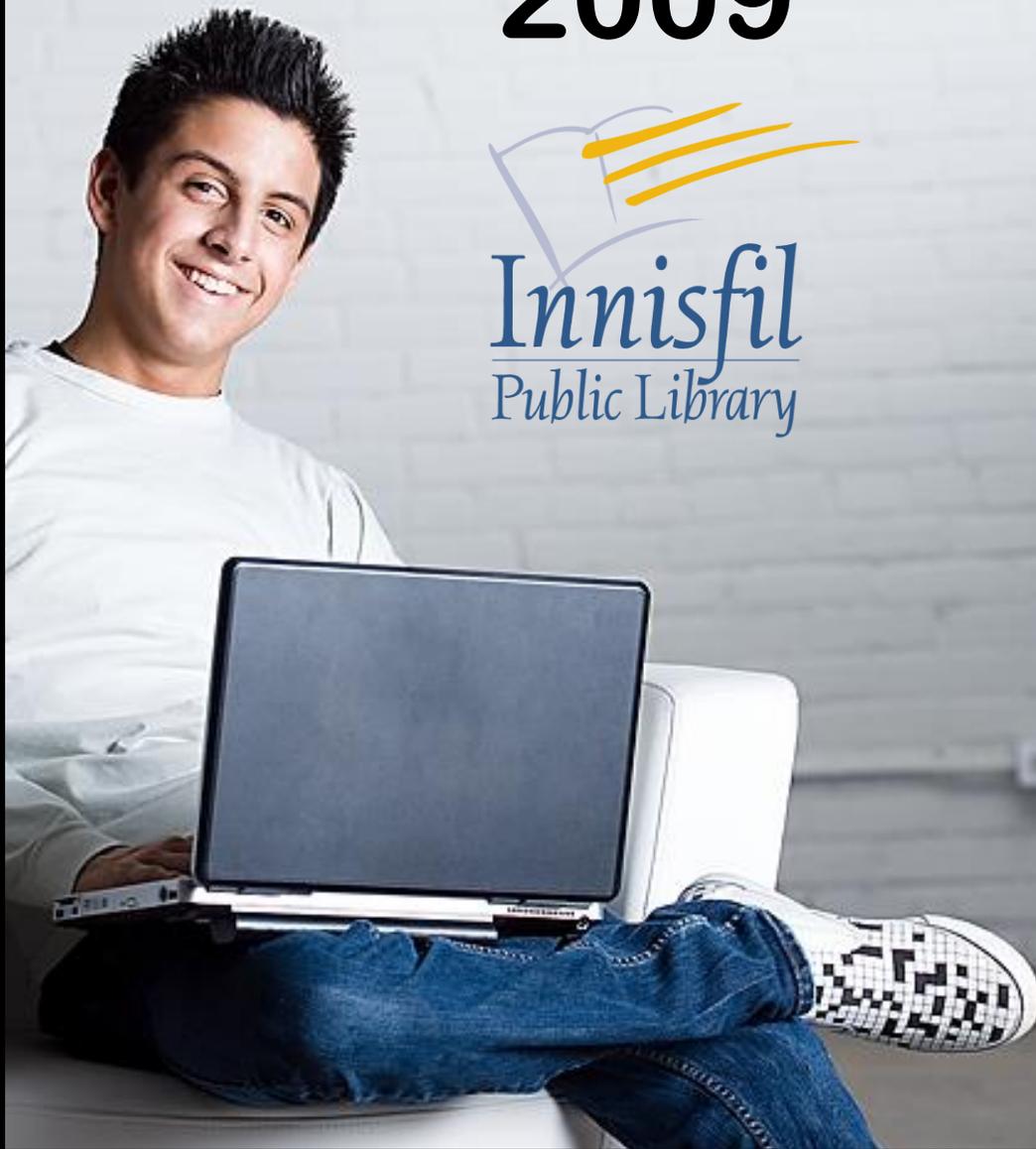


Innisfil Public Library The Seepe Walters Short Story Contest

2009



Produced by Innisfil Public Library

Innisfil, Ontario

October 2009

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 three 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 8th 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 and the Ferraro family for their ongoing support and sponsorship; the generosity of our newest sponsor, Chapters – Mapleview location; the judging panel: Writer-in-residence Shane Peacock and Amanda Quibell, 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 2009 edition of the Seepe Walters Short Story Contest.

Kathy Hammer
Children's Services Librarian
Innisfil Public Library

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i> By Shane Peacock	1
<i>The Dream That Became Reality</i> By Rachel Williams	2
<i>Christina's Tree</i> By Bea Toplitsky	5
<i>Room 101</i> By Jessica Burns	9
<i>The Dragon of the Ruby Star</i> By Raquel B. Vachon	13
<i>Emma's Lifeguard Dog</i> By Aniela Libicz	16
<i>How I Changed the World</i> By Jordyn Simpson	17
<i>Sci-Fi</i> By Matt Archbell	19
<i>My Telescope</i> By Kaila Tims	23
<i>A Musically Discovered Murder</i> By Hailey Toole	26
<i>Adventure in the Rockies</i> By Abigail Robinson	31
<i>Firsts and Lasts</i> By Griffin Toplitsky	35

<i>Talent</i> By Marnie Galea	39
<i>Undead</i> By Madeline Smith	42
<i>Akston</i> By Kyle Wilkinson	47
<i>Valkryie</i> By Martina Dotcheva	52

INTRODUCTION

It has been a pleasure to be the Writer in Residence at the Innisfil Public Library. Over the past few months, I have had the opportunity to work with many aspiring writers, speak at many events, and discuss my own writing with library patrons. But nothing has been more rewarding than working with the local young people. Addressing students in schools, helping kids develop scenes in their “Acting Out” library clubs, or talking to them one-on-one about their writing has been fun, but helping operate the 2009 Seepe Walters Story Writing Contest has been particularly dear to my heart. Seepe, who was a journalist, teacher, and founder of the local Friends of the Library, was obviously a lady who believed in the importance of literacy. There is no better way to foster advanced literacy than to push young people to not only write, but to write creatively, and then have the courage to offer their work for scrutiny.

The greatest gift we can give our children is to love them, second is to feed and clothe them, but third is to teach them to read. If they can read, and if they can write, they will possess an absolutely invaluable tool in life.

Last year, the Library had twelve entries in the writing contest. This year we have forty one. That’s more than triple the contestants! And in that deluge of Innisfil literary endeavours, what wonderful stories we have received. Turn the pages of this anthology and see what great writing talent is in our midst.

Thanks to Kathy Hammer, Children’s Librarian, for her hard work and enthusiasm, Marilyn Pillar, the Lakeshore Branch Manager for her steady hand on everything from the beginning, and Amanda Quibell, who gave so much of her time to help me judge the contest.

Congratulations to the winners, but more importantly congratulations to ALL of you who entered. Entering, not winning, is what matters. Judging short-story contests is not a science. Though we certainly chose winners who are remarkably talented, it is possible that the stories we liked were not absolutely the best. Many of you showed great ability and I know there are many other winners out there. Please enter next year and get your friends to participate too, become part of what I think is the coolest contest of any sort in all of Innisfil. Let’s triple the entries once more, in 2010!

Shane Peacock
Writer in Residence 2009
Innisfil Public Library

THE DREAM THAT BECAME REALITY

By Rachel Williams: Grade 6

Anxiety was eating at me, I wanted to jump into my costume and run out the door with a pillow case in my hand. Halloween was just around the corner, and I felt majorly eager to collect my most favourite candies and chocolates, but I was mostly eager because Halloween was always a night of fright. This was an amazing feeling for me and all my friends; the greatest time of the year was Halloween. I flicked out the lights and tucked myself into bed with a smirk on my face, I sighed with excitement. Tomorrow was going to be the most fun I've ever had, and I knew that for a fact. I stared through the window looking at the clear moon dazzling in the night sky. I closed my eyes still smiling. Wait! Something felt wrong; the hairs on the back of my neck rose, standing upright. A sudden change of emotion fell upon me, the atmosphere changed. An unusual sensation filled the room. I felt as if I were being watched. As if something bad was present. I hesitated, but I opened my eyes. A dark shadow was hovering on the ceiling. It moved along at a snails pace. I gasped. What was this strange figure? It was hard to make out what it looked like, but from my view, it looked like a ghost! I pulled the covers immediately up to cover half my face. My eyes peeped out as I watched the ghostly figure disappear. In a blink of an eye, it was gone. It was nowhere to be seen. I lay frozen for a while, I was scared. I deeply inhaled, trying to keep calm. "There are no such things as ghosts, there are no such things as ghosts". I chanted in a low voice. As much as I tried to keep myself calm, it didn't work. I reluctantly pushed myself out of bed. I walked slowly to the bathroom. I was shivering, but not because I was cold, because I was frightened. All I needed was to feel the cold tap water on my face, which would keep me relaxed.

The water was soothing; I splashed the cool water on my eyes. Wow, did that feel refreshing. I took a towel out from the cabinet to dry my face. My eyes widened, something behind me reflected in the mirror. I dropped the towel from my hands, my mouth also dropped. "AH!" I screamed. What I saw in the mirror was so appalling. My eyebrows tightened. It wasn't like anything I had ever seen before. Was it the ghost? I asked myself. I tried to tell myself it was not the ghost I had seen, just my silly, crazy imagination. I turned around quickly. I gasped again, not because of what I saw, because of what I didn't see. The ghost had disappeared once again. I was being haunted by a ghost. Why? I was not sure. I ran into my room, feeling puzzled and terrified and I didn't know what to do. I felt tired, but I didn't want to sleep. I questioned myself, was I being haunted by a ghost, why was I getting haunted by a ghost? It was quiet, dead silent, too quiet. The clock which read 6:25 a.m. was the only thing that broke the silence. I heard a quiet "drip, drop" noise. It was nothing I told myself, just in my head, it was followed with a scream. Then I was scared. It was a familiar voice though, my mothers. I abruptly ran into the bathroom. There my mother stood. She looked sternly at me, and pointed at the bath tub. There it was filled with gunk, black gunk. I shivered.

"What is this"! She said.

“I have no”... she did not let me finish.

“Clean it.” She said with a disgusted voice, and then, she left the room. This was going too far. The ghost was not only haunting me, but it was also getting me in trouble. What was this stuff anyways? How was I supposed to clean this? What if it was poisonous? There was no point of telling her it wasn't me who did this. If I did, I would tell her it was the ghost's fault. Now who would believe that? I got my gloves on and searched for the drain hole in the tub, I watched as the black gunk slowly drained out.

When I finished cleaning the mysterious gunk from the tub, it was already time for lunch. It wasn't a break for me, one ghostly event after another. It started with the shadow figure on my ceiling, then the reflection of the ghost in the cabinet mirror, then the black gunk in the bathtub. I was ready for the next incident to happen. I laid out my costume I would wear for tonight. It wasn't that scary, just your regular old classic witch. My mother and father had gone out to help our neighbors with decorating for their Halloween party. I was alone. I was nervous. This ghost was weird, yes, it was haunting me. But it never actually hurt me. This was a good thing. “Mom” I called out, I heard the front door slam shut. Then I heard footsteps. “Da-ad”. There was no reply. “It is mom, or dad.” I said trying to reassure myself. But I was positive it was not either of them. Loud sounds of footsteps were climbing up the stairs. I got more and more nervous, the sound got louder. A spine-chilling sense was around me. Then out the nowhere, the footsteps stopped! I was sure that whatever was around me was still here. Time went by, in silence. Was it still here, around me? I asked myself. SLAM! The door to my room shut, by itself. At once I ran to the door. I pulled, turned, and pushed the doorknob. I struggled to get out. It was useless to try to open it, it was locked. “Help, help!” I screamed.

It was a tough time for freedom. My mother had come home; she unlocked the door, just in time for trick or treating. I put on my costume, fixed my hair, put on the witch hat and ran out the door. I was late; I was supposed to meet my friends by the old creepy abandoned mansion on the corner of our street. The sounds of spooky music filled the streets, bloodcurdling costumes roamed the blocks, and little children screamed in fright. It felt like Halloween. I carried my bag that would soon be filled with candy. I stood in front of the old creepy house. My friends were not there. They had probably left without me. I looked ahead; there was no sight of my friends. I kept on walking although it was hard to see what I was approaching. Mist and fog was in the air. It was like walking into clouds. Where was I, I was somewhere, but where. Something was wrong, it was silent, and there was no scary music and no people screaming. Footsteps broke the silence. It was heavy footsteps. Like the one I heard in my house. I started to run. I dropped my witch hat, I wanted to go back, but I was too scared. I was out of breath, I struggled to breathe. Too cold arms wrapped around me, arms that were not mine. Whatever it was had long nails, which dug into my skin. I wept in pain.

The sunlight peeked through the curtains. I made a great effort to open my eyes. They burned in the sun. I squinted, I was confused. Why am I in bed, why aren't I getting attacked by a ghost? I questioned myself. It all started to make sense; it was a dream, one

silly dream. I laughed, I was relieved. I climbed out of bed, and started to get ready for school. I smiled, tonight was Halloween.

