. I need the exercise. Gotta get rid of this beer gut.”

I laughed. I had quite the beer gut myself. “Well, good luck with that. Hope I’ll be seeing you around.”

“I hope so too, Bob. So long.”

And there, he returned to the back of his truck to unload more boxes. I noticed he traveled light; he had maybe four big boxes, and a few smaller ones. I didn’t put much thought into it. He was a genuinely nice guy. I saw Jerry many times that summer. Sometimes I saw him at the local pub, sometimes he stopped in to my place for a beer. Many of my friends said that he acted similar with them. But I never went back to the Newbury house until Labour Day weekend. Something about that place gave me the creeps. A sense of dread, maybe.

I heard about Jeremiah’s party on August thirtieth, from the man himself. I was having a late breakfast at the Inn when Jerry walked in for a bite. He saw me and came over to say hello.

“Bobby, what’s the good word?” he said enthusiastically.

“The Blue Jays won last night, if you’d call that good news,” I replied.

“Ah, you know I’m a Red Sox fan, buddy. But unlike the Jays, the Sox have a chance at a playoff spot, my good man.”

“Touché. What’s new?”

“Well, this weekend, I thought I’d hold a Labour Day party at the house. Kind of a ‘last gathering’ for the summer. You in?”

“Sure. Who’s coming?”

He flashed his bright white teeth at me in a grin. “Oh, everyone’ll be there. Reckon I might as well get rid of all my food and booze in one swift motion.”

I laughed. “I’ll be there to help with that. See you round, partner.”

“In a while, amigo,” he responded. And he walked out the door, leaving me to finish my eggs and bacon.

I was uncomfortable going to the Newbury place. The atmosphere still gave me the weird sensation of panic, but I was willing to sacrifice my comfort to support Jeremiah at the party. And part of me was curious to see what he had done with the place. I had been in there the year previous, and let me tell you, that house was like Castle Dracula. If there was a square inch not covered in dust or cobwebs, I’ll eat my shoe. Maybe that was why tourists loved it. It was just a disgusting, evil place, and for some reason that attracts sightseers.

I walked into the cottage at seven o’ clock sharp on the Saturday of Jeremiah’s get-together, not expecting much besides swept floors and a TV. Seeing the note on the large white door inquiring that I let myself in, I walked inside, and I was amazed by the incredible transformation. The house was no longer the Newbury house. It was the Kingston house. Jerry had cleaned up all the dirt and grime from the years past, and I saw how beautiful it had been all along. The floors were red hardwood, the walls now a pleasant blue. The curtains had been torn down in favour of Venetian blinds, and the room was occupied by soft white modern furniture. The kitchen was like an IKEA set, with black granite countertops and tan wooden cupboards. A sliding glass door in the dining room led out to a large limestone balcony, perched above the Royal Rock, and with a spectacular view of Lake Groves. This was where Jeremiah sat now; wearing a black tuxedo and drinking a martini, looking uncannily like James Bond. I looked

down at my plaid shirt and jeans, and felt decidedly underdressed. I slid open the glass door. Jeremiah turned around with a start.

“Hello, Bobby,” he said quietly

“Like the suit, Jerry. How the hell did you do this?” I exclaimed.

He smiled. “Patience, time, and a little elbow grease, my friend. How are you? You’re the first one here.”

“I’m parched. Got anything to drink?”

Jeremiah laughed. “Wondered how long it would take you to ask. What do you want? Beer? Martini? Champagne?”

“Just a beer, thanks.”

Jerry stood up and led me off the porch and into the kitchen. He opened the fridge, revealing a smorgasbord of snacks, hors d’oeuvres, and liquor. He grabbed a bottle of Molson Canadian, and popped the top off with his thumb. Smiling, he handed me my drink.

“Thanks buddy. Looks like you came prepared. You’re stocked like a bartender.”

“I’m expecting about fifty people tonight. It was smart to go by my old boy scout motto.”

“I guess so.”

At that moment, the doorbell rang, as the new guests didn’t see the note. Jeremiah hurried to the front foyer to allow them in. With the sleight of hand of a magician I saw him tear the ignored note off the door. I greeted the guests with him, and then followed back to the kitchen.

As the night progressed, all the guests showed up. Jerry put on some classic rock and country music from his iPod for everyone to listen to. I mingled a bit, but I was quieter than usual. The air of the house was positive, but I felt a confusing, lurching anxiety build up in me as the night grew old.

Jeremiah looked happier than ever. He was an entertaining host, neglecting none of his guests, including myself. He was drinking more than a few martinis, but hey, it was his house, and his party. The man was enjoying himself—I had no right to judge. Jerry put on some karaoke around midnight, and crooned loudly, “Lyn’ Eyes” by the Eagles. I laughed: he wasn’t half bad. It occurred to me that I had never asked him what he did in Saskatoon before he won the lottery. Now curious, I looked for him, and found him. Jerry was on his balcony, leaning on the edge, martini in hand. I opened the glass door with a sense of *déjà vu*, and leaned on the side next to my friend.

“What’s up, Jerry?” I asked him.

He sighed. “Throwing a party’s tough work, my friend. I just needed a break.”

“I can understand that. Hey, Jerry, I never asked you what you did back in Saskatoon. Before you won the lottery,” I inquired.

“Well, Bob, back in Saskatoon, I was a manager at a local computer company. But I never won the lottery,” he admitted.

“But, when I met you, you said—”

“I know what I said. I lied.”

I looked at him, puzzled. “Why would you lie about a thing like that?”

Jeremiah took a sip from his glass. “Two months, ago, I was a conceited, smug cheapskate in a boring but high paying managerial job for a big Saskatoon company called Delta Protocol. I managed computer builders, technicians, and salesmen, and I was depressed. My wife had left me the year before, and I was starting to see why. My employees loathed me, and my colleagues resented me.

“I never wanted my life to be like that, Bob. I could afford a nice house, a nice car, and some of the finer things in life. But I felt empty. I felt guilty for hating my life, when I knew I was luckier than most. I considered suicide, but then I only felt cowardice. I was miserable.”

I stared at him, astonished. He seemed to be describing a different man, a man I would dislike, and a man who was the complete polar opposite of Jeremiah Kingston. He continued, speaking with the grace of a man who had not just drank a number of martinis.

“Then, on Canada Day, I got a call from my doctor. He told me I had pancreatic cancer. He told me I could pay for some chemo, glorified poison, if you ask me, but I knew the truth. Your pancreas isn’t exactly easy to get to. It’s hidden under your stomach and intestines, and few surgeons can reach it without killing or seriously damaging your body. There was no hope for me. I was going to die, and in one of the most painful ways imaginable. He gave me three months to live without life support.”

On what I felt was the verge of tears, I tried to do the math in my head. “But... that only gives you—”

“One month. And I’m not paying for life support. He told me the pain would start around September. I’ve felt twinges in my gut here and there, but other than that, I’ve been sound as a pound.”

“My God, Jerry, we have to get you to a hospital, or something, you can’t just let yourself die! You can’t just give up on yourself; I’ve heard those doctors can work miracles.”

“I don’t care. At first, I was scared when I learned I was going to die. I feared death, I feared what came after, and I feared the pain I knew would come. That night, I couldn’t sleep. I took a couple sleeping pills, and thought about gulping down the whole bottle. But I couldn’t do it. I still had that empty feeling. My life was not complete.

“I woke up the next morning with an epiphany. I asked myself, what is stopping you from just leaving, and moving to a nice cottage in a small town, and just enjoying your last few days? I could think of no answer, so that afternoon, I put my house on the market.

“It sold quickly, because I, to quote the Godfather, made an offer they couldn’t refuse. I could have made a couple hundred G’s more, but I was content. A nice family moved in, and I was happy for them, to be starting their new life in my home, where I was ending mine.

“I bought the Newbury cottage for 1.2 million dollars. Almost a million more than they were asking for, but I was fine giving away the money. I mean, what was I going to use it for? I fixed up the house in a couple days, making it more to my liking. I set out to enjoy life. I woke up at five in the morning every day to watch the sun rise. I swam in the lake every day. I made sure to make some new friends, like you and everyone else here. The old me was introverted, and dejected. I wanted to change that. And I succeeded. I lived in Saskatoon for thirty-three years, and I lived here for less than two months. The difference is, people in Royal Rock will remember me.”