I smelled the cool autumn air as I walked to the bus stop. I was fascinated by the vast Halloween decorations. Oh how excited I was for trick or treating. I couldn't wait to eat the candy and chocolates. I looked ahead; further on the sidewalk there was something black. I tightened my eyebrows. "What is that?" I said aloud. My heart skipped a beat when I saw what it was. It was my witch hat that I had dropped "in my dream". I immediately looked down on my arm. There I saw three nail imprints, where in my dream I had been hurt. I cradled the wound. It was then, I knew that it was not a silly dream, it was reality.

CHRISTINA'S TREE

By Bea Toplitsky: Grade 6

“Stop talking or I’ll keep you in at recess!” said Christina’s teacher. “And a hush falls over the crowd! I wanted to tell you that starting next week we’ll be talking about helping the Earth. There are so many ways I can’t count, and I’m a teacher! You’ll see later.”

Christina lived in Toronto with her brothers. Sam, the youngest in the family, Josh, who was two years older than Christina, who was thirteen, and Kyle, who was three years older than her, and he was the oldest child at sixteen.

You would think that growing up with two older brothers and also having a younger one after would mean Christina would be a tomboy, and that is right. Christina loved spiders, was on every sports team at her school, and could make many sounds that her mother didn’t approve of at the dinner table.

One day their teacher gave them a lecture about planting a tree. The lecture did bore Christina, but the slide show that went with it didn’t. It was the same message that the teacher had collected yawns with, but it inspired Christina.

“Mom,” said Christina, that night at dinner, “I want to plant a tree in our back yard. Am I allowed to?”

“You’re allowed to, but where do you think you’re going to get a tree to plant?” asked her mother.

“They sell them at the garden center,” said Christina. “I could get a nice tree there, right?”

“Where are you going to get enough money to buy a tree? They can be expensive,” said Christina’s father.

“Mom, Dad,” she said, “I think I should get a raise on my allowance. Josh and Kyle get more than I do.”

“They do more work than you do,” said her mother.

“They’re older than you,” said her father.

“I’ll do as much work as they do,” said Christina, “younger or not.”

“Why don’t you make lemonade?” asked Sam.

“Sam, lemonade has nothing to do with my allowance. It won’t buy me a tree,” said Christina.

“Yes it will!” said Sam. “My teacher read me a story about a boy who built a lemonade stand to make money. It is near summer, so the neighbourhood will like a nice cold drink after mowing lawns.”

“Sam, you’re a genius!” said Christina. “Mom, Dad, am I allowed to make a lemonade stand?”

“Do you know how to make lemonade?” asked her father.

“Mom does; she could help!” said Christina.

“We would have to buy lemons, sugar, and water. You would have to pay for all of those, and you would have to buy enough for the entire neighbourhood,” said her mother. “And besides, I’m not going to clean the kitchen when we’re done.”

“I’m getting my allowance tomorrow,” said Christina, “and you already have loads of sugar for when you bake cookies. I’m willing to clean up any mess I make, too. Can I make a lemonade stand now?”

“You don’t have a stand,” said her father. “Honey, I think that maybe this project can wait, okay?”

“No!” she shouted, finishing her supper. “I really, really want to plant a tree! It would be so good for everyone but you just seem to really hate my idea!”

“Honey, your father’s right,” said her mother. “It’s nice that you want to plant a tree, but this is a lot of work, not to mention a lot of money.”

“Mom’s right, Chris,” said Josh. “And you know dad was right; you don’t have a stand.”

“I could build her one,” suggested Kyle.

“Don’t give her false hopes, Kyle,” said her father, giving him a stern look.

“No, I really could!” said Kyle. “We have all that wood in the back yard, and with those tools you gave me for my birthday and some duct-tape...”

“Definitely not!” shouted their mother.

“Yeah,” said Josh, “no offence, Kyle, but you aren’t the world’s greatest handyman.”

“Can I go to the washroom?” asked Sam, but nobody paid any attention to him.

“You’re right,” said Kyle. “It was a dumb idea. Sorry Chris, but I guess you can’t have a lemonade stand.”

Everyone was silent. It was out of character for Kyle to give up so easily, just like Josh and Christina.

Defeated, Christina left the table and went to her room without saying anything. She knew she had lost.

As soon as she had disappeared, her father said, “Kyle, how could you do that? You made her so hopeful when you knew it was a bad idea! Why do you treat your sister that way? What were you thinking?”

“Sorry, Dad,” said Kyle.

“Can I go to the washroom?” asked Sam once again.

“Kyle, I think you owe your sister an apology,” said their mom.

Josh finished his dinner and slipped away while his parents were distracted, hoping to avoid doing the dishes.

“I’m going to go finish my homework,” said Kyle, standing up.

“CAN I GO TO THE WASHROOM?” asked Sam for the third time.

“Yes, but don’t raise your voice,” said his mother. “We would let you go even if you didn’t yell.”

A few weeks later, Kyle came into Christina’s room with a smug smile on his face.

“Knock, next time, or I’ll kick you out,” she said, looking up from a book she was reading on her bed.

“Sorry,” mumbled Kyle. “Dad wants to talk to you. He’s outside and I don’t think he’s very happy.”

“What did I do?” she asked jumping up worriedly.

“I dunno, but you better hurry up,” he said, and she did.

Christina ran to the back door, but hesitated to open it. She looked at Kyle and his eyes told her to go faster.

“Just how mad is he?” she asked.

“Mad,” answered Kyle.

When she opened the back door, she found the homemade lemonade stand that Kyle had built, and beside it was her father, who didn't look mad at all.

“I think I'll pick out a spot to plant the tree,” Christina smiled.

ROOM 101
By Jessica Burns: Grade 5

“Dad, where are we going?” I asked.

“You’ll see when we get there.” my father answered quietly.

“How much longer? It stinks in here.” I complained.

“Not long,” he answered. “And it does not stink in here.”

“Now Kaitlyn, do me a favour and don’t ask anymore questions. Got it?”

“Got it.”

My name is Kaitlyn Weiner. I am a 12 year old girl with short spiky blond hair with pink streaks. I also have eyes that are like a mood ring. I have different colours for different moods.

I ruffled through one of the many bags my father told me to bring and grabbed the small mirror that my mother gave me before she left when I was only five years old. I looked at the eyes that were staring back at me. Black....my eyes were black. That meant that I was annoyed. About ten minutes later the car pulled into the driveway of a house that I had never seen before.

“What is this place?” I wondered aloud.

“It’s your grandmother’s house. She’s a widow. Your grandfather died of a heart attack a year ago. She’s been ever so lonely since he died.” my father explained. “You will be staying here for about a year since I have to work and I couldn’t find anyone other than your grandmother to watch you. Besides you will be good company for her. Now, I have to go so get your bags and ring the doorbell.”

I ran up the porch steps and rang the bell like my father told me to. Then I waited. An elderly woman answered the door. Her eyes told me that she had been crying, but as soon as she saw me her eyes lit up and she embraced me in a huge bear hug.

“Can’t breath.” I managed to choke out.

As soon as she let go of me I was gasping for air and she was laughing.

“Sorry Alice, I mean Kaitlyn.” she apologized.

Lots of people call me Alice but who was she and what did she have to do with me.

Just then a voice interrupted my thoughts.

“Well, come in. Have a bowl of soup.”

“No thanks I have already eaten.”

“Alright.”

I slept well that night and in the morning I grabbed my back-pack and went to school. The secretary told me to go to room 101, so I walked down a long hallway until I reached the end. A large rectangular door stood in front of me. I read the numbers on the door. 101. I slowly turned the doorknob. When the door opened all eyes were on me. I walked up to the front desk and handed the teacher the slip of paper that the secretary told me to give her. I sat down beside the only boy with brown eyes. Then I realized that everyone else had red eyes. I shuddered. I have heard those stories before. VAMPIRES! I shuddered again.

“Hello.” said a voice from beside me.

I turned to see the boy with brown eyes staring at me.

“My name is Drew Williams. Do you happen to know what we are?”

“Vampires.” I answered automatically.

“What is your name?” he asked.

“Kaitlyn Weiner.” I answered.

His eyes widened with shock.

I changed the subject.

“When’s recess?”

“Never.” he answered as if he was in a trance.

“When do we go home?”

“Never.” he said again.

I couldn’t speak so I just stared at him. Suddenly I felt strange. I grabbed my mirror and looked at my eyes. Oh no. No! No! No! No! NOT PINK! Anything but PINK!!!! I had just fallen in love with a vampire. Just then came a flash of green light and then a thud.

“The trap door.” Drew whispered.

“Lorenza!” someone yelled.

Then a woman popped up in front of me and she handed me a vile with red liquid in it, then she spoke.

“My name is Lorenza and you must complete three tasks in order to stay here.”

I was surprised, so my eyes probably changed from pink to purple. Lorenza seemed to have caught that. She stared at me in sheer horror. Then her face went completely blank.

“Okay, only two tasks then. First, drink the liquid out of the vile that I just gave you, and then if you survive, I will give you your next task. Alright Alice?”

“Who’s Alice?”

“You are Alice, the queen of the vampires and I am your mother. Now drink.”

I should have been worried but I wasn’t. I was excited. I popped the cork off, closed my eyes and drank.

I opened my eyes and I was still in the class.

“I’m alive!” I shouted louder than I needed to.

Lorenza laughed. I’m sure she wasn’t the only one.

“Your second task is to walk through the trap door. You may take one of the vampires here with you. Say the name in your head, not out loud.”

I closed my eyes and said the name of the person (technically speaking vampire) that would haunt me forever. I then closed my eyes and walked through the trap door.

When I opened my eyes, I was in a castle on a throne, sitting beside Drew Williams.

I didn’t know how long it would last and I had to say something, so I’d better say it fast.

“Drew?”

“Yes.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too - Alice.”

WAIT FOR THE NEXT BOOK IN THE SERIES
THE QUEEN RETURNS

THE DRAGON OF THE RUBY STAR

Raquel B. Vachon: Grade 5

Long before the creation of our world, beneath the dark ocean and the threatening sands, there was a Clan of Dragons, the JhadaKmen, in a place called Ascheyr.

“In the dark ages of our time, there was a great star, the Ruby Star. It was so powerful that anyone who tried to use it for evil would lose all of their senses, their own lives smothering before them. Our ancestors believed that there was a golden dragon, far more powerful than any of us, which protected and guarded the star.” The elders of the JhadaKmen were wise. Melanchei, the youngest of the elders, and, by all of the apprentice dragons’ standards, the most amusing, was cuddled up against the wall of the cave with the young dragons piled on top of her. “The golden dragon’s name was Kalai.”

Kalai. A very strong name. Delachia thought. It suits him, if he is so powerful.

Delachia was in her first two months of being a warrior. She was assigned a duty by the Leader, Gelana, she was to accompany Melanchei on her quest to keep the young dragons, better known as “the little balls of scales”, busy while the senior warriors worked on the wall around camp. Delachia was on the edge of a nervous breakdown, but she knew she had to help. “Melanchei,” she whispered, “Is the great dragon still here today and watching us right now?” Delachia knew the answer, but, deep down, she enjoyed the stories the elders told her. By those stories, she knows what she is. It’s complicated.

The elder met her gaze with thankful eyes. “Of course, Kalai is always with us, even if we don’t notice it.”

At that sudden moment, Gelana burst out of the brambles and into the cave... “May I take Delachia from you?”

Melanchei nodded. “She has been great help.” Delachia turned away.

She met her sister, Nauwla, at the mouth of the cave. Unable to speak because of shock about this outburst, she twitched her tail in a greeting. Nauwla had a shocked look on her face as well.

Gelana stepped in between the dragons. “You must listen to me closely, girls. I need you to find the Ruby Star. You are the only ones who can go, because you are the daughters of Rhodri. ” Clearly, Gelana had seen the angered expression on the sisters’ faces, because she said, “Not for evil, you foolish children! I need it because the Clan is in danger! Vampires! Vampires are coming because those apprentices went out into the wild and practically waved the source of our power in their faces!” Delachia had never seen the she-dragon lose her temper.

Gelana quickly shoved blankets, mouse pelt cloaks, Raspberry Poultice, and Pear Oil into two goat fur bags.

Later, after a fresh dinner of zebra foals, the sisters were placing the last items into their bags. Gelana came galloping fiercely, shoving them out of the camp as quickly as she could. “You must go now. Hurry! I had a vision; it showed that the vampires are on their way!”

“Alright, we will!” Delachia had already tumbled into a pool of mud. “You don’t have to push someone into the mud to make them get the point!”

Nauwla was in the air, with her talons, she grasped her sister’s shoulder. Delachia growled and spread her wings, signalling that she was ready to take flight. After a non-stop five hour flight, they arrived at the Forest of Fyr.

Nauwla stared into the black shadows of the forest. “That’s.... a little bit... frightening...”

Her sister, the complete opposite of her, had the complete opposite reaction. “We’re here! Isn’t this going to be so exciting! I hope we get to-” Delachia didn’t finish her shout of joy.

A large, muscled dragon flew down from the tallest tree. “I am Gryffyn, King of the Dragons.” Nauwla was trembling out of her scales.

“Go!” Delachia shouted. In her haste to fly away, she flew straight into a branch. She fell backward with a thud. “Nauwla, help me!”

Nauwla banked, and swooped down toward her sister. Catching her by the wing, and piercing her claw through the thin skin, she flew Delachia to a safe place for the night.

“You really should be more careful,” Nauwla scolded as she spread Raspberry Poultice over Delachia’s injured wing. She looked at her with an icy stare, “and you’d better be able to fly in the morning.”

“Do you have to be rude?” Delachia mumbled with mouse butts on bagels clamped in her jaws. “Anyways, I wasn’t the one who pierced my wing!”

“If I hadn’t pierced your wing, you’d be broken all over!” Nauwla retorted hotly. She turned and lay down to sleep. “At least I’m being the sensible one.” She muttered.

At the first light of day, the dragons were flying towards the Ruby Star. After another never-ending trip, the sisters found the Crystal Glaze. It is a portal that true warriors can pass through to get to any star they wanted to. The she-dragons stared in awe as they watched the clear air ripple through the crystal glaze.

“Okay,” Delachia said, “I think we have to fly into the middle, with our eyes closed, and....” She trailed off, trying to think of the instructions. “Oh! We have to think of rubies. At least, that’s what all the legends tell us.”

They started to fly toward it, but Nauwla got shocked by a side beam.

“Get the pear oil,” She managed to say in a feeble voice, “quick!” Delachia dug through her bag, tossing out many items. Finally finding the Pear oil, she tossed the green bottle to her sister. After five minutes the healing was complete and they tried it again.

“Stay in the middle!” Delachia warned. She and Nauwla ended up in a dreary, dark dungeon. The two noticed a muscled dragon sleeping in the corner, chains wrapped around his tail and legs.

Without thinking, Delachia spoke, “Kalai, may we have the Ruby Star?” The dragon woke up, startled.

Long minutes of silence overcame them. Finally, he spoke. “Why should I give it to you?” His voice was rough, and ragged, from years of guarding this precious star.

“We’re trying to save our Clan, the JhadaKmen.” The sisters said at exactly the same time.

After , for what seemed like forever, Kalai spoke again, “Fine, but only if you can find a gleaming stone to replace it.”

All of a sudden, a red quartzite stone appeared in the corner opposite to Kalai. Nauwla stared at it, amazed, but Delachia didn’t waste their time. She hurried to pick it up, “Here.” She handed it to Kalai.

“Very well, your heart is true. I shall take you home.” All ended well, the Clan was saved, and Kalai was saved from his fate.

EMMA'S LIFEGUARD DOG

By Aniela Libicz: Grade 5

Once upon a time, a young girl lived with her mom and dad in a little house by the Ohio River. Now, this girl was six years old and she was very sweet. Her name was Emma. Emma had a dog whose name was Song. As you can imagine, they were great friends, Emma having no siblings.

One day Emma was playing in their yard on her swing when her parents came and told her that the next day they would be going to a fair. In the morning, Song woke Emma up, for he was more excited than Emma. Emma got up, dressed, and came downstairs for breakfast. When they are all finished, Emma and her mom cleaned the dishes, and dad put on a tie and they drove to the fair.

It was a beautiful Saturday afternoon and it seemed like everyone was at this particular fair. As Emma was about to run off, her dad caught her by her skirt and reminded her that they need to stay together for it was extremely crowded. Emma's dad took Song on the leash and they went to buy their tickets. There was so much to do and so much to see... Yet, everyone had their minds made up. First, they decided that they would go on the Ferris wheel then they ate some cotton candy. When they finished, it was already two o'clock so they went to the acrobat's show. Emma's mom really loved gymnastics!

When they finished doing all these things there was still fifteen minutes left until closing. Since there wasn't too much time left, Emma asked if she could at least get her face painted. They asked a clown for directions. He told them that they had already packed up the face painting stand, so Emma's parents decided that they should go home.

When they were near their little house, Song saw a squirrel and jumped out and chased it. Emma, young and full of life also jumped out of their carriage and chased Song. They chased each other for quite a while until the squirrel saw a tree in the river. In one leap it landed right on the tree. Emma slipped and accidentally fell into the water. Since she could not swim (and the water was deep) she started sinking. Her terrified dog jumped in to save her. Emma's mom also saw this and started to scream for help. Her husband not knowing how to swim was sure his little girl would drown. Just then he saw Song and Emma. Emma was on Song's back. Song swam to shore and put Emma down. Emma's mom and dad bent down and started doing CPR. Emma started coughing and opened her eyes. Her parents hugged and kiss her. Then Emma's dad picked Emma up and they drove home. They were all very tired but nearly exploding with joy.

HOW I CHANGED THE WORLD

By Jordyn Simpson: Grade 8

It was the middle of the afternoon when I received the letter from the Black Hand. I was just on my way to my next class when one of my classmates stopped me and said that he had a letter for me. I asked him who it was from and he said he couldn't say. I looked at the envelope. The handwriting did not look familiar. I opened it. What I found in the letter was shocking. First I must tell you that I was part of an activist group with two other friends Nedjelko Cabinovic and Trifco Grabez. The group was opposed to the Archduke Ferdinand becoming king. Now back to the letter. I found that the letter was from an underground group called the Black Hand. Somehow they had found out about me and they wanted me and my friends to assassinate the Archduke Franz Ferdinand. When I first started reading I thought I couldn't do this but as I read on I started thinking I could do it and not only that, but that I should do it. The letter said I was to meet The Black Hand on June 17, 1914 at 1:00 am under the bridge in Sarajevo. I would go.

My alarm went off. I looked at the clock - 12:45 A.M. Who could have set my alarm for this unearthly hour of the morning? Then slowly but surely it all came back to me; the letter, the Black Hand, and the meeting. The meeting! That's why my alarm went off so early. I got up quickly and dressed in dark clothes. I looked at the clock, ten to one. That meant I had ten minutes to get to the bridge. I got there just as the church bells chimed 1:00 am. The meeting was short. The Black Hand just told us what to do and handed us a package. The supplies: pistols, hand bombs and cyanide pills. The orders: the first man was supposed to throw his bomb at the Archduke's car, and if he missed the second man would throw his bomb, and if he missed it was all left up to the third man, me. After the deed was done we were all to take the cyanide pills so the assassination could not be linked back to the Black Hand. This was a suicide mission. I would die to make the world a better place.

The day of the assassination arrived quickly. My friends and I made our way through the throng of people till we got within throwing distance, then we waited for the Archduke and his wife to pass. As I waited I could hear my heart thumping and my hands began to get cold. I thought I was going to throw up and then pass out. I actually did throw up but no one seemed to notice. The car was getting closer and closer. As I waited I was comforted by two things. One, I was doing this for the benefit of my country and two, because I was the last man I probably would not have to actually do anything. The car was now just seconds away from where we needed it to be. I prepared myself and then....it was over. It happened so fast. The explosions, the screams, but through the clearing smoke I saw the Archduke and his wife drive away and they were not injured at all. I saw my friends run over to me and I realized they had missed and I had not thrown my bomb. When everything was left up to me, I failed.

I walked through the back alleyways feeling dejected and angry for failing to throw the bomb that would have changed the world. It was beginning to rain but I continued to walk, not going anywhere in particular, when I came to a dead end. As I turned to leave I heard a car behind me. I looked back at the car and it was only after a

second glance that I noticed that it was the Archduke's car and he and his wife were still in it. That was when I realized I could make up for my previous mistake and kill them now. I hid in the shadows and cocked my pistol. When the car was just where I wanted it to be I stepped out of the shadows and aimed my pistol. It was almost point blank range. I pulled the trigger. The bullet hit the Archduke Ferdinand in the neck. I took aim once more and hit the Archduchess in the stomach. Then I ran.

I stopped for just half a second to take the cyanide pills then kept running. As I fled, thoughts and questions raced through my mind. What would it be like to die? I wondered what would happen after my death. I wished I could have seen the better world I had helped to create. Then out of nowhere someone grabbed me, interrupting my thoughts. I knew from his uniform that he was a police officer. I twisted to get free but he was too strong. As he led me away I was comforted by the fact that I would not have to face a life in jail because I would be gone soon. That moment never came though. Somehow the cyanide failed to work, and I was put on trial for murder. At my trial I was forced to confess everything and how the Black Hand was connected to the whole plot. I thought I would be put to death, but by another twist of fate my life was spared again. My birth date had been recorded incorrectly making me too young for an execution. My sentence was twenty years in prison. That is where I am now writing this whole story about how I changed the world.

SCI-FI

By Matt Archbell: Grade 8

Reginald pushed off of the side of the ship, his feet slowly spinning over his head. He held out his arms as stabilizer jets shot out from the palms of his gloves. The jets propelled him forward, his red spacesuit a blur against the black nothingness of space. He slowed himself down and reached into his pouch, pulling out a small bag. His gloved hand reached forward and grabbed a small rock floating by. He plopped it into his bag and started to jet back toward the spaceship.

The hatch on the port side of the ship clicked open. After passing through the opening in the Star Rider's fuselage, Reg looked back to see the hatch lock back into place. As the gravity kicked on, he began to descend until he touched down on the floor. The air pressure was slowly building up and the oxygen was starting to pulsate more freely through the room. Reg took off his helmet and gloves and walked out of the pressure room.

* * *

On the moon, the Star Rider slowly touched down on the landing pad as the giant spiderlike legs absorbed the shock. The front of the hull opened up and a small set of stairs extended to the ground. Reg fought his way through the crowds coming out from the inside of the ship. As he reached the edge of the landing pad, he hopped of the edge onto the soft surface of the moon. A puff of dust shot up from beneath his feet. Reg walked across the ground to a large vehicle, the moonbus. It ran on a single track like a monorail and was completely run by electricity so that the inhabitants did not pollute the moon as they had done to earth so many years before. He began to enter the bus and the last of the crew came down the stairs and filed into the bus. As the doors closed, the bus started to roll forward across the metal track toward the research facility. As the group of buildings came into sight, they were still about five kilometres away, a distance which they could easily cover in about thirty seconds. As they came nearer to the facility, a massive fireball shot up from above the establishment and the whole complex burst into flames. A giant bang sounded louder than a jet engine. Moments later, the shock wave pounded into the bus, flipping it off the rail and sending it across the moon's cold surface. Millions of shards of glass shattered, shooting through the air and impaling the bus and ground. Flaming chunks of the facility were sent careening through the air as another explosion lit up the sky. Another shockwave came, flipping the bus upside-down and denting the roof. Reg jumped to his feet. He ran to the front of the vehicle and barged through the door. He gasped for air, breathing in the nuclear chemicals from the humongous blast. He choked, his lungs couldn't take it any more, and he collapsed to the ground.

He woke up what seemed like moments later with a mask pressed up against face. He inhaled the air in one large breath and just as quickly exhaled. He began to regain his strength and started to stand, his feet barely supporting his weight. He leaned against the

trashed bus and looked over to see the captain and two others holding masks up to their own faces.

The walk to the habitation took hours. They had deposited their masks and oxygen tanks thousand of paces back. The metropolis lay only a few kilometres away. Reg fell to his knees and then fell unconscious.

As Reg left the sanatorium the next day, he felt bruised and battered. Captain Osprey had asked him to join the next mission. Reg had enthusiastically accepted. During the explosion, the colony was hacked into by a gang of thugs. These pirates had set off the explosion as a diversion to distract the authorities. Even as the people were in a panic, the computer blocked the thugs from gaining much. The captain had been asked to hunt down these pirates and capture them. It was rumoured that the pirates would attempt it again, they had to be stopped before this happened.

The Star Rider lifted off at precisely six forty that evening. It passed through the artificial atmosphere that encircled the moon and rocketed through the solar system. The president had received information minutes previous to their departure that the thugs hung out in an old ship warehouse in the galaxy X-29 and the launch was scheduled right away. As the ship came closer to the planet Transletov, a call came to the ship's central bridge. The face of a hideous man appeared on the screen. His nose was crooked and he had a scar running horizontally across his face. He told the captain in a deep grunting voice that we were in a free fire zone and that if they came any closer they would be shot down. The captain decided that they should send the rescue pods down. These pods had been designed to not show up on radar or tracking systems. Reg and the pilot went into the first pod with another astronaut named Roberto Long. As it dispatched from the hull of the Star Rider and descended to the planet below, a massive blue streak shot up and slammed into the mother ship. The Star Rider began to fall toward the planet and swiftly shot through the atmosphere. Another blue streak shot up again smashing into the ship as it fell. It burst into flames and plummeted thousands of feet to the surface where it exploded into a million fragments of flaming metal. All the pods had made it out of the ship safely but the same could not be said for the people left inside the flaming ship. Only a few escape pods had managed to get away

More blue streaks shot up and they just barely swerved to the side, dodging the oncoming ammunition. Reg wondered how they had been seen and then remembered that the pirates had managed to get some information from the moon's database. More missiles came shooting up and narrowly missed the pods. As they came closer to the planet, a pod behind them was destroyed by a missile. They rocketed down toward the planet's surface dodging the missiles all the while. They pulled up and came to a stop hovering hundreds of feet above the ground. They yanked open the hatch and dove out the side of the pod. As they rapidly sped toward the ground their jumpsuits flapped in the wind. One at a time, they pulled their chutes and slowed their descent to a lot slower pace. On impact, they dropped their chutes and got prepared for the challenge ahead. They loaded their ammunition into their weapons. They made their way toward the warehouse and surrounded the building. They burst through the windows and barged

through the doors, but the pirates were ready. They jumped up and fired at the astronauts. Reg ran at the pirates and was hit from behind by the magazine of a pirate's gun.