And with that, he finished off his martini, devouring the olive that was left. “Say, Bob, would you fetch me another drink?”

Simply shocked by his story, I did not question this unusual request of Jeremiah's. Any other time, he would have gotten one himself. That was Jerry. But I did what my instincts told me, which was to be polite and, for lack of a better phrase, to fill 'er up. I said nothing and grabbed the glass out of Jeremiah's hand. As I reached, my fingers grazed his palm accidentally. It was the last time I touched him while he was alive.

I walked off the balcony, and as I stepped out into the kitchen, I heard the glass door close behind me. I turned around. Jerry locked the door shut with a click and a smile.

It took me a moment to realize I had been had. I knew now what he was going to do. I had to stop him.

"Jerry!" I yelled. "Open the freakin' door!"

Party guests started to look. They were, like me, confused by what was going on. Jeremiah just smiled. "I can't do that, Bob," he said in a voice muffled by the glass. "It's like the Neil Young song. It's better to burn out than to fade away."

He kept smiling at me for what felt like hours. Then finally, he turned, and climbed up on the ledge.

I looked around furiously for something to smash the glass with. But I was too late. I saw Jeremiah blow a kiss to the sky, then jump into the abyss.

There was silence for a few seconds. Then I heard screams. Women in cocktail dresses were running around like chickens with their head cut off. I just sat there shocked, slumped against the wall. How, why did this happen? Why would he choose such an exit to life? The Jeremiah Kingston I knew wouldn't do that. But he had. Once I regained my composure, I

calmed down the crowd. I addressed them, telling what Jeremiah had told me. Some cried. All were in disbelief. No one knew him to be a person who would commit suicide. Not even me.

Blue Skies

By: Chelsey Collins (Gr. 12)

Teenagers are always talking about the expectations their parents place on them. They lecture you to get good grades and continue with education because you *can*, they tell you to behave properly and to always respect adults. They chide you many a time to be punctual, to stop being lazy. They have high standards that can be hard to meet, and their children often crack under the pressure.

But what we don't talk about is the expectations we place on *them*. They have to provide for us at all times. They have to blend in with all the other parents—they can't embarrass us or act out of place. They have to love us even when we're rotten and don't merit a smidgen of fond regards. We expect them to help us, yet leave us alone, and we're constantly changing what for. And God forbid they ever break our idol-like vision of them.

What we don't know until we ourselves have reached maturity is that parents are not holy and enlightened beings with the sole purpose of raising a child. They weren't sent down from the celestial courts of heaven with a destiny to bake brownies for school club meetings, treat injuries, and make Sunday night dinners for the rest of their existences. A mother's hand with a gentle touch as she rubs your back to soothe you to sleep was used in a different lifetime to inject needles of heroin into her seemingly healthy body. A father's strength as he demonstrates how to hit a ball with a bat could have in a different life been applied to beating the broken body of his girlfriend. Parenthood may cease their poor choices; it may coax even the roughest of people into letting love into their hearts. But it does by no means redeem them. It does not erase who they

were. Sometimes they even lead a secret life away from their children, or let the corruption leak into their children's lives.

I, at the tender age of seventeen have been forced to learn this all too quickly. When your father is a self-confessed serial killer, and he grips your arm a little too tightly as he pleads with you not to tell, you do not tell. You instead do everything he says, and you retreat inside yourself to ponder how such an atrocity could have gone unknown to you for so long. You have time to wonder what it truly means to be a parent. And you learn that in life, black and white do not exist. Only shades of grey.

I was sitting at the kitchen table, day dreaming over my homework when the oven timer—with a sharp buzzing sound—pulls me out of my reverie. For a minute, I let it go off. It is still blaring when my father enters the kitchen five minutes later, disturbed out of his dank and quiet study in the basement. Fighting off the urge to shudder and run for the umpteenth time recently, I force myself to make slow steps towards the oven to switch it off.

My father settles down at the table, and waits for me to slide the plate of lasagna in front of him. He doesn't comment on my negligence, or my homework still splayed over the table. He only murmurs a soft *thanks sweetie*. Ever since my mom left two years ago, I've had to pick up most of the housework. Needless to say I'm not the best at it. And neither am I Daddy's little girl anymore, either.

“So, how's Addie doing?” My father asks, looking up from his plate to look at me. His blue eyes pierce my own gaze. He's referring to my childhood best friend, who I of course have not seen much of since that day a few months ago I first confronted my father. With the weight

of the secret I hold on my back, knowing Addie could never provide any solace, I have withdrawn from her. At lunches I hide in the library. But he doesn't know that.

“Good. She just got a job at the drug store.” I reply. This is not a lie; I have just not heard it from Addie herself.

My father leans back in his chair, running a hand through his short mahogany hair. The hair I have inherited from him. “Grace, I wish you would invite her over. You spend too much time alone.” He begins. Knowing he's going on another tirade, I zone out and concentrate on my food. A muffled name piques my attention though, and I interrupt my father to turn up the volume of the small television sitting on the counter.

The news lady is reporting that the local outcast is missing; the man in his early twenties charged with breaking and entering a variety store and threatening the clerk with a gun. I exchange a knowing glance with my father. “You won't tell.” He tells me. It's a statement, not a question. I nod, and it is all I can do to quell the rising nausea. Tears appear in the corner of my eyes, and I hastily wipe them away before he can see. The missing man; he's my best friend's older brother. And I'm the abomination who has the power to tell the authorities. But of course I won't. I can't.

I think of calling Addie; she doesn't live with her brother so she wouldn't have suspected anything until hearing it now on the news. Even after all I've done to build a brick wall between the two of us she would still want me to be there for her now. She might be hurt if I don't. But what can I say, without telling her the truth? And if my father caught me calling her, I don't know what would happen.

If I'm being honest with myself, I'm scared. My father's code used to be only killing murderers and sex offenders. He would frequently travel out of our small town to Toronto and other big cities where there was more prey for him to stalk. I knew his code was wrong, I knew no one deserved to die, not even criminals. But selfishly, to justify to myself why I did not tell, I told myself that no one close to me would ever be harmed; that I would never be forced to lie about someone I had known. I had used that lie to remain in my fantasy world and spend less time in reality. But now that's gone. And I don't know what that says about me.

The next day at school, I do not have to make the decision to find my best friend, because she finds me. She strides right up to where I'm sitting in an overstuffed armchair in the back corner of the library, surrounded by shelves. I've never seen this look on her face before. In place of the usual soft features to match her caring and easy going personality is a mask. She's biting her lip, her eye brows are furrowed in concentration, and there is a faint glint in her eye. She's hurt, I can tell.

I place my thumb in my book to hold my place and guiltily look up at her. "Hi, Addie. I heard about your brother." I say.

"Of course you did! It was all over the news. And I texted you and left you voicemails." She pauses, waiting for my explanation that I cannot muster at the moment. "Even though we haven't been close lately, that's my *brother*. You're my best friend, I thought you cared!" She pauses again to rip the book out of my hands, her aggression driven by my betrayal. I'm forced to look her in the eyes. "What happened to us, Grace? I know you didn't just wake up and not want to be my friend anymore."

“I wanted to call you, I did.” I say in a pleading tone. I need her to forgive me and to leave it alone. “I’m just going through a hard time right now, and I can’t talk about it. I’m sorry.” I cringe internally, knowing the damage I am doing.

Addie raises my book and gives it a small shake for emphasis. “You’re reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* for the third time. You only read that when something big happens. Like when your dog died, or your grandfather. You read it so see that even in the darkest of times, humanity and goodness still exists...The last time you read more than a passage of it was when your mom had just left.” Her tone is rising, concerned and accusing all at once.

At the mention of my mother, my jaw involuntarily clenches. I was fifteen, and vulnerable, and in desperate need of a mother. And regardless of knowing about my father’s secret or not, she had left me there alone with him to move to New York and follow her dreams of acting (or so my father had said). I’d been devastated and it’s still a soft spot to this day. But Addie had been there for me. For two whole days we skipped school together and gorged ourselves on ice cream sandwiches at her house as we watched endless episodes of *Little House on the Prairie*. We didn’t speak one word to each other but to ask what song to play next, or what to eat. There was no pressure to explain my feelings; that would come naturally later. I was just grateful to be able to grieve away from my father. The bottom line is; Addie had been there for me when I needed her the most.