He woke up dazed in a room. He was crowded in with the other astronauts without anything other than his jumpsuit. It was pitch black and Reg could not see anything. As his eyes adjusted to the light, he noticed that the room was completely empty other than the astronauts and himself. He reached into his pocket and felt around. Nothing. He checked his other pocket. There was a small cylindrical object. He pulled it out to find his detonator. This was no help at all because he needed his bombs for this to work. He had a faint memory of after he had been hit. The pirates took his weapons and one of them named Perry had taken his bombs. The pirate had not disassembled them, so that meant that they were still active. If he could get Perry to the door, he could blast it and destroy the door. The other pirates would come though, so they would have to escape as efficiently as possible. Reg started yelling, and someone came to the door. Luck was with Reg as Perry opened the door. Reg pressed the button and Perry exploded, sending the door flying off its hinges. Reg and the astronauts ran out of the room only to just as quickly be shot by the remaining pirates. The slugs they had been hit with entered into their skin and released a highly potent poison that knocked them unconscious in seconds. Reg heard the leader, Eriksson, laugh before he closed his eyes.

They woke up on a ship. Reg looked out the window and saw stars pass by. The pirates were sitting meters away armed with guns and ready to fire if need be. Eriksson told everyone that they were going to launch the meddlesome astronauts into a black hole. Reg knew that there was a black hole a galaxy away from Transletov. That was the closest and most likely one. The ship started to slow down with its retro thrusters. They had reached their destination. Eriksson grabbed Reginald's collar and threw him to the ground. He told Reg that he better not try anything and made his hand into a gun shape and pointed it at his head, showing him what would do if he did. He told the astronauts to follow him to the pods where they would launch them into the black hole. Reg tried to think of something to do to save himself and the crew from certain death. As he walked by the controls on his way to the space pods, he lunged for the engine adjust and pulled the lever all the way back. A pirate noticed Reg at the last moment but it was already too late. The thrusters adjusted their tilt too quickly and the engines went offline one by one. The ship lurched forward and everyone went into a panic. The pirates started yelling out and Eriksson called out to Reg that he was done. The pirates ran to the port escape ships and hopped in. The black hole was on the starboard side. Before the ships had launched out of the hull, Reg spun the ship around and watched the streak of the escape ship shoot into nothingness. The pirates had just plummeted into a black hole at the speed of light. The ship started to be pulled backward toward the black hole. The astronauts rushed for the leftover escape ships. There was no chance of getting the engines back online in time. There were two starboard ships left that were both filled to the limit with the crew. They launched out of the ship and sped toward the nearest colony outpost back on planet Transletov.

On the moon, Reg was awarded a medal and proclaimed a hero. Captain Osprey was given a new ship and Reginald was first mate. They were needed to transport items

to Voltarr, a planet six light years away, an eight month trip there and back. Reg later became captain of his own ship, the Prey Bird and worked for a research company where he discovered a new substance that could be used to make a metal alloy stronger than anything before.

MY TELESCOPE

By Kaila Tims: Grade 7

I sat down on the dark green park bench. The third plank creaked gently under my weight. Paint had chipped off the bench and my hands rested patiently on my lap, not the gum covered armrests. So, I sat there and watched the world around me. It would have appeared to any passerby that a girl sat down on a park bench and did nothing for an hour or so. I sat down like those elderly people do on their driveways and watched what was going on.

It was a warm, summer evening and the park and streets were bustling with people. The green of the park looked out of place beside the neon signs and streetlights. I heard cars honking, a revving sound in the distance, and the sound of footsteps along the crosswalk. The park fountain bubbled with constant eagerness, and the cicada's last song echoed through the night. The robins calmly chirped, their silhouettes in the trees against the sky, and there were plopping sounds in the water, which was frogs escaping the 6 year old boys who had run down to the pond to skip stones.

I was a regular at this park, but the one thing that everyone was sure about me; I was different. Not everyone can digest the fact that a 7th grader can actually contemplate life and existence and observe the world through the best telescope, the park bench. An elderly couple slowly hobbled along the park trail, a man with his spaniel Bandit, also walked the park grounds. Of course, there was the exasperated mother of the six year old boys. Only a few people appreciated the park's natural beauty.

Now, the three 6 year old boys were arguing. One had his arms out in question, while the third boy backed up and ran straight into the first one, screaming loudly. Then it was a ball of boys kicking and yelling. The second boy snuck out of the ball of fury and decided to go down towards the pond. The boy looked at the water and slowly his face lit up. He slyly cupped his hands, and with a look of pure evil, he started flinging water at his brothers, who looked so dumbfounded they stood up, looked around, and when they saw their brother by the pond they did what all little boys do.

“CHAAARGE!!” the first one screamed and together the two ran toward the single brother, who realized he was doomed. Two minutes later, three guilty looking boys were dragged out of the pond by their mother. They were soaking wet, but seemed to enjoy the session by the water. Smiling, with pleased expressions pasted on their faces, they didn't seem too worried about the consequences. The mom's face was not calm.

“We'll talk about this when we get home,” the mother said. Anger and annoyance dripped out in the tone of her voice. She bit her lip as hard as she could, trying not to blow a gasket at her boys. One boy motioned to the others, grinned, and gave them two thumbs up.

I went into the forest. It was much cooler now and I swatted at the spare mosquitoes. All the dark, shadowed trees and bushes seemed to surround me. They looked like people. A creeping thought made me shiver, what if someone ... was here... watching me? I walked faster. Don't think those thoughts; nobody would be here, you are in the middle of a park, not New York at night I told myself. Soon, I came to the clearing. The trees were cut just so I could see a square of the sky, the moon sat in the middle, the dead, exact middle. There was a rustling of leaves behind me. A coyote's howl echoed from distant farm fields. I turned, feeling my heart pulsing, but I could see nothing. Then, I heard it, felt it. My intuition poked and prodded at me. I have to leave. Turning quickly, I burst into a run. There were footsteps behind me. My adrenaline kicked in and I sprinted. I slowed down momentarily, it was quiet. Then, a piercing scream filled the air. Footsteps again. I ran along the road and turned onto my street. My street was one of those circles and I always thought it was neat, until now. Another man in black came from the left side of the circle, the other was behind me. They were so close to me. I wanted to just sit there and give in, but I couldn't. The street lights shone on the man's face showing a quick glimpse of his appearance. In his hand he held a knife. I shuddered. He held it up and brought it into my hand. The searing pain seemed unbearable. Screaming, I pulled away so the knife didn't cut all the way through. Trying to make room to escape I lunged at one of the guys then dashed off.

Something glittered on the pavement. The moon's reflection caught me by surprise. I remembered the park trail to my left. I faked to the right and ran. Now, they were close behind me, the size of my footsteps were no match for theirs. But, my youth won out. I started going faster, trying to ignore my stinging hand. Blood was gushing. There were no dead ends for them to trap me in. I felt energy run through my veins once again.

Running through the trail, my feet were pounding too loudly. Hearing voices behind me I stopped at a big tree and scrambled behind it. Please don't find me, please don't find me, I trembled silently. The two men passed me and ran into the park. I waited a few minutes and bolted off back the way I had come. I collapsed in my parent's arms and told them what happened while my father called the police.

Waking up to my alarm I rolled over onto my hand and bitterly remembered it was hurt. Drained from last night, I had slept through the constant stinging. A dream popped up in my head. I was in the park, and these bad guys came for me and they chased me everywhere. Something was still puzzling me. Do you know that feeling when you forget something and it bothers you until you remember? That's how I felt. I think there was something about my dream that I was missing, however my brain was still foggy from sleep, so striding into the kitchen, I grabbed some soy milk, cereal and popped a blueberry bagel into the toaster. My bagel popped up and I buttered it. Piling on the ketchup, pepperoni, pickles, cheese and cranberry sauce, I knew this was going to be quite a meal. I grabbed a fork and knife. This type of bagel needed cutlery.

"Oh my, like you're so weird...like. An' how's your hand?" my older sister asked as she dragged her early morning self into the kitchen.

My sister, Macy, was very social. She was pretty and wore expensive clothes. I was the exact opposite.

“It still hurts a lot,” I replied.

Then, BANG! I remembered my dream, except it wasn't a dream. It happened to me last night. Grabbing my breakfast and utensils, I raced to the park. The whole trail was dotted with drips of blood.

What I saw made me drop my mouth open. The garbage cans were spilled, trees were down, and everything was a mess. Some park benches were broken. Some police were gathered and were talking to a man. The man that tried to get me. Why wasn't he in handcuffs? He was the bad guy. My dad called the police, didn't he? My eyes darted to the pavement that was splattered with blood. A knife that was covered in dry blood was in the Chief's hands.

“Tell me exactly what happened.” the Chief demanded.

“She... she, that girl... she tried to attack me,” the man innocently moaned. His eyeballs darted around, looking for something.

All eyes rested on me. The Chief noticed my breakfast and the knife covered in ketchup. The man showed his leg which was brutally cut as well. The gash looked deep and trailed down his whole shin.

“I didn't do it!” I yelled.

“He cut himself on purpose, so he could frame me. He's acting! He's not the only one either. He had a partner help chase me. He was the one who cut me! Please officer,” I glanced at his name tag, “Please Officer Pete, you... you have to believe me!”

“I'm sorry kid,” he said as he connected the handcuffs on my wrists. The man just stood there. Were they going to let him get away? Luckily, they put handcuffs on him too. I knew the police believed him, we both knew it. He had a smug look on his face.

As we drove away I looked out the police car's window back at my calm, bird singing park, and tried to remember what a great place it was, and how it had changed. I tried to remember what I did to make those two men choose me as their target. Then, a thought struck me.

One man was still out there.

A Musically Discovered Murder

By Hailey Toole: Grade 7-8

I don't care. I don't care about those girls at school with their boyfriends. I wish I could have a boyfriend. No, I don't care that I don't have a boyfriend. I don't care about the parties I never get invited to. I don't care about my school grades. I don't care that my dad said he was just going out and never came back last week. I don't care that my mom has been a drunken mess ever since. Well, actually I do care about that. And I don't care about the fact that my older sister has a new boyfriend every month. I just don't care.

But I do care about my music. My iPod is my life. It drowns out the loud yelling between my mom and my sister. And it fills in the silence when it's quiet.

A car honked at me when I crossed the road. I stick up my middle finger and the guy yells at me. I can't hear him because my music is so loud. The car goes to drive past but stops beside me. My sister is in the passenger seat and her new boyfriend is driving. I take my headphones out of my ears and get ready for the yelling that's coming.

"You're so totally not normal. You're walking all by yourself and it's raining." Cherry says. Everyone calls her Cherry, but her real name is Cheryl.

I look into the sky. Rain drops fall onto my face. Pull my hood up and shrug. I might get a cold, but that's nothing big.

"I swear, sometimes it's like I'm your mother, Sara."

"Why don't you just stop acting like my mother then? Mom can take care of me herself if she wants to." I say.

"Mom isn't exactly okay these days. Now get in the car." I shake my head. "Get in the car now."

"I'm walking home." I insist.

"You missed the bus, so now you're just going to walk all the way home?" I nod. "But it takes 30 minutes!"

"It's a lot of exercise."

I turn away from her and start walking down the sidewalk. I return my earphones to their rightful place, in my ears. I turn it on high. I continue my long list of things that I don't care about.

I kick a rock and see where it goes. The rock skips down the empty road and into the dark forest that's up ahead. I follow it and go into the forest. It's really dark in

here. I walk slowly and use my iPod for a small light. There's nothing to be afraid of... there's nothing to be afraid of... there's nothing to be afraid of... I kept repeating to myself.

I felt a tap on my shoulder. I spin around quickly and nothing is there. I slowly walk backwards. Something tapped my shoulder again. I spin around quickly, but this time in a 360 degree angle. I trip on something by my feet. My headphones fall out of my ears and I can just hear the song distantly... it probably has one of the creepiest beginnings especially for the setting. It's called Walking on Air by Kerli Koiv.

I look by my feet to see what tripped me, but I can't see a thing. I grab my iPod for the light and shine it on the thing. I scream as loud as I can until I couldn't scream anymore. By my feet was a person. But not just any person. It's my father. I can't tell if it's him or his body. I feel for a pulse. I feel a very faint pulse.

"Dad! Daddy! Wake up! Don't die!" I yell.

Nothing happens. He doesn't even flinch. I run back to the road and in front of a truck that's coming. It stops quickly and the guy that's driving yells at me. He looks to be in his... late teens.

"Help me! Help!" I yell.

The driver sticks his head out the window. "What's wrong kid?"

"My father, he's hurt! I was walking through the forest and tripped and just found him laying there. He hardly has a pulse! I need help!"

The driver grabs something from his truck. It's a cell phone. He dials something then says... something. Then he runs to me.

"Are you alright?" he brings me to his truck and makes me sit in the passenger seat.

"No, I need to be with my dad. He's dying! He's been gone for a while. I need to be with him!" I try to get out of the truck, but the guy is stronger than me and holds me still.

"I called 911. They're sending the police and an ambulance."

"I still need to be with him! I need to make sure nothing else happens to him. Let me go!"

"I can't. They told me to make you stay here."

“If your father was minutes away from dying would you want to leave him all alone in the middle of a forest with wild animals? Or would you want to be there beside him waiting for the ambulance to come?” I ask softly.

The guy loosened his grip on me and a wave of sadness washed over him. “My father died a few years back. He died in my arms. It was too painful to bear. You wouldn’t be able to handle it if I could hardly do it.”

“I’m stronger than you think.”

I push the guy off and run as fast as I can to the forest. I can see my iPod’s light so my father must be there. I run to the light. I kneel down beside my dad. I’m not alone. There’s a quiet rustling in the bushes in front of me. It starts to get closer... just feet away. The sirens start coming and the rustling sound starts retreating. Running feet come up behind me.

“Excuse us miss.”

A paramedic pushes me away from my dad’s body. They check his pulse quickly then put him on a stretcher. They rush him out of the forest to the ambulance. Two of them start to do something with him in the back of the ambulance and the other one gets in the driver’s side and starts driving away.

The guy grabs my arm and pulls me to his truck. He buckles me into the passenger seat and we head to the hospital. We’re very quiet the whole drive there. The guy would give me side glances. I’d catch him every time and he’d look back at the road right away. When we got to the hospital he drops me off at the front door. And it was a complete shock to me when he walked in the doors and sat down beside me after he parked the car. Why did he park the car?

“I never got your name.” He says quietly.

“Why do you want to know my name in the first place?” I ask nastily.

“I think I have a right to know the name of someone who jumps out in front my car yelling and screaming that they need help. Then I had to give this strange person a ride to the hospital to wait to see if her dad is okay. I think I have the right to know this pretty girl’s name.”

I look at the guy. I look straight into his eyes and notice just how beautiful they are. And he himself is pretty hot too. He’s tall and muscular. He has black hair and smoky eyes. His skin is so pale that he’s almost as white as a sheet.

“Me? Pretty?”

“One of the prettiest I’ve ever seen.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me. I’m so plain; I hardly count as normal looking.”

The guy looked shocked. “Plain? Your hair looks so soft and smooth and it’s so dark. And your eyes... they’re like a beautiful blue waterfall. Your skin...” He runs a hand up the back of my neck.

I quickly scoot to the next seat. The guy’s hand was still in the place where my neck used to be. It curled into a fist. He sighed.

“Can you tell me your name? Please.”

“Sara. My name is Sara.”

He starts singing. “Sara, why do you have to be so unfaire? What will it take to have the honour of a date? Tell me, Saraaaa!” I put my hand over his mouth before he can continue the made up song.

“Would you be quiet?! People are looking over here.”

He moves my hand away. “So what do you say?”

“No.” The guy sucks in air to start singing again. I cover his mouth again. “Will it make you shut up if I say yes?” he nods. “Then fine.”

He moves my hand again. “Great.”

“I never got your name.” I mimicked him.

“My name is Sara. I’m kidding. My name is Trever.” He smiles at me. “Do you go to my school? You look familiar.”

“Yeah. And I’m in two of your classes, but you never seemed to have noticed. You’re the star quarterback. That’s kinda why I thought it was weird that you thought that I am pretty.”

“You’re in my history and science class. See I noticed.”

“But you’ve never said anything ever.”

A doctor came up to me. “Excuse me. Are you the daughter of...” she looked at a clipboard. “Ronald McDonagin?” I nod. “I’m so sorry, but he has just passed away. He has been lying there for hour’s maybe even days. He had multiple broken bones and he lost most of his blood. We’re guessing it wasn’t an accident because he had scraps on his back, most likely from being dragged. Again, I am very sorry for your lose.”

“Wasn’t an accident? You mean it was...”

“We think he was murdered.”

I gasp. The rustling in the bushes... I know for a fact that that wasn’t a little innocent squirrel! Or any animal at all.

“Oh. Trever can we leave please.”

“Uh... sure.” He says unsure if we really should.

I take his hand and we run from the hospital. We get to his truck and he starts driving. I don’t know where we’re driving to; I just know that we’re driving somewhere.

“Are you okay? It’s never easy to hear that a family member has died. Or was murdered. Especially if it was your mom or dad, that when it’s hardest.” Trever says.

“I’ll be fine. Can you bring me back to that forest? I need to grab a few things that I dropped.”

“Yeah, sure.”

We drove to the forest and I jumped out of the truck before it was even stopped. I run through the trees and find my book bag and iPod on the ground. Trever comes running up behind me with a big high powered flashlight.

“Did you get your stuff?”

“Yeah, but I also want to look around.”

“What? I understand that you’re upset that your dad was... you know. But that doesn’t mean that you have to find out who did it.”

“When I was sitting here waiting for the ambulance I heard footsteps in that bush right there.” The bush started to rustle again. “Just like that.”

The rustling got louder. Trever stepped in front of me as if he were trying to protect me from the thing in the bushes. The thing... or person... jumps out of the bush onto Trever. It starts to tear at his clothes. He screams, but not a girlish scream. I jump onto the creature. It backs off of Trever and goes for me. I get a good look at its face. I scream. It’s definitely an it. It’s like a hairy human... like Bigfoot! It bites me and everything goes white. I didn’t think that my death would be like this... I didn’t think that the white light was true...

ADVENTURE IN THE ROCKIES

By Abigail Robinson: Grade 8

CHAPTER ONE: The Accident

We were on the passenger airplane on our way to Calgary, Alberta from Vancouver Island, BC, and then it started to get very bumpy. Captain Fredrick came on the P.A. sounding nervous and concerned, yet professionally calm, "Ladies and dog..." he paused, "...we are having some difficulties with the engine. Please tighten your seatbelts and remain calm." Not now! I thought to myself, we're over the high and sharp Rocky Mountains and so close to seeing dad! All of a sudden there was a loud BANG! Comet barked from being so startled, and then he started whimpering! Never before had I seen the proud, black, Belgian Sheepdog so scared, even as a puppy. My mom bent over to tighten my seatbelt. "Mom, what's happening?", she looked at me, her blue eyes popping from her pale skin and long night black hair, I could tell that she was scared and trying to think of answer for me, "I don't know," she said, "we just have to stay calm and listen to Captain Fredrick on the P.A., okay love?". Unwanted questions started flowing threw my head, what will happen to us? Are we going to survive this? Then the thought of death, my head started spinning, butterflies in my stomach, and the feel of my face going pale. Another bang filled the air, also filling my window with black smoke. After many long seconds the smoke cleared, we seemed to be closer to the ground than I remembered. Closer and closer the ground came to the plane, seeing the different colours of trees and bushes were easier now. More bangs and putts filled the air. My mom and I looked at each other, then I reached over to hug her, "I love so much Anna Chelsea Louise.", she said. I could see the tears build up in her eyes. Mom stroked my short, dirty blonde hair and kissed my forehead. There was a fast series of bumps, and then darkness.

CHAPTER TWO: The Awakening

I woke up to the sound of crackling fire and to the feel of a dog licking my face, "Mom?", I mumbled. I sat up with my eyes squinting from pain and confusion. Comet came over to me and I pet his head to find comfort, but instead I found blood behind his ear. Then I remembered where I was and what had happened. We crashed! Oh my gosh, Mom! I looked to my right where she was sitting, my eyes were open now. "Mom!" she was bleeding, and bad, her pale skin was even paler. I checked her pulse, there was, was, nothing. I checked again, and this time her breathing too. Still nothing. "Oh my gosh! She can't be!", but she was. Then I remembered about Captain Fredrick and his son Clayton who came along on the flight for fun. I took off my seatbelt and went to the captain's area. Again, I checked Captain Fredrick, he was gone too. Clayton, he was a young Burnett boy about the same age as me, thirteen. His chest seemed to be moving; I put my ear to his mouth to hear for breaths, he was breathing! I slowly tried to wake him up, knowing that he might be injured. He awakened, "Huh, where am I?" he looked at me then looked to his left to see his father. "Dad?!", "I'm so sorry Clayton, he's dead, my mom's dead too." his hazel eyes were tearing, so were mine." Clayton, I know that it's hard, "I couldn't keep my voice steady, "but we need to get out of here, I don't like the

smell of the air. Do you feel any pain anywhere, like broken bones or something?", he focused onto me from his father, there were two streams of tears on his cheeks, "No, I feel fine.", he wasn't broken physically, but I could tell his heart was broke for sure. "Can you get up?" my voice was steadier now focusing on the situation, "Ya.", "Okay, lets get out of here. He bent over and unbuckled his seatbelt then opened his door. We both crawled out of the hutch with Comet in the back. I went to the back of the plan to get some luggage to help us survive until we were found. Mom had packed some food in a bag incase we got hungry during the long flight. She also had packed extra coats and sweaters because it was mid winter in Calgary and she knew it would be cold. Clayton and I started walking towards what seemed to be a cave in the mountains. I could see that Clayton had brought some supplies as well. A first aid kit, drinking water, two sleeping bags, matches, and about ten flares. Smart boy! Especially after seeing his father like that, for the last time too. We were making good progress towards the far away cave when the sound of an explosion alarmed us. We looked back. The plane had exploded from gas leakage or something like that; I thought the air had smelt funny back there. But, the bodies of our parents had been lost. Imagining what the plane looked like now, on the inside, made me sick. I pushed the thought out of my mind.

CHAPTER THREE: The Shelter

It took about an hour to get to the cave up on the hill. "This should do for now.", Clayton said. Poor boy, his father was really a part of his life; my mom was a big part of my life too. Dad always went to Calgary for about two or three weeks at a time and then came back to B.C. for a week to be with us, so mom was always there. It was a big cave that we had found on top of a hill. There was a clearing around it too, that was good for when we set the flares. "Are you hungry Clayton?" I said, "I don't mean to be rude, but I'm starving!" I unpacked a granola bar, an apple, and a juice box for both of us. We sat down and enjoyed our snack, and then Comet barked as to say, "Hey! What about me?! Your knight in shiny amour who saved you from exploding with the plane!" I unpacked his dog food and gave him a small portion; there was only so much for him. "He's a beautiful dog Anna," Clayton sounded a bit more relaxed, "...is he a Belgian Sheepdog?", "Yup! He's six years old. We've had him since he was a puppy." I felt a bit more relaxed now too. A little bug crawled by Comet and he pounced on it! Both Clayton and I got a good laugh out of it. As if the little bug would hurt him! Than he ate it, "Ewww!" I said with a chuckle, "At least he knows how to get protein into him!" said Clayton.

CHAPTER FOUR: Fire, Food, Chat, and Sleep

It was getting dark out. I set out with a flashlight and Comet to go and find firewood while Clayton stayed at the cave to set a flare. Clayton was tall, about five foot eight, and very handsome. His hair was dark brown and his eyes were hazel. He was very calm and had a sense of humor. I'm glad that he had survived the crash. I would be very alone without him and Comet too. It would have been great too though if mom and Captain Fredrick had survived too. It would have been great if we hadn't crashed at all! Okay, calm down Anna, the past is the past and you just have to deal with it. Then I found some fire wood and made my way back to 'camp'.

"Where could she be?" she's been gone for a while. I'm sure she's fine; she has Comet with her, and a flashlight. I thought to myself. I decided to set up the sleeping bags. Anna was quite beautiful. Her hair was dirty blonde and her eyes were blue. She was about five foot seven; she was very smart and funny. "She saved me," I said to myself, "If she hadn't checked on me, I would have been dead too. Then there was a shuffle noise, "Hello?", "Hey stranger! Talking to yourself? You sure that you didn't bump your head?" It was just Anna and Comet. "Did you manage to find some fire wood?", "Oh ya, lots of it!", "Great! I set up the sleeping bags while you were gone, there wasn't one for Comet though.", I felt bad for the dog, the cold hard rock wouldn't be comfy for him, "That's okay, I think mom packed his blanky for him anyways." Comet whined in embarrassment, "It's okay Comet! I'm just teasing you!" he wagged his tail.

Wow! That was really nice of Clayton to set up the sleeping bags. He felt bad for Comet too! He is great! "Thanks for setting up the sleeping bags Clayton!" I said with care, "It was nothing. I just thought that you would be tired after this long day, I know I am.", I think that I'm blushing, crap! "Ya well, you read my mind!" yep, I'm blushing! "Do you feel okay? Your face is really red.", "I'm kind of hungry, maybe that's it?! I'll get the fire started and cook something." Whew! Quick recovery. "If you're going to cook, I'll start the fire. Deal? Done." said Clayton. Okay then!

Ya right she's blushing because she's hungry! You usually go pale when that happens! "Are you sure that you don't have a fever Anna?" she looked up at me, her blue eyes shining, "Oh ya! I'm positive!", "Hmm.", I reached over to her and felt her forehead. She was warm, but it was a normal temperature. "You're blushing?" I said to her, "No!", and then she chuckled. "Okay, I give up! I'll leave you alone now."

Yikes! He's too smart to hide a secret from. "The fire looks good to me; do you want me to start cooking?" I said, "Um, ya, if you want to cook then go ahead. We could just have granola again if you aren't feeling good." oh boy. What should I tell him? 'I'm all red because I think you're very attractive.' Ya that's perfect, NOT! Or is it? "Anna, I didn't find anything in the food bag that we can actually cook over the fire.", "Oh, okay then. We can just have an apple and a granola bar again.