“I know you. You’re hiding something.—something important that you don’t trust me to know.” She said, more softly this time. She placed the book on the arm of my chair and walked a short distance away from me. On second thought, she swung back on her heels, her curtain of light hair moving with her. Later, I would think about what she said and know she meant it only

to let me know she would be there for me when I was ready. But in the moment, I could not stop the blush from staining my cheeks, my quickened heartbeat, nor the fear of suspicion.

“Just remember; bury something in the snow in winter, and it’s only a matter of time before it washes up again in the spring.” And with that, she leaves me.

Did you hear about Conner Green?

I think he’s Addie Green’s brother, he went here a few years ago.

What do you think happened to him?

He must be dead...it’s been too long.

Why doesn’t anybody know anything?

The whispers of Addie’s brother bombard me. In every hallway I walk, in every classroom I sit in, they are there. Their voices increase in tempo and blend, stopping only when a momentary distraction enters their attention. It’s everyone, and I can’t escape. They’re cicadas on a warm summer’s morning—sinister, looming around every corner even if you cannot see it. I try to ignore it, but fail. And soon a progressive, violating, and rhythmic pounding sounds in my mind if only to block out the shame I cannot erase.

As I step outside, hunkering to be as small and unnoticeable as possible on my way to the bus a single rain drop falls upon my face. Looking in question at the sky, I am just in time to see a cloud shift over the sun. The sky is grey. That is my first sign. I swallow forcefully, and quicken my pace, sloshing through puddles of late winter slush until I climb into the safety of the

large yellow bus. I *must* get home. All day has been not quite right and I can't explain it, but I do not have a good feeling.

The house is empty when I arrive. I check each room, not knowing what I expect myself to find. One of my last stops is my own bedroom. I let my eyes scan the neat and pristine bed, desk in the corner, and posters of favourite television shows and bands on the walls before I softly shut the door. Everything is there. The unbroken image of who I used to be is intact. But something is wrong; I can feel it in my gut.

The last place I check—and for good reason—is my dad's "study" in the basement. I have not been here in the three months since I have known my father's secret. I have not been to the basement at all. But now, something is pulling me here. A sickening gravitational pull. At first glance, the study is normal, appropriate for his disguise as an accountant. But if you listen just *so*, a faint whimper can be heard.

That's when it comes back to me. The thing overlooked throughout the chaos at school. All it takes is that small noise to break my daze self-induced by my guilt. Out of one of the second floor windows, I'd seen Addie in tears, walking out of the front doors. And in the shadows cast by trees across the street, a familiar car was parked. But I had done nothing then, as I hadn't for the last few months.

I find it. A cabinet, shifted carelessly out of place. I curl my fingers around it and pry it loose, my heart pounding. It reveals another door made of steel, or some other heavy material.

Inside is my best friend lying on a table. She's alive, but barely.

I rush towards her and untie her bonds, but she will not let me help her off. She shakes her head frantically and points at a folded up piece of paper lying on another table at the side. “I knew something was up. So I walked to your house, let myself in with your spare keys you left at my house once, and came down here. That was on the desk. He doesn’t want you to know about it. I didn’t notice him following me home. Whatever happens you have to see this.” Her voice cracks at the end.

Reluctantly, I read the letter as quickly as possible. My heart, threatening to beat out of my chest a minute ago, now drops into my stomach.

I grab Addie’s wrist and roughly yank her off the table, stopping in my haste to put the cabinet back in place. I have the good sense to make as little noise as possible as I make my way to the stairs, but Addie, having finished her duty to me, is making keening noises. Over her, and my furious attempts to shush her, I almost don’t hear it. A creak from the loose floorboard in the kitchen upstairs. It’s enough for me to snake a hand over my friend’s mouth and pull us underneath the stairs to hide.

When his long muscular arms reach in and pull Addie out, all I see is my Dad reaching towards me with a crooked grin on his face as he teaches me how to swim. My feeble attempts at pulling her back in fail; my father pulls her out as if she were merely a piece of fabric caught on a nail, a minor setback. I bite my tongue so hard it bleeds. Instinct tells me to make no noise.

But this is not the same version of the man I am thinking of. This is the man who explored his dark curiosities on my mother before he moved on to bigger goals. This is the man who drove my mother out of town with his abuse when she could no longer remain strong and threatened her with *my* life not to betray his secret, or to try take me with her. I cannot pretend to

understand his delusional mind any longer. Whether he still has humanity left is irrelevant. He deserves to be held accountable for his crimes. It's all I can do now for my mother, for *Addie*.

I count to three hundred, and then dash for the garage. With fumbling hands, I tuck the letter into the front of my shirt and let it rest on my heart. I see a jagged piece of metal lying on the work table and take it. And then I swing my leg over my bicycle and take off like my life depends on it. Because it does.

I've not been riding a few moments before my father pulls up in the car beside me. He swerves until I fall off my bike, and even then I start running. I'm still running when I collide with a warm and solid body that holds me steady under one arm as I thrash.

With the other arm, he runs a hand down my hair, as if to soothe. "Shh. It's okay. I know you told her, Grace. So I had to do it. We couldn't trust her. But by the grace of God I have you. We'll get through this." His free hand travels lower until I feel its warmth on my neck. His thumb finds a spot and ever slowly begins to push.

I may be being punished for my sins; my reluctance to tell, my utter ignorance of deciding right from wrong even in my fragile state. But if I have my way, so will he. I stop thrashing, and reach my hand up as if to caress his face. In his shock, he does not let go of me, but the space between us widens. I take my makeshift weapon and launch it directly into his jugular.

When I stagger free from his weight, I surprisingly do not feel guilty any more. Not about keeping my father's secret. And not about killing him. I pat the letter in my chest, assured that it will be there close to me. I stumble for a few feet, still determined to right my wrongs and report

to the police. I may be just another grey person now, but I do not care. Maybe there's still hope for me. I feel tired. I just want to lie down for a minute before I do anything.

The last thing I see before my vision fades is the sun escaping its cover from the clouds and the blue sky unveiling like a promise.

Through a Shark's Eyes

By: Meaghan Theodore (Gr. 11)

I'm not exactly a writer, but I do have a story to tell. I can't walk on land or breathe air like you, but I can feel things the same way you can. I have feelings just like you, we're not that different at all. I may not be able to communicate like you, but I get by. I don't have to go and work or grow up. I'm free and no human can take that from me. Now, come see my life through a shark's eyes.



As faded light spilled into my cavern, I could tell the sun was setting and it was time to wake up. I wiggled out of my snug sand bed, out of the cavern and into the open blue. The beautiful, vast ocean, my home and domain. Gliding by, I passed the "cities" of the sea, the vibrant colours standing out, lighting the ocean up. Although there were so much meal options to choose from by the coral reefs, I like a meal that's already dead or weak and injured, it just makes things a whole lot easier.

Searching and using and using my senses, I picked up on something a mile or two away : a faint heartbeat. Getting closer, I was hoping it was a weak fish, something I could prey on easily, but it was instead something totally out of the blue. Curious as I was, I went up to what seemed to be a line. It was stretching horizontally for what seemed like forever in the opposite direction and while investigating the line, I came across the creature behind the faint heartbeat.

The sight of it stopped me and looking into those lost, yet piercing eyes, for that moment, everything around me went motionless and I could feel all the pain and agony it was experiencing. One of my cousins, a hammerhead shark was tangled on the line and dying. I decided it was probably best not to get close to the line, it was too dangerous. What I could not understand was what this line was doing out here and where did it come from?

Looking back at the hammerhead on the line, I felt guilty for being free while he was stuck and on the edge of death. All I could do was bid farewell, it was too late. Not sensing a heartbeat anymore, I left the lifeless body of my cousin and continued on, looking for the ending of this white, thin line. By now it was dark, the moon was out and the night had begun. The more farther down the line I travelled, the more fish I encountered stuck on the line. Many fell for the bait trick and those who went for bait only ended up with a hook in their mouth.