After our 'dinner', we wrapped up in our sleeping bags and Comet lied down on his blanket. Clayton and I talked for a while. We talked about our selves and eventually we shared tears about our parents. Then we decided to plan about what we should do. I had grabbed my bag when we left the plane witch had my cell phone in it. I could have

called my dad to tell him what happened and where we were before or even now, but we were too tired to think straight. When we had run out of things to talk about, we all said good- night, "Good-night Comet, good-night Clayton.", I accidently put some flirtation into that, "Good-night Anna.", he stared right in my eyes when he said that, and his eyes, oh my gosh! I've never seen any boy's eyes shine at me like that. Even though we both lost something big in our lives, I think that we both gained another.

CHAPTER FIVE: A Successful Plan

In the morning, Clayton and I couldn't stop talking. So to keep ourselves quiet, we ate more granola and apples. When we were done breakfast, I got out my cell phone and called my dad. It was so painful for me and him. His soul mate was lost and his daughter was stranded in the Rocky Mountains. Dad said he'd get an emergency helicopter there as soon as he could. I told him to tell the pilot that there would be a flare light and to give them my cell phone number so that they knew it would be us. He said I love you and that he couldn't wait to see me.

I told Clayton everything that my dad had said. "Clayton, where does your mom live?" I said, "She actually lives in Calgary as well! You and your mom got the flight because my dad and I were headed that way.", This was perfect! We'd be able to see each other whenever we wanted! "Does your mom live just outside of the city?", "Ya, she does!", "I guess we could call this a solid friendship then!", "Ya! I guess so!" We both laughed, and then Clayton hugged me! It was one of the warmest, most comforting hugs I had ever had.

I had to do that, Anna was my best friend now. We survived a big plane crash and managed to get through twenty four hours on granola bars and apples! "I guess I should set the flare now.", I think I know why Anna was blushing last night, it was my turn now "Ya! Unless we're going to spend another night out with the wolves!", she's so funny! I love it! "I'll set the flare!" I laughed.

A little while after Clayton set the flare, my cell phone rang, "Hello? This is the Calgary emergency helicopter, we have indicated your flare. We're coming down to get you." "Oh my gosh! Clayton we're saved!" now, it was my turn to hug him. I was so happy and sad and, whatever else, that I started crying! I let go of Clayton and he looked at me with a smile, "Don't get teary Anna!" he wiped off a tear that fell out of my eye. The helicopter landed at the bottom of the hill and men scurried out of it. Then my first kiss.

THE END

FIRSTS AND LASTS

By Griffin Toplitsky: Grade 10

Where does it begin? Does it begin at the start of time, or merely the start of the planet? Does it start with the first competition between man? The first sibling rivalry? Does it start at Eric Lake's birth in 1994? Or does it start with his sister's Mia's, 4 years later, in 1998?

Or does it begin in a local, grimy, totally non-descript Chinese food restaurant, located in an average, normal looking local plaza?

Eric sat down with his plate of lemon chicken and chicken balls. Lemon chicken and chicken balls were (besides dessert) all he would be having at that restaurant. The restaurant didn't have much selection. If it was somewhere like, the Mandarin, he would probably get...well, lemon chicken and chicken balls.

Mia sat down too, with a larger variety than her older brother's. The main part was the shrimp. She liked the shrimp.

Their mother sat down last, and the three began eating in silence. Their dad was out that night. They continued eating until their mother asked the simple question.

"Either of you given any thought if you're doing the story contest this year?"

The day was June 17th. The contest was usually held in September-October. It had been running for 5 years. Out of those 5 years, Eric had entered it 4 times. Out of those 4 times, Eric had won 2 times. With stories he usually wrote in less than a few hours.

Mia had been at every one of her older brother's ceremonies. Until this year, she had not been old enough to enter herself. Just sit back, and watch her brother lay down shadows for her to fill. But she could do it. She knew she could. But she wasn't old enough. Not until this year.

"Yeah, I'm definitely doing it, I've even thought of some ideas," said Mia.

"Meh, maybe, I don't know," shrugged Eric.

The answers summed up the way each of them lived, pretty much. Mia had plans. She wasn't organized, but she had plans, and she knew what she wanted to do. Eric knew what he wanted to do. Sort of. Sometimes. But he rarely put anything into action.

"I think you should Eric," said his mom.

“Yeah, I’m thinking I will, but this is going to be my last year,” said Eric. Eric was 15, and while he was still allowed to enter, most of the kids were younger. And he also knew there was age compensation. The best story did not necessarily win. Eric’s first win had come in 2005. His story was not that great, supposed to be funny but came up short, with several errors and mistakes. Something older relatives would call “cute”. There was a story entered that year by a Grade 12. One Eric would read over and over. It was interesting, entertaining, and thought provoking. But at the time, Eric was in Grade 6, and the story was from some guy in Grade 12. The best story did not win. This was going to be Eric’s last year.

It was going to be Mia’s first year. And she was excited. Excited to win, yes. But the fact she would have the chance to win against her brother, made her the more eager. Never before, had she had the chance to prove herself against the person who had set the bar high for her. And she had already broken many of the bars. But to beat him. That had not happened before, there was never a chance. Until now.

“You should get thinking about ideas,” Eric’s mom said to him.

“Yeah, later,” said Eric. Eric had certain cockiness. He had always written his stories within a week of the deadline. One time he didn’t get the story finished until the day of. He assumed since he had won before like that, he could just keep doing it. Whatever. But he wanted to beat his sister. She had done many things he had, but younger. She was proving she could do what he could at a younger age. A part of him wanted to enter and try this year, just to beat her. To prove that he was still the older brother, he was the one who set the standards. So he would start thinking of ideas sooner than usual. Just once, for his last year in the contest, he wanted to win. One more time.

“I think I’m going to start tonight,” said Mia.

“It’s June Mia. The contest isn’t until like, September or something,” said Eric.

“Yeah, I know, but I want to get started,” said Mia.

And she did start that night. June 17th.

Sunday, September 27th. One week until the deadline. Mia had gone through 2 stories, edits and all. But hers was finished. Not submitted, but finished.

Eric was sitting at his computer, staring at the blinking line on the top of the blank page on his Microsoft Word program. The little animated paper clip Word assistant blinked at him. “May I be of assistance?” The automated bubble over it asked.

“Yeah,” said Eric “, write me a story.”

Eric wondered where to start. He usually wrote amusing stories, about idiots. To entertain, amuse. He had no idea what he was going to do here. Eric wondered where to start.

And then Eric wondered about his life. Why was he doing this? This story. He was 15. Most of the other kids were younger. He wouldn't get any respect from people his age. A local author would read his story. Big whoop. The author would say good story, nice to meet you, bye. Why try? 100 bucks for first prize. That was nice, yes. But would this really help him in the long run?

"What can you do?" asks the future job interviewer.

"I once won a story contest," says Eric.

Yeah, not a big help. Eric wanted to do screenwriting when he was older. Maybe a director too. Novelist? Perhaps. But a small story contest at the local library probably would not help that. But Eric continued to think of ideas for a story anyways. He knew why he was doing the contest again. Not for the money (although, that's what he would tell everyone else), but to win against Mia. To be able to say, that in a fair competition, he beat his sister. No matter what she accomplished that he did at an earlier age, Eric still beat her. Fair and square. Sure, someone else other than him or his sister would probably win. It was Eric being egotistical to assume it wouldn't. But it seemed like it had to be. Seemed like a movie. His last chance to win. Ever. He wanted to go out with a bang. His sister's only chance to beat him (but Eric was so sure that she wouldn't, and he wanted to beat her badly).

But Eric couldn't think of any ideas. None. Out of all the amusing little stories about idiots saying dumb things he had written in the past, he couldn't think of one to write this year. So what could he write?

Eric stared at the blank Word page on his computer some more. And then he started writing. Not about some unrealistic situation that gave characters a chance to say stupid things, but about him. About now. About what he was doing. Why he was writing. And he finished, printed off the story, no editing, and handed it to his mother. She said that maybe he shouldn't have done that, that it was a bad idea, that maybe he should just go back to doing his usual stories. Eric, who usually listened to his mother's suggestions, didn't. He submitted the story, as it was. The story was a little shorter than most of his other ones. He didn't care.

And Mia had submitted her story too. And then they waited.

A few weeks later, the phone rang. It was the library. Eric and Mia were invited to the ceremonies. This could mean they won. Or not. But they were both anxious.

They got seats right beside each other. Mia and Eric. Their parents sat back a little ways. Eric was calm, cool, and seemed fairly uncaring. Mia was anxious. She knew that this could be her chance to beat, and maybe to even impress, her brother. Eric also wanted to impress his sibling. Show her he could still do it. Eric wanted to win, and Mia wanted to win. They both wanted it more than anything.

And the host thanked everyone for coming, thanked the volunteers and such, and began handing out the awards. Eric then seriously considered the possibility that neither of them might not get anything at all. The other writers were all talented, they all had great stories. And it seemed like that was the case. But Eric wanted to win. Eric, more than anything, hoped he won. He looked around the room. No one else his age. And most of the writers were girls. Eric thought this was weird. But he realized no matter what happened, he would not be here again for himself. Maybe for Mia, but not for himself. This was his last year. This was it for him. All or nothing. And he really hoped he won. His eyes, after looking around at all the old, battered books stacked in their shelves neatly around the room, rested on Mia. Mia was staring at the front. Staring at the man handing out the awards. She had started fidgety, but was now as stiff as a log. Staring unblinkingly at the man. She wanted to beat her brother. Just prove, after all the time of being in the shadow, to beat her brother. And Eric looked at her staring at the man. She didn't move. And Eric thought about this. About her hope, and what she wanted. And Eric really hoped she won.

TALENT

By Marnie Galea: Grade 12

Is talent so much to ask for? One wouldn't think so. And yet, here I've sat endlessly, enduring one maudlin, insipid actor after another, none adequate for a play of this caliber.

Of course, I may be biased as I am the author of this glorious play- but I'm sure you would agree it's among the finest ever penned. It is yet to be titled, but that of course is of little importance. After all, if Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, perhaps the greatest tragedy in history, had not been titled so, would it have changed the quality of the content? Would it simply have been buried away in history, little known? This is doubtful, my friend!

How to describe my play! Well, the word "magnificent" comes to mind. Also, "resplendent" and "stellar." I suppose you must think me a pompous man. However, when you have written a play sure to cement your name among the greatest literary stars of the century, I think you are allowed to boast a bit, don't you agree?

The easy part was composing this stunning success. After all, I am a natural talent. Writing is akin to breathing for people like me.

Organizing people and events and finances, on the other hand, do not interest me. I simply try to ignore these things, but sometimes they are inescapable. When I met Carla McHenry, a woman with resources, who utterly adored my play, and agreed to finance it as long as she could direct, I suppose I was so overcome with my premonitions of fame and international success, that I overlooked one significant detail: Carla is absolutely useless.

I don't mean to be cruel. I swear I don't, but as an artist, I must always be true to my soul. Carla is bungling, inexperienced, and amateurish. Now, don't think me a parasite, but without Carla's money, my play won't be given the attention it deserves. I see my manipulation of Carla as more of a sacrifice than anything else. I forfeit a bit of my dignity so that the whole world may see my play. I am somewhat like Jesus in this regard.

As a result of Carla's incompetence, I am forced to oversee every aspect of the play to ensure its success. It is wearisome, going back over her steps without her finding out, but I am crafty and quick-witted; I doubt she suspects my lack of confidence in her. For instance, her attempt at directions for the costume department. She instructed them to create fuchsia headdresses for the wandering Egyptian travelers, when I clearly told her magenta. I mean, is this woman simple?! I nearly lost my composure at that point, but of course I am a sophisticated man and will not let my temper get the best of me, least of all for that asinine woman.

At any rate, I am now casting the lead roles in my play with my faithful Carla. I groan inwardly as I see the next audition walk through the door. It is Jane Egan. Whatever rage and desperation I feel when Carla is speaking to me with her shrill, whiny voice that I have come to despise over time, is trivial compared to the passion with which I detest Jane Egan.

She is the mayor's daughter who fancies herself a wonderful artist in her field. I would laugh at her if I were not so outraged at her audacity. She thinks she is good enough to be in my play. She has the nerve to bring her mediocre face coupled with her sub par acting ability in my theatre?! I could almost just strangle the woman.

Of course, I have never seen a play with her in it. I just know they'll all be horrendous and I refuse to submit myself to such torture. It's that unfailing intuition I mentioned earlier.

I suppose you are wondering why I don't just refuse to see her audition and banish her from my theatre. The answer is simple and grim: Carla loves Jane. To be more exact, Carla loves Jane's family. Carla has money, of course, but money cannot buy status like being the mayor's friend can. Carla longs to have influence. Thus, she inserts herself into the lives of people who already have influence. It is not surprising then that she sought me out to become attached to my play.

Carla has been raving about Jane for the months we have been planning and I have kept biting my tongue in fear of Carla withdrawing her financial support. Unfortunately, I have found myself somewhat "in Carla's back pocket." I must at least see the audition and then try to talk sense into Carla. Ha! This is not a painless task, my friend. Have pity on me!

Jane stares down at me from the stage. I have that feeling when someone is trying to catch your attention by looking at you. I refuse to make eye contact with this ridiculous woman. Let her babble on for a few excruciating moments and then simply be gone from my vision.

"Oh, Jane! How lovely you've stopped by!"