The line was so long and after passing fish after fish I grew more worrisome. Not only did I pass tuna, ocean fish and other sharks, I found sea turtles and birds that had drowned trying to get the bait off the hook. Reaching halfway down the line, I was getting hungry and was tempted to snatch a fish off the line. Forgetting about the dangers and risks I was taking, I zoned in on a tuna that had died from being tangled by the line, swam with a burst of speed and sank my jaws in. After the quick meal, I was still hungry and went for a baited hook attached to the line nearby to satisfy my craving. Not realizing the mistake I was making, I chomped away.

Like so many fish on the line, I fell for the bait and well, now a hook is pierced through my mouth and I was stuck. All of my commotion did not disturb or unsettle the other fish on the line. They were used to seeing free fish become stranded in the matter of one bite. With all my strength I pulled and pulled and pulled and with all that pulling the line drifted down, but then

rose up again. There was no escape and thinking this through, I did not want to come to terms with my death, but only hoped I was one of those who were lucky enough to escape the line.

For about two hours I pulled, snapped, thrashed and swam around like a fish gone crazy because I was going crazy. During those two hours, four more sharks, two sea turtles and swordfish and a bird joined me on the line. Still focused on escaping, I backed away as far as I could from the line and angled myself towards the surface. Now, many fish could see where I was going with this and thought I was strange and losing my mind. Really, they're just jealous because they don't have as much speed as I do, being a shark and all, those are my advantages.

Continuing with my plan, I let my body take over and with a storm of speed, I exploded out of the ocean and into the air like a dolphin would, it was exhilarating. Flying out into the air, I felt so free and for a few moments I could see shiny dots in the sky above and of course the moon, my friend of night. Like all things that went up though, I had to come back down. Crashing through the ocean, the powerful boom of my body hitting the surface was enough to scare some sea gulls who were floating by into flight.

After entering the ocean, I swam around slowly to shake off the rush and all of the spinning and flipping that took place. Suddenly, I realized my plan had worked! I was off the hook, literally, well actually I still had the hook pierced through my mouth, but I wasn't attached to the line anymore. Luckily for me, I was one of few who were able to escape a horrible fate with that line.

Grateful to have a chance to live, I was still puzzled about what this line was for and where it lead to. The line was still in my sight, still baited and still catching fish. I continued on my journey to find the end of this line, my curiosity more strong than my concerns to stay away from

the line. In the next ten minutes of drifting, I made sure to stay a little far from the line, but as I kept going, in the distance I could finally see where the line of death ended and began. I could make out the distinct shape of a large boat attached to the line too.

Where the line ended, I came face to face with the familiar object. Sometimes they're large, sometimes small, but the hard bottom always stuck out in the water while the rest of the structure was above surface. Many fish and sharks are familiar with these things called boats. Some fish who are caught and boarded on the ship never return while some that are boarded return after a couple of hours with a red or yellow tag attached to their fin. What this long line had to do with this boat got me confused. I never expected to find a boat, but then again I did not know what I would find at the end of the line.

I noticed that the sun was peeking out over the horizon while the moon was slowly disappearing. The night was over just like that, but with the light coming through I could see the bottom of the boat more clearly and the huge menacing shadow it casted. I could hear a ruckus going on above on the boat and I wanted to know what was happening. Peering above the surface, it was land dwellers, but I wasn't afraid. Bobbing back under to catch my breath, I approached the surface again and could barely make out three individuals over the ledge. They were wearing something bright yellow like the sun and getting excited I rushed up to see them.

Breaking surface was very dramatic to them apparently because once I did, one pointed to me and screeched something and the second sneered, exposing his dull, tiny teeth as if that was going to intimidate me. I looked for the third, but could not spot him. I went back under and circled the length of the boat again. Coming back up at the same spot, I saw the land dwellers

again, but this time I was greeted with a sharp jab from a hook at the end of a long stick. I quickly dove under wondering if that was a threat or some sort of friendly gesture.

I went back up to find out and to my surprise, chunks of meat was being thrown into the ocean for me. I guess they were being friendly, so I graciously accepted the hand out and chomped on the bait, not noticing the trail they put me on. The chunks of meat ended as I came around to the other side of the boat and before I knew it, a large cranking noise sounded . Some part of the boat had a cage attached which closed in on me.

The top view was open, but the sides and bottom of the cage was soft and flexible but not breakable. I bobbed in and out of the water trying to make sense of what was happening. I swam around the cage five times finding no way out. Fearing the worst, the three land dwellers peered over the edge of the boat again and this time all three had that long stick again. The cage was shallow and they started to jab me with the sharp and pointy sticks. I did not like that and tried to escape instead of lashing back. One jab got through my skin pretty bad and I started to bleed. That was all it took for me to become aggressive and defensive.

I couldn't take it anymore and I got violent. I thrashed and fought and flipped and swayed my powerful tail as hard as I could. I snapped my jaws at them trying to scare them away so they couldn't hurt me anymore, but they kept going at it and pretty soon I was bleeding a lot. By five minutes I was exhausted and weak. The once so strong thrashes became weak, painful and vain attempts for fighting for my life. The three land dwellers took advantage of that and dug their metal hooks into my tough hide. The cranking noise began to sound again and I hoped they were releasing me, but feared the worst.

Anxiously looking around, the cage was not opening but was being lifted out of the water. With the hooks still in my flesh, the land dwellers pulled hard, making me squirm in pain and brought me aboard. Terrified and out of water, all I felt was searing pain and my thoughts quickly flashed back to the hammerhead I had first encountered on the line, was I going to die like him?

Not finishing the gruesome thought, I checked out my surroundings. The smell of blood was so strong, it made even a shark sick. Piles of fish and as shocking as it was, heaps of fins were all over the deck. Fins from all sorts of sharks were in large piles and the deck which was white to start with was now a reddish-pink. Being gently tossed around by the waves against the boat, the three land dwellers left me on the deck in the corner. There was little, but not enough water to keep me going and that's when it hit me. I was no longer predator, but prey. In the ocean, I dominated the seas, but out here, the land dwellers were stronger and better. They killed and destroyed with ease and I was just food to them and who knows what else.

I felt so rejected, betrayed and alone. I was out of place and away from my home, my beautiful ocean. I did not care about surviving anymore, my gills were burning and my flesh was screaming with agony. All I wanted was for this torture to be over. Remembering the land dwellers I looked over to see them doing the same thing they did to me to yet another creature. Once pulled aboard, it was another member of my family, a great white shark. My gills still ached and there was nothing I could do but lie there and suffer.

My vision began going hazy, but I did catch something out of the normal. The sky was turning gray and a huge gust of air blew so hard. A bell attached to the boat was ringing so loud I thought I was going to lose my hearing. Turning my attention back to the great white, I was

happy I never made eye contact with him because words cannot describe what occurred over the course of the next two minutes. By then, another of my species was dead and finless. Nearing my end, I was ready to let go and leave all this pain behind as the absence of water was finally getting to me.

At that very moment, as if God's hand came down, the biggest wave I have ever seen or felt struck the boat. That quick observation of the sky I made earlier was really a storm forming. Swirling and spinning around, I tumbled through the water, not knowing if I was still on the deck or back in the ocean, but before I could figure that out, everything went black.



To this day, not many sharks are as lucky as this shark was. Many sharks each day are met with a gruesome fate, being killed off just as easy as it is to breathe. These magnificent creatures have gone from predator to prey from the work of our hands and they have been portrayed as viscous, mindless killing machines. These stereotypes are not true and these myths need to be broken. Long line fishing is one method used to harvest and kill many sharks, but not only sharks are victims. Other species like sea turtles suffer the same fate too. Shark Finning also has a huge impact on shark populations today which is why their numbers are still decreasing rapidly. I'm not exactly a writer, but I breathe the same air as you do and I can walk on land just as you can. I have feelings and passions just like you. I strive to be a voice for those who can't speak : My friends, the animals.

Miles into the Darkness

By: Madison Fitzpatrick (Gr. 12)

I woke up to the loud beeping of my alarm clock at apparently 6:30am. I hit the button and rolled onto my back. I have school today and I know I have no choice but to go, even though I despise it. I hate McCarther High and about every person in it, with the exception of my only friend Craig. I got out of bed and walked to the bathroom to take a shower, brush my teeth and maybe even put a brush through my hair. I haven't cared too much about my appearance since Emily and I broke up. She left me for a senior at my school and I haven't talked to her since she said 'It's not you it's me'.

I walked downstairs into the kitchen and looked inside my fridge. All it contained were two frozen pizzas, a two four of beer, an empty bottle of cheese whiz and a box of left over potato wedges. I slammed the fridge door 'When were you planning on putting some food into the fridge Paul?'

From the living room I heard 'I told you to call me Dad you little punk.'

'I would call you Dad, but a real Dad would put food in the fridge for their own son.' I didn't hear him walk into the kitchen, but from how hard he hit me in the jaw I guess he heard what I had said. He hit me a few more times until I screamed at him to stop. I felt blood drip down my cheek bone and out of my mouth.

Paul wiped his hand off on a dish towel 'Get your ass to school.' I got up and wiped my face on my shirt. My shirt was as red as the blood smeared on it so hopefully kids at school wouldn't notice. I grabbed my bag and headed out the door.

...

On the bus I leaned my head against the window so no one could see my face. I had a feeling the bus driver knew what was happening at home because she always looked so sad when she saw me. After arriving at school I got off the bus and headed to my locker. I put my books inside and grabbed my English binder.

‘Miles buddy. Ready for a fun filled day in Mr. Abett’s English class?’ Craig had leaned his back up against the locker beside mine and pushed a pair of shades from his eyes to on top of his head. Craig was about a few inches shorter than I was and today he had on what appeared to be a Hawaiian button up shirt. He looked at me ‘Dude, did your dad hit you again? I told you to talk to someone about this.’

I shut my locker and turned away ‘I told you I can’t do that. I have nowhere else to go. Can we change the subject now please?’ I just wanted to stop talking about it and go to English.

‘Fine, have you seen that girl Jamie again?’

I looked at Craig ‘The girl from the party a few weeks ago?’

‘Yea, the girl you hooked up with, her name was Jamie.’

My eyebrows went up ‘Oh, no I haven’t.’

By the time we got to English class most of the students had already taken their seats. They all glanced at my face and looked at each other. Mr. Abett turned from writing on the chalk board and said ‘Ah boys, nice of you to join us. Now everyone turn to page 238 and read the article while I hand back your unit tests.’ After handing out all the tests Mr. Abett came beside my desk and bent down. He turned over my test. I got a 37%. He looked at me ‘Is there anything

you want to tell me Miles? Is there something at home that's stopping you from being able to study?'

I took the test and looked at it. 'No sir.'

He dropped his head in disappointment and got up. 'Extra help is after school on Wednesday and I suggest that you attend.'

...

Lunch time came around and the special in the caff today is left over meatloaf, yum. Craig and I got a tray and waited in line. A few players from the football team were behind us and started to push their trays into our backs. I whipped around to face him 'What is your problem?'

Emmett was about the tallest kid in school, not to mention the most muscular. He and his best bud Billy, who was standing beside him, were known as the biggest jerks at McCarther High. 'Well at the moment, you are. You see, there are only a few pieces of meat loaf left and I want them all.'

'We're not moving Emmett, we have to eat too.' I was about to turn around when Billy grabbed my shoulder.

'I'm sorry, did you not hear my good friend Emmett? Step out of line or I'll kick your ass.'

'Oh but Billy, don't you see? Someone has already beaten you too it.' Emmett brushed my face with his hand and I turned away. 'Or are all these cuts from all the gay sex you've been having with your little tag along over here.'

I couldn't take it anymore, so I hit Emmett. But before I could get another punch in he tackled me on to the floor. He planted four other punches on me before we heard Billy yell out 'Teacher!' Emmett dragged me up and put me into a head lock. Mr. Williams yelled at us 'Boys, what do you think you are doing?!'

Emmett surprisingly started giving me a noogie. 'Oh Mr. Williams, we're just playing.' He started to whisper into my ear 'Wouldn't want to get detention now would we Miles?'

Emmett let go of me and it took me a few seconds to look at Mr. Williams 'Yea sir, just playing.'

...

After school I went to Craig's house. He said he had some pot we could smoke so I could try to relax. We started smoking it out in his back yard while sitting on his old wooden swing set. Craig's parents weren't home and I knew this because if they ever saw Craig smoking he'd be as good as dead. Craig looked at me 'Feeling any better?'

'Yea' I said. To be honest it made me feel a whole lot better. I wasn't as shaky and my face didn't feel as bad. I usually just go for runs when I'm upset, but this strategy seems to work a lot better.

'So, why did you hit Emmett?'

'Because he's a jerk and deserved it.' I took a long drag and passed it to Craig.

'So it wasn't because he said something about you getting bashed in the face?'

'No, I was just sick of him telling us what to do.'

‘Alright, but really Miles you should talk to someone about your Dad because it’s just gunna-’

‘Craig shut up! I don’t have to explain myself to anyone and I sure as hell don’t have to talk to anyone about it!’ I stood up off the swing and turned away from him.

‘Miles, you can try to at least talk to me about it. I can try to-’

I whipped around ‘Try to what Craig? Change things for me? Make them better? How are you going to take down my father when you can’t even handle a guy like Billy or Emmett? You’re weak and pathetic, you can’t help me.’

Craig stared at the ground ‘You need to leave.’ He looked up at me and I knew from the glossiness of his eyes that he wanted to cry. I had just hurt my only friend.

I said ‘Okay’ and walked around the side of his house on to the street. It started to rain as I walked home, but I didn’t mind it because with the rain dripping on my face no one could tell that I was crying.

...

When I got home I took off my wet clothes and put them in the dryer. I went to go see if Paul was home and I found him passed out on the couch. Since he was sleeping I figured I had to make dinner. So I went to the fridge and opened it up to see the same week old food that I had seen this morning. I took a frozen pizza out, turned the oven to 400 degrees and stuck the pizza in. I went up to my room and sat on my bed. I sat there thinking of my fight with Craig and how bad I felt that I hurt him. I knew I needed to call him and apologize. I picked up the phone but before I could dial his number the phone started ringing. I answered ‘Hello?’

A voice I had heard before replied ‘Hi is this Miles?’ It was a girl.

‘Yes this is Miles, who is this?’ I was confused, girls never call here, or to talk to *me* anyways.

‘Oh thank God, finally! I searched through the whole yellow pages for your number. I hope that’s not too creepy but it’s important that I talk to you. It’s Jamie.’

Jamie from the party, why is she calling me? ‘No, uh, what’s up?’

‘Well, I haven’t been feeling well lately. I’m tired all the time, I get headaches, and certain smells make me vomit.’

‘You’re calling me because you’re sick?’ I was confused but I could hear the fear in her voice.

‘Miles, I took a test yesterday. I’m pregnant and it’s yours.’

Being Perfect

By: Katrina Alves (Gr. 11)

Ryan looked at his face in the mirror. He was genetically perfect: no brain damage, no physical disabilities. He was aesthetically and physically perfect: Hairless face, head and brows, lash less eyes, the perfect skin pigmentation; no blemishes, spots, scars or wrinkles. Eyes the light grey of a receding thundercloud. Muscular, but lean. Almost twenty-one and not a scratch.

He lived in a world where his environment was shaped by his perfection: no stoves or open flames so he wouldn't accidentally burn himself; his meals were prepared elsewhere and came to him at the precise temperature at which to be consumed easily without burning his mouth. His food, which was very good, was soft so he didn't need a knife that he might cut himself on and also so that he didn't cut his gums or tongue on a hard or sharp piece of food. His surroundings mirrored his perfection. And, of course, Ryan didn't mind that. He never got sick, never too hot, too cold, too dry, too wet. He lived a comfortable life.

The person he saw most often throughout the day was his father, who, being the head scientist and Ryan's only caretaker brought his meals, regulated his nutrient supplements and looked after any other necessities. Ryan's friends visited him often, for he had many because of his perfection, and would enter a holographic room on the other side of the large complex in which Ryan had his living space. In this room, holographic projections made a likeness of Ryan and his living space for them to see, and, simultaneously, a holographic projection of them would be made in Ryan's living space so he could see and talk to them. This would alleviate the risk of Ryan contracting an illness or objects in his living space being infected. Social interaction, as his father often said, was a very good thing.