Oh, how Carla nauseates me. She shall kill me one day with that voice.

"Thank you, Carla," replied Jane in a rather gracious tone. If she can pretend to not want to murder Carla, perhaps she is a better actress than I had predicted.

"Today I will be reciting from Rebecca."

Rebecca is a wonderful novel, to be sure. I am sincerely dreading its impending slaughter.

She inhales deeply and begins:

“Last night, I dreamt I went to Manderley again. It seemed to me I stood by the iron gate leading to the drive, and for a while I could not enter for the way was barred to me. Then, like all dreamers, I was possessed of a sudden, the supernatural powers and passed like a spirit through the barrier before me.”

I suppose I may have underestimated her. She’s not entirely horrid to listen to.

She continues:

“The drive wound away in front of me, twisting and turning as it had always done. But as I advanced, I was aware that a change had come upon it.”

Carla is grinning like an idiot, which makes me want to hate Jane if only to spite Carla. However, I find myself unable to hate Jane.

“Nature had come into her own again, and little by little had encroached upon the drive with long tenacious fingers, on and on while the poor thread that had once been our drive. And finally, there was Manderley.”

She is exactly what I am looking for in a female lead. I stand wholly corrected. I find myself incapable of remembering why I hated her so to begin with.

I glance over at Carla who is whispering to one of the stagehands as Jane is speaking. I try to focus on Jane, but Carla’s animated whispers slither into my consciousness. How can she chat casually through such a beautiful reading?! She is infuriating, I tell you, infuriating!

“Manderley, secretive and silent. Time could not mar the perfect symmetry of those walls. Moonlight can play odd tricks upon the fancy, and suddenly it seemed to me that light came from the windows.”

Carla giggles aloud and I simply can’t tolerate her any longer and I grab my paperweight off the table and throw it at her head with as much force as I can muster.

I am aware of Carla slumped over in her chair, motionless, and the audible gasps of the others filling the theatre as I say to Jane, who since stopped reciting:

“Continue, please.”

UNDEAD

By Madeline Smith: Grade 9

A gentle smirk crossed a woman's face, her silhouette outlined against the headstones of her town's cemetery. She abruptly ceased her quiet hum, the chant left hanging in the crisp night air. She seemed to be content with her results, and began to turn and leave. They would rise. Soon.

~*~

He awoke that morning, an uncomfortable chill enveloping his body. He started, still shivering, as his name was called.

“Charles! Breakfast!”

Charles wearily rose from his bed, frowning. He had slept fully clothed in a depressing black suit and bowtie upon his neatly made bed. As he headed down a groaning set of stairs for what smelled like eggs, he vaguely wondered what he had gotten dressed up for the day before, as he could not seem to recollect.

“There you are Charles, your eggs are ready.”

Charles' mother, Louise, set a plate of warm scrambled eggs on the deteriorating wooden kitchen table. Louise didn't seem to be very lively that morning, her face ashen, and her cheeks a feverish red. She was dressed nicely nonetheless, though her faded, off-white gown was not exactly her day-to-day attire. Even her usually thick and lavish dark hair was limp; the graying hairs showing she was older than her young son lead others to believe.

“Shouldn't you and dad be leaving?” Charles inquired, gulping down some of the lukewarm eggs.

“Yes, we were just about to head over to the town hall for our new job assignments. Mayor Firlance has deemed it necessary that no one leave the town. Someone came around with a slip of paper earlier this morning, telling us that there is a contagious flu in the city not 20 minutes from here, and we cannot risk having it spread to us.” Louise explained, kissing Charles on the head, and slipping on her black pumps. “Your father has already left of course, so I had better go catch up. Have a nice day sweetie!”

Charles gave his mother a departing wave and hastily scraped his leftover eggs in the garbage. They tasted expired.

~*~

“An outbreak of zombie video games and movies has caused us all to wonder, is the Zombie Apocalypse real? Does our own government really have a virus they are willing to set forth onto our enemies in war? If such a thing existed, could it really spread to our allies, and even us? Will it be unstoppable? Find out tonight at 9 on your local news channel. Now, back to your regular programming.” A woman blinked into momentary blackness on a television screen in the city of Madetropole. The screen shifted to that of a man shuffling a thin pile of papers on the desk in front of him.

“Welcome to M News. We have a recent bulletin that the town about an hours’ drive from our own city has seen some activity. All of you adults out there will surely remember the town I’m talking about; Midvale. For anyone watching who can’t remember, here’s a quick refresher: Midvale was deserted when a mysterious sickness all but wiped out the entire population. Since then, no one has really gone back there in case the ailment is still lingering in the air. Now, back to the activity that was found in the town.” The reporter quickly flipped his page over. “So, there have been sightings of people there, but they all seem to be injured in one way or another, and a few have reported to be very ill in physical appearance. Unfortunately, no help can be brought to these people as no confirmation has been made. As of now, that is all the information we have, but updates will be reported again at 10 later this morning. Now over to Larry for the weather.”

~*~

Charles turned on the dull metal tap on the sink labeled with a blue C. The water ran a rusty brown for a few moments before becoming clear, as though the water pipes needed to run out the old water before the newer, cleaner water could go through.

After rinsing his dish, he sat down on the plush couch in the carpeted part of the kitchen, doubling as a sitting room. Flicking on the TV he realized he could not seem to find any of his favourite television shows. He couldn’t even find his regular Saturday morning cartoon, the Bugs Bunny Show. Frustrated and bored, Charles switched off the TV and decided maybe to find a neighbor to hang around with. Perhaps Jimmy Scott across the street?

Jimmy was a regular at Charles’ house, street, and school. That kid was everywhere, and so Charles was surprised when Mr. and Mrs. Scott told him they didn’t know where he was. Though an energetic and sometimes annoying neighbor, Jimmy was anything but irresponsible.

Exhaling, Charles satisfied himself with sitting on his own front steps, head in hand, feeling sorry for himself. Where was Jimmy?

Looking out across town, Charles’ dim blue eyes landed on the town cemetery, the bright morning sun reflecting off the plaque over the arched entrance. Standing up, Charles resolved to visit his grandparents that morning. His parents would be happy with him if

they knew he was paying his respects again; they were always talking about how they should go and bring flowers as a family.

~*~

“This just in! We have had numerous phone calls about the goings on in Midvale, and quite a few of them have one thing in common: all sightings have been of groups of adults moving heavy oil rigs, others inserting them into the ground, and the last few busy setting up the machines. One caller commented, quote, that the workers seemed ‘un-trained and physically not up to the task of drilling for oil.’

~*~

Charles smiled sadly as he looked down upon the grave marked Louise Taylor, his grandmother. He had just finished picking flowers for his grandfather, and now placed the last few on Louise’s grave. She had been a beloved family member; even Charles’ mother had been named after her. As he slowly began to turn away from the grave, Charles chuckled softly; his black clothing and fancy shoes made him feel as though he was dressed for a funeral. Looking a bit more amused, Charles started to leave the graveyard. If he had more closely examined the headstone on which he had placed purple lilacs, he would have realized that since his mother married his father, Joe Taylor, Taylor would also be his mother’s last name, not his grandmother’s. His grandmother’s last name was Barns. Why didn’t the headstone read Louise Barns?

The grave was his mother’s.

Leaving the burial area, Charles couldn’t help but notice a faint noise. It was a trio of footsteps, each one uneven and off balance. As he casually pivoted on the spot to find the source of the noise, Charles heard himself gasp in bewilderment; at the other end of the graveyard, three figures entered Charles’ line of vision. The first was a man, his dark hair greasy and disheveled. There was a faint hint of green to his face, and his eyes were unfocused. He was limping badly, supported by one of the others, a woman. The woman was in no better shape, blood dripping from her lips, her own gait slow and shaky.

The last man walked steadily, his pace slow but sure. He followed closely behind his two companions, the sun glinting off of his glassy eyes. When the man caught sight of Charles, both of them seemed to draw in a sharp breath, each one pausing in shock.

Charles found himself stumbling backwards, calling for his parents, his friends. One person who had been returning home stopped when he heard Charles yelling for help.

“What is it?” called the man.

Charles turned as the man answered his plea, “Look! Over there! Do you see them? Who are they? What are they?”

The man was taken aback when he followed Charles' line of sight, staring in disbelief at the three strangers.

"I will get help!" The man darted off, back to the town's park where he had come from. Moments later, a small assembly of people had joined him, including Charles' parents, and the mayor.

"Stay away from them!" Mayor Firlance called out, rushing to the front of the group. "They are unsafe! Do not go near them!"

The citizens obeyed their mayor's orders, keeping their distance from the three foreigners, but the latter continued moving closer, oblivious to the fuss they were causing.

The townspeople looked towards the mayor for further instruction, each one wondering why they should be afraid, and what they should be doing. In response, the Mayor moved forward, steps away from the wanderers.

"Be gone! Leave us in peace!" cried the Mayor.

The trio of battered visitors made no answer for a brief second, but then the lone man behind the first two answered back.

"We mean no harm. We come to you for help!" he called, his voice clear.

"Stay away!" The mayor enforced, "They have the sickness! Do not touch them!"

Like servants, the townspeople complied, firmly planted where they stood.

"Sickness? What sickness? We were in an accident days ago! Being an hour away, this is the closest town that we could get to! We-" the stranger abruptly stopped talking, his eyes suddenly wide. He gaped at the group of citizens before him, clearly not quite believing his eyes.

"Undead." The word was whispered, but was heard clearly by all.

Mayor Firlance glared at the man, her hands clenching. "You are the only undead ones here my friend. Now leave my town immediately."

~*~

"We are coming to you live, finally coming into contact with the town of Midvale. We are right here, moving up the road to the town, where voices are clearly heard. What are we going to find? A mess of kids playing pretend? Or something completely unexpected? Stay with us." The reporter gestured for his camera man to follow him, hurriedly jumping out of their news van, and dashing over the overgrown road into Midvale. The

microphone that was held in his hand soon hit the ground as the cemetery in Midvale came into view.

~*~

An hour long drive? Didn't the mayor say the city that had the flu was less than 20 minutes away? Charles frowned, thinking it over. Now he was definitely confused. And why had the weirdo said undead? That was even more confusing. As Charles looked down at the ground, concentrating hard, something dawned on him. He was not dressed for a funeral. He was dressed to be buried.

~*~

"Oh my goodness." The microphone dropped out of the news reporter's hand.

~*~

"What have you done?" The stranger looked directly at the Mayor, her healthy appearance an obvious sign that she was not quite the same as her citizens.

"Get away!" Firlance cried, "Get away! You are not welcome here!"

The news reporter tottered onto the scene, his mouth drawn in a long, silent gasp. "Get the police!"

~*~

"The Mayor, Ms. Firlance, had proclaimed to have brought the townspeople all back from the dead. As you know, the town was wiped out by some disease, which explained their appearances. She has also told us that she only brought back the adults, as they could presumably do the most work. She made them work for her in an oil business, the oil unexpectedly found right in the Midvale Park. Each one would remember everything as when they were last either alive, or when they were very happy. Many of them were probably wondering where their children were, though one young boy, presumed to be Charles Taylor, was found among the bodies of the re-buried. He must have been a mistake. All the re-incarnated have fallen again after their Mayor lost her control over them, and they have all been ceremoniously re-buried, including the boy Charles. The three humans that were also there were from a car wreck about an hour away. They were sick from drinking filthy water and obviously unhealthy as you can see from our footage, but they are safely in our local hospital receiving care. So, the truth about being 'reborn' is right here. It can happen, though mayor Firlance hasn't spilled the beans on how. Thank you for tuning into M news."

AKSTON

By Kyle Wilkinson: Grade 10

Kent Akston ran down the polished halls of Houte Industries, made a quick turn onto the next hallway and checked his watch. The time read 1:17 - Dammit, he thought, the meeting started 47 minutes ago. It had begun this morning; his wife had been feeling neglected over the past few months and had forced him into having lunch with her today. "Of course today!", he had screamed at her, the day of the most important meeting of his life: the chance of a partnership with Robert Houte. Alas, she had won and he promised to meet her for lunch at the most prestigious restaurant in town.

Or rather, his mind told him mockingly, you tried to meet her. It frustrated him that his car had blown a tire on the way, forcing him to run the 5km to the restaurant; only to figure out that she had left 20 minutes beforehand in tears. Kent had tried her cell as an afterthought the minute he had arrived but there had been no answer. Shrugging it off and planning to apologize later, he began the run back to the office, knowing that a cab in lunch hour traffic was suicide.

He finally arrived at the door to the boardroom, took a deep breath and entered, the long wooden table that centered the room was surrounded by board members and stock holders, none of which dared look up. Robert Houte had taken the stage and was giving a presentation, a projector showing many graphs and texts pretending to prove a point. Kent sat at the end of the table; his face white in fear in what might happen now but to his surprise, nobody looked at or mentioned him at all. He felt relieved at first, but then his mind started racing:

Maybe Houte hasn't said anything because he has already fired me at the beginning... maybe he told all the board members I'm not the new partner - No, that doesn't make sense, if he had told everybody; he'd have no problem telling me to get out of this room.