Ryan sighed, pulled his slightly tight, white shirt over his head. He adjusted the thin black ring on a chain around his neck that symbolized his perfection. A perfect circle, a perfect human being. There was a circle like it engraved in the pavement outside his living quarters, he had been told. Walking down the white corridor to the main part of his living space, Ryan wondered what was for breakfast. Based on the complex levels of chemicals in his body that scientists received from scanners throughout the living space, the scientists would develop his meals and the amount of food supplements that he needed to maintain perfect health.

A chime sounded, telling him that someone was waiting in the hologram room to visit him.

"Come in," Ryan said, turning toward the front door as a figure materialized in front of it.

"Hello, Ryan," Rosia greeted him with a polite smile.

"Hello. How are you?" Ryan smiled back.

"Good. Have you had your morning meal yet? I want to play a new game I learnt with you."

"No, I haven't received my meal yet. Perhaps later?"

"Sure."

Ryan changed the subject: "How is Myra?"

"Fine," Rosia's smile never faltered, "She wanted to come with me to see you, but she had to go to the clinical centre for medication."

"Oh. It's been a long time since I've seen her. Ask her if she can come over some time. "

Rosia nodded and adjusted her grey shirt. Social status was represented by the colour of attire: 'Perfects' wore white with a black pendant as Ryan did (that group consisting only of Ryan and many test tubes), the average person with imperfections wore grey, law enforcement wore black, physically disabled people wore blue, mentally disabled wore green, repeat criminals wore red, and homeless people (second smallest group of people in the community, according to statistics)

wore brown. Ryan had to know these from memory because he was in the highest-educated class, which included the Perfects and the law enforcement. Most of Ryan's friends, as he had noted quite a few years earlier, wore grey.

"Did you hear about what happened to Thresh?" Rosia interrupted his thoughts as she rearranged a vase of plastic flowers nearby.

"No. What happened?" Ryan frowned. Thresh was part of law enforcement, and guarded a nearby science and genetics complex. Nothing eventful happened in that job, and everyone knew it. Or, at least, something worth mentioning happened rarely.

"A Red got out of the Correctional Facility and charged him while he was on duty."

"Is he okay?" Ryan raised his brows; a vain expression of emotion since it was hard to see the muscles in his face move without hair to exaggerate them.

"The Red was taken back to the Facility --"

"I was asking about Thresh." Ryan interrupted.

"Yes I was getting to that," Rosia had a highly developed talent of making smooth conversation, even when interrupted, "He's fine. Twisted a wrist knocking the criminal out. Nothing Thresh can't handle though." Rosia said with a small chuckle. Both knew that Thresh was an extremely large, heavily muscled young man, at least two times Rosia's size.

"I'm surprized the criminal didn't go to the Clinical Centre with a broken skull. Thresh is a rock. A brick wall." Ryan joked, "That's why he's in law enforcement, I guess."

"He said he was going to come and visit to tell you all about it this afternoon, after his shift ends. That's why I won't tell you all of the gritty details. He doesn't like it when his thunder is stolen." Ryan laughed. At that moment, his father came in, passing through Rosia's hologram in doing so, holding a tray with a bowl of steaming eggs and fruit with light cream.

"Hello, Rosia." Ryan's father said.

"Hello." She turned back to Ryan, "See you later. Have a good day."

"Thanks. You too." Ryan replied with a quick nod.

"Eggs, today." Ryan's father said as he put the bowl on the table.

"And fruit? Again?" Ryan asked. This was the third time he had received the same kinds of fruit this week. Sometimes he didn't receive any fruit. He preferred vegetables in his breakfast, fruit with his lunch.

"What are we going to do today?" his father broke his train of thought.

Ryan sat down at the small, white kitchen table and started to eat, "I'll exercise, maybe run for a while in the simulator --"

"Don't forget your educational studies."

--that was next... educational studies, lunch, Thresh will come after lunch -- he usually does-- then I'll play a match of tennis in the simulator if I have enough time. Dinner. Motion picture. Sleep." Ryan liked to keep himself busy. As busy as possible.

He spent the morning doing what he said he'd do. A small surprise was incited when his father brought him a bowl of pasta with sauce and chunks of meat. Ryan found time to read waiting for Thresh. He especially liked biographies, but he rarely had time to read them between being tested and working on his educational studies. He was reading the biography of an esteemed geneticist when he heard a resounding crash. The breaking of proxy-glass. The kitchen window. Ryan ran towards the kitchen and slid to a halt in the doorway. White kitchen. Black figure. To his left. Broken window. Cold breeze.

"The Perfect." a cold, monotonous voice whispered. The assailant had noticed his pendant. Ryan had a split second to react. That split second turned into an eternity as the following events

unfolded in slow motion before him: the black figure, hood hiding his face, started toward him, intent on whatever his mission was. The door to Ryan's right opened, startling the attacker, who pulled out a long, serrated blade. His father, startled at seeing another person in the room, started toward the attacker, yelling for Ryan to hide. Before Ryan could warn him, the blade flicked up and the black figure plunged the blade into his father's gut with lethal accuracy. The tip of the blade shown red out of his father's back, where a large, dark red stain began to spread on his white laboratory coat. The attacker pulled the blade from his father's body, the metal making a large variety of sickening sounds before being released from its victim. The body fell to the floor like a doll. Blood started to drain through the skin of the body onto the tiles. The figure once again turned his attention to Ryan. With a feral scream of rage and sadness, Ryan lunged at the man. The blade was knocked from his hand and he struggled as Ryan grabbed his neck with one hand and flicked his hood off with the other. The young Perfect looked into the imperfect, helpless eyes of his father's murderer as both of his hands tightened their grip on the man's neck. Ryan could feel the man's erratic pulse as he squirmed to release himself from Ryan's death-grip. Pushing the man's neck into the floor with the strength fueled by adrenaline, Ryan grabbed a heavy, metal pipe the length of his arm and drew it up over his head. The pipe whistled down and hit the man across the left temple with a bloody crack. Drops of blood smeared on the pipe's side from the small hole that opened in the man's skull. Ryan released the limp, dead man and grabbed the knife with his free hand. He stood, slowly, numbly, wondering what to do next. He willed himself to slow his breathing. He had just killed a man. That inspired both self-loathing and pride in him. He, with some hesitation at first, looked through the man's clothes. A transport ticket for Off-Planet Transport 53. That station was not a block from his current location. Ryan decided that he would find this man's superior, wherever he was, and show him how much

stronger a Perfect was made to be. He put on the man's pants, a dark green denim pair with many pockets for storing weapons and trinkets, and the man's coat over his own white shirt. The hood was warm on Ryan's bald head and the black leather gloves were comfortable. The yellow band on the sleeve of the coat would tell other people that he was a visitor to the planet, as it had for his father's assailant. The pipe, Ryan decided, would be a good tool, so he slipped it through a loop in the upper thigh of his pants, so it hung lazily down his leg. He exited through the broken window, being careful not to make too much noise on the broken proxy-glass. Ryan had never been outside his living quarters before. He had seen the world outside through the kitchen window, pictures of the buildings and maps of the city. He easily remembered the layout of the city, though. The station was approximately ten minutes if one walked, but at the hurried state Ryan was in, he cut that time in half. The station wasn't very large; it was meant for transporting goods more than people to other continents or, even, other planetary colonies. Three continents. Five other colonies on foreign planets. The ticket had shown Ryan a holographic image of where the attacker had been: the fifth and farthest planet away. Almost a week's journey. No transfers. Straight from one planet to another. Ryan nodded to himself and entered the transport. An hour or so until departure. It would be evening by the time the transport left: a low-budget transport, meaning there weren't any seats, only cargo crates. But it also meant that it was harder for law enforcement to pick up his trail in case something had gone wrong and the attacker needed a quick escape. The few passengers that were taking this transport were sitting near the front window. Ryan chose to sit near the back, out of sight. Considering the most recent events, Ryan was surprised to find that his first day on the transport was spent, mainly, sleeping. Grief didn't seem to want to deprive him of sleep as it might a normal person. He hadn't known his father as well as a son should. He wasn't exceptionally grieved by his parent's death because he wasn't a

very emotional person, Ryan concluded. Then again, he had been emotionally driven by his father's death to kill his assailant and go on this little adventure. So, he concluded further, he wasn't grieved, but enraged by his first encounter with death.

Finally, the fifth planetary colony came into sight. Ryan got up from the crate (which happened to be filled with fruits and vegetables) he had been sitting and sleeping on for nearly six days and did some much needed push-ups to get his blood pumping. When the transport came to a final jolting halt in the planet's dock, the door opened to the world waiting for him outside. A world Ryan never would have imagined being in existence. Once, Ryan had learned in his studies years before, the entire human population lived on this planet. Now only a small population of a few hundred still lived here, forsaken by their race. Left to rot in the garbage taken from the other colonies. Tons upon tons of refuse and decomposing bio matter met him. A most foul odour, of burning, wasting, decomposing waste assailed his nostrils. The air was thick, warm and oppressive. Fine ash and dust ascended on everything like an eternal rain. Ryan almost forgot his mission as he stepped onto the small, metal platform, where the last of the cargo was being off-loaded by automated arms. The food in the crates behind him was probably the only source of food on the planet. And the transport only travelled this far every month or so. Ryan detected movement to his right and turned. A hunched over figure, about five feet tall, came hobbling towards the crates from a small path made in the garbage.

"Hello." Ryan said when the figure came closer. It seemed to be a man, but was so deformed and unhealthy that Ryan couldn't be certain. The man was bent over as if someone had taken his

spinal cord and bent it in several places; one of his legs seemed to be longer than the other, offsetting the man's balance; like Ryan, he was hairless, but that was most likely the result of his deformities; one of his eyes was almost perfectly white, probably blind. His skin wasn't smooth. To Ryan it looked like a very wrinkled garment that desperately needed to be ironed. When he breathed, Ryan could hear the rasping and rattling of phlegm and deformed lungs clearly, like the growling of an animal. This man could be very intimidating if he became angry. He bent so low that his hands, if that is what one would call them, touched the ground. Ryan could feel only pity for him. He, a Perfect, had been given every luxury but wished to be free. This one was free but lived in a world of death and constant suffering. The man grunted a greeting and turned his head slightly so that his good eye could have a better look in Ryan's direction.

"Name's Kios."

"Ryan"

"Rain." The poor soul couldn't even repeat Ryan's name correctly. He disregarded Kios's simple speech, grateful that they could understand each other at all.

"What status." Kios grunted.

"Perfect."

"A Parfet? Here?" The man took a wobbling step back. His deformed mouth didn't allow him to pronounce words like 'perfect' properly. He obviously had given up trying to learn how to say more complex words years ago. Even more obvious was the fact that he didn't know the symbol for perfection; otherwise, he might have noticed Ryan's pendant.

"Yes, I am Perfect."

"Why? Why here?"

"I am looking for someone. A man broke into my house and murdered my father. I want to find whoever sent him." Kios looked puzzled but remained silent. "His intention was to kill me",

Ryan continued, "I want to know why."

"Many wan' to know 'why'." the man said in slurring speech due to his deformed lip.

"Why what?" Ryan asked, unsure of what Kios meant.

"Care more about food." Was all he said, moving off with a shrug to one of the crates without a backward glance. He took up a large piece of metal and pried the top of the crate open. He chose a pear from the crate and took a bite, eating from the least-deformed side of his mouth. Turning to Ryan, pear juice sliding down his chin, he offered Ryan an apple. He took the fruit and bit into it. Slightly tart, but still good despite the long, unrefrigerated journey.

"Come to my house, meet my father." Kios grunted. After taking another bite out of the pear, he loaded more fruits and vegetables into a bag, slung it over his back and proceeded to walk the way he had come. Ryan followed him, studying Kios's ponderous, off-set gait: shuffle, hop, skip, step, shuffle, hop, skip, step. Ryan had to slow his walk, for his strides didn't match Kios's. The small, winding path took them among many heaps of refuse, which, Ryan realized, happened to be the home of an ugly assortment of rodents, insects, and, to his displeasure, a number of people suffering from a large variety of deformities, illnesses, and missing limbs. Finally, they came to a small shack made of metal pieces and rotting wood, tied or nailed together in a most lopsided fashion. Kios entered first, dropping his bag of goods just inside the entryway, and, taking a fruit from it, moved further into the house. He bent and gave the fruit to an old man, who seemed to have fewer deformities than Kios did. Ryan moved closer to the man, who, seeing him, gestured to a mat that Ryan sat on.

"You are a Perfect?" the man asked after a long moment's silence. This man seemed to know the symbol of Perfection Ryan wore; meaning he probably had a higher understanding than his son did.

"Yes. My name is Ryan." he replied, dipping his head out of respect as he was taught.

"Hakim." the man said, inclining his head in return, "You come out of curiosity or revenge?"

"Both. To find the man who sent the assassin that killed my father and targeted me, ask him why he did it, then kill him if I see fit."

"Would it not be beneficial for you and the unfortunate man at the end of your blade to find the true cause of your predicament?"

Ryan sat, dumbstruck. Puzzled. Why else had the assassin been sent but to kill him? Hakim seemed to hint at a different, more complex game being played by the assassin and his mysterious superior.

"You have two choices, Perfect." Hakim interrupted his thoughts, "I will give you the location of your attacker's whereabouts." The old man handed him a scrap of paper with hastily scribbled directions on it, " and you can go find him without further interruption from me, or... "A pause, "You can stay, forget about finding your target and listen to some vital information that will be much more important to you."

Ryan lowered his head into his hands and thought about his options.

Ryan walked briskly and impatiently through the twilight. Almost four hours had passed since the transport had landed, three since he had received the directions taking him to his target. This

man, apparently, lived in one of the last standing buildings which had survived the days of destruction that followed the prosperous age in which it was built. The directions had said that there would be a river a few meters off the North and West edges of the perimeter that Ryan would have to swim through; a river that was slow moving and murky, with shallow banks and a deep median. Ryan paused to catch his breath on the edge of a high rising heap of trash which gave him the perfect lookout on the premises below: the river was between him and the building. No windows in it. Piles of trash had been moved beyond the river, so much so that Ryan could see a good stretch of earth around the walls of the building. Someone took meticulous care of the building. New cement had been poured in places where the old had crumbled. Wherever paint cracked, there was a patch of new paint to cover it. A whitewashed one-storey building with a grey roof. Ryan climbed as silently and slowly down the heap as he could to the water's edge. Trying not to slip on the slimy mud, rocks, and refuse underfoot, he entered the water. He only really noticed the icy chill of the water when he had gotten close to the middle of the river. By then the frigid water had soaked him thoroughly, making tremble with cold. Fighting the chills, Ryan finally made it to the opposite side of the stream, where he quickly rung out his shirt and shook as much water off as he could. The building was only meters away and Ryan felt his anticipation rise as the moment when he would get answers drew near. He hugged close to the side of the building, wary of surveillance, and edged to the front entrance. A seemingly regular, wooden door. The lock was easily picked and the door swung open without a peep. Ryan froze. A huge, inhumanly muscular man stood in front of him, taking up at least half the room. A whole head-and-shoulders above him. Easily twice his size. The face of a bulldog. The unmistakable odour of sweat, leather, and blood. Everything in Ryan's being screamed for escape. Except for a small voice in the back of his head telling him to stay where he was. To stand his ground. His

resolution hardened like a rock beneath his feet. There was nothing to be afraid of, and that nothing included the man in front of him. *He* was Perfect. He was superior. Ryan straightened and closed the door behind him. There was a door behind his opponent as well; a black door, probably leading to the pit bull's master. The pipe that helped him before slid into his hand. Ryan hadn't noticed so much blood on it before.

"I'm going to kill a friend of yours with this." Ryan held the pipe very much like a sword.

"And I'm gonna kill you with this." the brawny brute hefted a fist almost twice the size of Ryan's head.