Kent brushed his hand up his forehead and through his cropped blond hair, bits of sweat brushing onto his skin. He could feel himself going from white to red as more ideas popped into his head about why nobody has mentioned or looked at him yet. He looked at Cheryll Ferris - A member of the board in charge of the image of the company. He had had an affair with her for a couple of weeks but she had eventually cut him off, actually getting a boyfriend who she planned to marry in the coming months. Kent turned away - as much as he tried to catch her eye, she ignored him.

"... and with our new location opening up in Boston this week, I believe that you'll have No Doubt, With Houte."

Houte smiled, cocked his head and gave a wink - His trademark mannerism and phrase that the papers found oh so corny, made all of the board members and stock holders break out into a round of applause.

"Now, I believe that's all for this week, does anybody have anything to say, recommendations and all the jazz?"

Nobody dared question; Houte acted like a good person who respects the opinion of others - he had to, being the face of his company - but the reality was that if anyone dared to question his decisions without a good reason, they would be fired on the spot. Kent considered for a second of asking what was happening with his promotion, but opted out for a one on one meeting when the others left.

"No? Then good. You're dismissed." He smiled and moved out of the boardroom into his office.

With that, everybody closed up their portfolios and walked out of the room. Some conversation was made but no one questioned what had happened to the "Big announcement" that had been promoted throughout the week.

Kent stood up and followed the others for a minute, before breaking off from the group and knocking on the door to Houte's office.

"C'mon in," Akston heard before opening the door and walking slowly towards Robert's desk.

"Yes, what seems to be the problem Kent?" He said, a mocking smile spread half way across his face.

"Uh, well Mr. Houte, I was wondering about the promotion," Kent replied quietly.

Houte looked up for a second, as if in thought, then asked, "Why, on the day of your possible promotion, would you be late for a meeting that allows said promotion?"

"My wife - "

"I don't care about your wife. Give me a better reason."

"Wha - What? " Kent stuttered his words, then blinked. "Ah, right - My car blew a tire - "

"Don't care about your car."

" - well trying to meet my wife - "

"I don't give a DAMN about your wife." Houte smacked his hand down at the table, glaring at Kent.

"I thought I hired someone I could rely on, if you couldn't handle your wife or a simple flat fire, how can you handle a company?"

"I... I - Look sir, with all due respect, I've done everything you've asked - "

"Except one thing," Houte stated. Kent looked at him, their eyes meeting for a second, before taking his gaze away and looking around the room. Three of the four walls were covered with windows, showing black clouds covering the New York skyline like fog.

"What did I miss?"

Houte smiled, "To hire someone to take your spot." He stood up and reached out his hand. "You've got the promotion."

"Real - " Akston didn't even finish the sentence before jumping up, putting on a huge smile and shaking his hand.

"Now, you've got some work to do," Houte said, passing a folder of applications to Kent. "You have the office down the hall - we haven't had a chance to put your name on it, but good luck. Partner."

Houte gave a gesture to leave, which Kent did in almost a run.

It only took Akston a couple of minutes to sit down and finally begin looking through applicants. About two minutes in he found one and set it aside, the name he barely gave a glance said "Kevin Stadler" - a young accountant who had originally tried for partnership but failed to meet Houte's high standards.

The day went on as usual from there - oddly enough, being partner did not change much of how he did things. He still spoke to the same people, some new clients came but he quickly turned them down: explaining the flaws in their propositions and sending them stomping off angrily.

Kent smiled as he took out a victory cigar, grabbed his coat and left the office five minutes early, making it to the parking lot before remembering that his car was still in downtown New York and that he was walking home today. It didn't take him long to get across the parking lot and onto the sidewalk; crossing the street and into an alleyway.

He was about halfway up the alley when he heard a scream from behind him - Spinning around he noticed a man laying across the ground and another running away.

"Shit," Kent mumbled, hurrying over to the man and pulling out his cellphone.

"Hello, 911." He looked down, the man was wearing a black sweater and blue jeans; no wound visible. He pushed him over slightly, pulling up the sweater to see a bloody slit across his stomach indicating a failed mugging. The man's face was covered with a hat and black shades.

"I'm located in the alley between 45th and Queens. It appears he was stabbed in the stomach - 5 minutes? Yeah, my name is Kent Akston."

He hung up then knelt beside the body, first checking his pulse - which was still strong, then reaching into his pocket only to figure out his wallet was gone.

What a surprise, Kent thought sarcastically. Wait.

He had just noticed a brown piece of leather on the ground about five feet from the man's head. Kent opened the wallet and slipped his fingers into each hole; He had no money but a single piece of ID sat in the uppermost pocket. Akston pulled it out and sat in shock at the huge black font that read:

Jonathon Pope, Private Investigator

He looked back at the man, tried nudging him before getting up and moving out of the alleyway.

The ambulance will find him, he told himself reassuringly before beginning to run.

If it's as I think... - No, don't think about it that way.

It took him a couple minutes to get back to his apartment, barge up the stairs and through doorway number 7. The room was dark and empty, only a chair and table left of all the furniture that had been there this morning. Letters sat scattered across the table, the first of which he picked up was written by his wife.

He didn't bother opening it, he already knew the contents. The second of the letters was from a lawyer - divorce papers no doubt. The third one caught his eye. It was from Mr. Houte, the first of which he actually opened. He read:

Dear Mr. Akston,

We regret to inform you that as of 2:00 today, you are no longer working for Houte Medical Insurance and will be replaced by Kevin Stadler. You will receive your final pay check on Thursday of next week, which shall include your vacation and resignation pay. We thank you for your time and hope for the best on your further exploits,

Robert Houte
Kevin Stadler

Kent crumpled the letter and threw it at the wall. It took him a second for his vision to focus before falling into his chair. He sat there, staring at the wall for a moment.

He lost his wife who had learned of his affair.. . from the guy who was stabbed... which sequentially had made him lose his job, the job he had picked his own successor for...

- A knock at his door interrupted his train of thought. He got up, dragging himself to the door in which he opened slowly. Two police officers stood, arms folded in the brightly lit hall.

"Kent Akston?"

"Yeah?"

"You're under arrest for the murder of Jonathon Pope. You were seen fleeing the crime scene by local civilians."

It took them only seconds to arrest Kent - his will defeated by the events prior. He was dragged down the police station with no fight and sat in his jail cell, not speaking to anyone through his quiet weeps. Some would call this karma, from all the medical cases he denied insurance for over the years, to the families he broke apart but to him, none of it mattered. He was still screwed, and nothing could change that.

VALKRYIE
By Martina Dotcheva: Grade 9

A body lay at the foot of the stairs. A tall, well-built woman stepped over the body and walked out the front door, leaving it open. As she walked out of the small, cramped house into the fresh autumn air, the woman pulled a silver cell phone out of her pocket and dialled the number she had been given, just as instructed.

“The target is dead.”

A gruff voice replied, “Very well. Return to headquarters immediately.”

“Understood.” the assassin said, and flipped the phone shut.

Headquarters never heard from her again.

* * *

(2 Days Later)

I walked into Finch Enterprise’s downtown Los Angeles location a little past 2 o’clock. I was late... again and my father was waiting.

The lobby of Finch Enterprise was large, open and bright with expensive furnishings and spotless marble floors and counters. My father always expected the best from his staff, and unfortunately the best from me. This is what today’s meeting was all about. According to him, I’ve been reckless and stupid just like my mother, and that I’ll get myself killed just like she did.

My mother was part of an assassination sect called the Valkyries. They had trained her since she was 16, making her a skilled and deadly assassin. Two days ago, a woman from her own sect murdered her just after she had completed a job. My father said it was her fault – that she deserved to die the way she did and I’ve hated him for it. Now, he’s convinced that I’ve joined them. What he doesn’t understand is that what I’m really trying to do is to catch my mother’s killer. I’ve been followed everywhere the past two days by the woman.

As I walked out of the elevator into my father’s office, I recognized the familiar scent of cigarette smoke and leather. As always my father was sitting in his favourite chair, reading paperwork with his glasses slid far down his nose and a gaze so intent and focused it could have burnt a hole right through the pages. He looked up as I walked in.

“Ah, Casey. You’re late.” he said as he looked at his watch.

“Sorry, Dad. Train was late.”

“If the train was late, you would have been here half an hour ago.” he said.
“Where were you?”

“Dad, I’m 17. I don’t need to call in every day to tell you what I’ve been doing.”

“You were with them weren’t you? The Valkyries.” he spat. He hated them just as much as I did.

“No. I wasn’t.” I replied icily. “Now, why did you want to meet? I didn’t come here for another lecture, Dad.”

“Well, actually this is the reason I asked you to come today. I wanted to talk about this.”

“No. I did not come here for another session of psychobabble. I haven’t joined the Valkyries! How many times do I have to say that?!”

He didn’t even listen to a word I said.

“The Valkyries are responsible for your mother’s death! Why are you still interacting with them?” he shouted and slammed his fist on his desk.

“You have no idea what you’re talking about! Don’t you ever listen to what I tell you? I have nothing to do with them!”

And then I told him something he didn’t know. “I was there, Dad! I saw it! I was there when she was killed!”

He blanched.

“What?!” he spluttered.

I sighed. “Yes. I was there. I’ve been following the woman that killed Mom for months now.”

“I... I thought you joined them...”

“No, Dad. They’ve been trying to kill me, but I’ve been eluding them – barely, but I’ve succeeded so far.”

I left out the reason why they hate me and want me dead, for his safety. I didn’t want him knowing too much in case they came after him.

“Why are they...?”

“Listen, Dad. I have to go. I think I have a lead on the assassin. I’ll call you later.”

“Casey...”

“No, Dad. Don't try to tell me not to look for her. I know what I'm doing.”

“Okay, come see me when you can alright?”

“I can’t guarantee it, Dad. I’ll try.”

“Alright, be careful.”

“I will. Bye, Dad.”

I slipped a note on his desk just before I left. I prayed that he’d read it on time, or I’d be dead. I let out a deep breath as I walked out of the office. No more time to worry about it though; I had unfinished business to attend to.

Covering up evidence was a serious matter for an assassin. I knew she wouldn’t underestimate me; I was the daughter of the best. My interference in her secret operation didn’t leave her too happy.

The alley behind the building was dark and cool, full of slithering shadows. She was following me. I’d have to face her soon, but not in the open part of the alley. I walked farther down the alley, slowly pulling the long, thin dagger from my sleeve. In the darkest shadows of the skyscrapers around us, I stopped.

“I’m surprised you’ve waited this long.” I said.

“Well... we have to be discreet don’t we? We wouldn’t want to have anyone witness your death and go running off to tell your mother’s friends.” the woman said as she slid out of the shadows.

She wore tight leather pants, jacket, and high heeled boots, just like me – classic assassin’s wear. Her long, black hair hung past her shoulders, gently swaying in the breeze. Her face was a chalky pale white, making her bright blue eyes stand out like sapphires. A slight hint of a smile crossed her face, as her hand flexed on a blade similar to mine.

“You’re prepared I see.” she said.

“You can never be too careful, especially with you following me around like a puppy all the time.”

“Well, I’ve got to cover my tracks. I can’t have you exposing me.”

I didn't miss the slight signs of agitation. Being impartial to the victim or the assignment is a vital skill needed for assassins. She hated me just as much as she hated my mom; and I could definitely use that to my advantage and drive her off the edge – make her attack first.

“So what's it like – being second to my mother? I can't imagine how upset you were when she took the lead job. You hate being second to anyone, don't you? Don't you, Jessica?”

That was it, saying the assassin's name – I broke the code. Within the second, she whipped her dagger with pin-point precision at my heart and simultaneously pulled her gun out of her boot; but being trained as an assassin, I easily dodged the blade and the bullet that followed immediately after.

“You've been taught well.” she said.

“My mother was the best of the sect...”

Jessica rolled her eyes.

“Yes, well not anymore. I've come so close to getting what I want. Only one thing is standing in my way... you.” she said.

“You were so close... but I'm afraid you won't be getting what you want tonight.”

Without warning, I threw the dagger at her chest and bolted for the alley's exit, hoping that my dad had read the note in time. I stopped at the opening of the alley, trusting that Dad could see me and give the signal. In the note, I had asked him to contact the leader of the Valkyries, my mother's supposed most trusted friend – a man I had never met. I also asked that when I stepped out into the entrance of the alley, that the director would step in and help.

Jessica soon caught up, the hand with the gun discreetly pressed to her side.

“No more games. It's time to finish this; I have a job to complete.” She raised the gun towards me and aimed at my chest. The bullet would no doubt have killed me.

“Put the gun down, Jessica.” a gruff voice said. A small, but burly man stepped out of the shadows behind Jessica. She spun around in bewilderment. I gasped in shock. This couldn't be the leader of the Valkyries; it was impossible.

“Why are you here?”

“To put a stop to all your nonsense.” he answered. “You’ve been too much trouble over the past few months. Your jealousy and temper have clouded your judgement and lead to unnecessary deaths.”

“NO! I’ve waited too long for this!” she screeched. “You have no idea what I’ve been through to get here! I will not let a miserable little brat like her –” she pointed a finger at me, “– take it away from me!”

In all her rage, she spun around and aimed the gun at me once more. This time around, she didn’t get the chance to aim. A bullet hit her square in the back, and she toppled to the ground, lifeless. I gazed at the man standing before me in shock, just as my father stepped out of the office building.

“Casey, may I introduce your godfather as the leader of the Valkyries?” he said.