The man held the Perfect's gaze for a beat and then drew back his fist to deliver a blow. Time slowed. Ryan switched his hold on the pipe so that each hand was on opposite sides of the pipe, just in time to stop the oncoming ram of the man's fist. The pipe wedged itself between the man's stone-like middle- and ring-finger knuckles. The force of the blow jarred Ryan's arms and he staggered slightly. Not seeming to notice the pain, the brawny man pulled back his other fist and let it fly, as if from a gun. Ryan ducked and he could feel the breeze of his attacker's fist overhead. Too close. They struggled in this fashion for what seemed like an eternity, until, finally, his opponent let his guard down ever so slightly and gave him the opportunity to bring the fight to an end with a loud, jarring whack in the temple with the end of the pipe. Blood dripped from a cut across the man's face; if he wasn't dead yet, he certainly would be because of the placement and severity of the blow. Ryan stepped over his dormant form. The ebony door the unfortunate man had been guarding was sure to lead him to answers. Ryan opened it and stepped across the threshold. Three doors, several dead or unconscious men and a couple of continuous black-painted corridors later, Ryan found himself at yet another door. So much black. He felt as if he was walking in a wall-less void. A rat in a maze. Ryan felt uneasy. Nothing seemed right

anymore. The building certainly wasn't as big as it seemed to be on the inside. Suddenly, Ryan was overcome with an unnatural fatigue, as if someone had injected him with a large dose of surgical sedation. He fell heavily to the floor, hitting his head on the corridor wall. Before his body and mind surrendered to the unseen onslaught, Ryan caught a glimpse of a fine mist falling to the floor about him. His last thoughts before he blacked out were that he had, indeed, been medicated, and would soon, surely, die.

Ryan awoke suddenly and with a jerk. He was standing upright, his wrists and ankles heavily chained to the wall just behind him. A lone figure stood ten feet in front of him. Short, bald, and slight, the man wore a laboratory coat and stood at a table in the centre of the stone-walled room, his back turned.

"Welcome, Perfect." the man said slowly. His tone sounded like he was talking to a specimen he was about to dissect. Ryan made no reply. The man turned to look at him through thick, round spectacles.

"Oh, yes," the scientist said, more speaking to himself than to Ryan, "You are Perfect, aren't you?"

Ryan stared the man down. The scientist returned his glare with a look of complete authority, as if he were looking down upon an unruly child.

"Did you know, Perfect," the man continued, "that the scientists that worked on you day and night have suppressed some of your memories?" He looked at the vial of chemicals in his hand with more concern in his eyes than he did with Ryan.

"Why would they suppress my memories?" Ryan doubted. His voice was gravely; he hadn't had much to drink at all for a whole day.

"Because you are Perfect... the Perfect killer, that is." the scientist looked up from the vial only to see Ryan's stunned reaction before returning to his work on the table, continued slowly:

"You see, they trained you to be the perfect assassin. The perfect weapon. They would give you a mission; send you out to accomplish it. Once you came back, they wipe your memory and put you back in your cage until next time. Do you know why they did that? Kept you in that house? It's not for your safety, I assure you. It's for theirs. They have trained you. Whenever you enter that controlled environment, your mind enters a dormant state. You willingly and gladly forget what happened. Then, when they want you, they take you out into the real world, give you a stimulant and hand you your mission. That's why you can kill so easily. The stimulus, this time, is being here, on this unfamiliar planet. Your memories will start to return. You'll remember... everything."

Ryan couldn't believe what he was hearing, "How do you know any of this?" he whispered.

"Because..." the scientist turned to him once again, "I invented that part of you before coming here. I was the scientist that showed them how to reset your memories by locking you in a controlled environment. I showed them how to use different sights, smells, sounds to bring those memories back," he paused, "I showed them what I have so appropriately called the Jekyll-and-Hyde syndrome," the scientist grinned.

"You're saying that I'm a trained - experienced - killer?" The scientist nodded, and Ryan scoffed: "That's ludicrous."

"Is it?" the man's smile broadened, "How do you explain the fact that you have severely injured or, quite possibly, killed almost ten of my best mutant men?" He let the question sink in. The question wasn't the only thing that sank; Ryan's heart sank to his toes, his throat threatened to close like a clenched fist. It all made sense. Even now, memories, flooded into his mind.

Memories of blood. He found it hard to breathe and didn't notice until too late the bite of a needle inserted into his flesh. The burning sensation of a sedative coursing up his arm.

"My last words to you are this:" the scientist said, pushing the medication into Ryan's blood stream, "When you return to your home, you won't remember anything. They will give you more missions that you will complete with lethal, perfect, accuracy that you will never remember in your 'waking' life. But there is more good in you than you could possibly know," his tone seemed to change, concern grew in his voice, "and before this is over, I will send someone to liberate you. Come, find me again. Use whatever means possible. You... are our last hope."

"Our'?"

The man pointed to a cylindrical chamber filled with fluids, a human form slowly taking shape inside. Before Ryan finally blacked out, he heard the scientist say: "My son. I'm thinking of naming him Kios."

Ryan took a deep breath and raised his head from his hands. Hakim still sat before him.

Questions raced through his head.

"I thought the map would make you remember," Hakim smiled. The same smile as the scientist.

"You're him," the pieces came together, "You're the man that trained me."

"Yes," Hakim said slowly with age, "You were on a mission to kill me. I trapped you and told you the truth. That was some twenty years ago."

"How can that be? I'm only twenty-one."

"Oh, no. You are quite older. They had genetically enhanced your body to such a degree that you would live much longer than any average man. I'd say that you are a few years older than 50."

"I've been lied to."

"Countless times," the old scientist chuckled, "now I will tell you the whole truth."

Kios sat down on the mat adjacent to his father, munching haphazardly on a vegetable.

"Around 60 years ago," Hakim began to explain, "Geneticists had found a way to make Perfect DNA, but only in one specific bloodline. Yours. You were conceived in a test tube and for the first twenty years of your life you stayed in a tube. I was eighteen, then. A young scientist, fresh out of school. I had always wanted to work on your project. Only the greatest minds did. I was put on the team almost immediately. I studied your brain functions after you were released. That was about a year later. You rapidly developed over the next five years; superhuman hearing, sight, smell; you moved faster; your muscles were stronger. Twenty-five years ago, the military took over the project. They had some of their own scientists working on you. They forced me to train your brain to reset at their discretion. When you started going on missions of murder, I left. I escaped to this world, hoping that they wouldn't find me. They did. Twenty years ago, they wiped your memory and sent you on a mission to find me. The map in your hand happens to be the map you used to find the complex I used to live in. I took a sample of your blood while you were sedated and learned as much about you as I could. I found out what your favourite weapon was:" he pointed to the pipe by Ryan's leg, "a lead pipe. Blunt-force trauma. You wield it like a sword and swing it with the force of ten sledge-hammers. They didn't care how you killed as long as your target was dead. I sedated you and reset your brain so you wouldn't remember immediately, then sent you back. No doubt they have used you for the odd mission since. I've been studying your blood; you can heal yourself extremely fast, leaving no evidence on your body of your latest mission. Your internal system is resistant to toxins of all sorts. There is one flaw, though."

This surprised Ryan. He had a flaw? It almost excited him.

Hakim continued, "The Jekyll-and-Hyde syndrome won't work anymore. Your brain is becoming so advanced that it will soon overcome the barriers they have made to keep you in the dark.

Soon, you will remember everything. All the murders, the torture. But you will also remember all of the times you had in the laboratory so many years ago with the original team. The first time you ate chocolate, for instance," he smiled again and handed Ryan a small piece of chocolate wrapped in wax paper. Ryan had never been allowed to have it when he was at home. The taste of it, though, brought faint memories of people laughing and smiling. The taste was familiar to him.

"I brought you here, Ryan, because your blood is very special."

"Oh?"

"Not only is your DNA perfect," Hakim whispered, "But your blood can eliminate deformities and diseases, as well as toxins. You are the source. Kios is the conductor, the branch sprouting from the tree." the old man laid a loving hand on his son.

"How is that?" Ryan inquired, deeply interested.

"I engineered Kios' blood so that when it came into contact with yours, his would inherit the same Perfect properties and then duplicate in copious amounts. It makes those properties compatible with others of varying blood types; a life-giving solution available to the people on this planet who believe there is still a way to live on our race's planet of origin. Together, you can heal all wounds in humanity."

"We can rebuild this planet?" Ryan asked.

"Most certainly." the elder smiled and nodded.

"We can never truly call ourselves Perfect until that happens."

"Of course." Hakim pulled out a box with his medical instruments in it, saved for this occasion. In the bottom, wrapped in leather, a black ring pendant waited for its owner. Ryan lifted it out of the box and hung it around Kios' neck as Ryan's blood flowed through a tube between them. Already, small details in Kios' face were changing. Hakim removed the tube from their arms, saying, "Only a small portion is needed for the process to begin." Kios smiled at his father and looked down at his arm where the blood had entered his body. "Perfect."

-FIN-