

*THOUGHTWELL*

*2022-2023*

In these pages, you will find a variety of writing from the talented students of SCHS. Some submissions have come from the Creative Writing class. Other submissions have just been from students, proud of their writing, and wanting to share with others. What this should say to you is that our school is brimming with creative and writing talent, and not always in the places you'd expect. I hope you enjoy this collection as much as I have. There are several poems, some impressively in-depth and lengthy short stories, and an academic essay that helps us peek into the mind of the modern student.

Matt Donoho

Thoughtwell Sponsor

May, 2023

POETRY

Dear Thoughtwell reader,

I wanted to give some backstory to these poems in the hope that the same readers who are interested in reading poems would get a deeper connection to them. In my English 41 class, we were assigned to write an open letter. After talking about my fears of life, I brought up a certain person, my moon, who brought a smile to my face that inspired me to write this line:  
*Something about their smile makes me want to hold the moon still,  
so the sun too can see the beauty that steals its warmth.*

I liked this line so much I thought it deserved to be in a poem of its own. That's when I wrote "The Moon in My Night Skies."  
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The Moon in My Night Skies

By: John Green

When the world turns black,  
your light emanates onto the Earth.  
And when the sun rises,  
you fade while the bright blues and radiant yellows shine above.  
I swear I see glimpses of you in the clouds,  
But as soon as you are spotted,  
you are lost in the natural cotton of the sky.  
Even the sun rises early to try and catch a glimpse of you,  
Only to find out you've already faded.  
I would think you'd shine brighter,  
showing off the light and heat you so often take from the sun every dawn.  
I wish I could hold you still, so the sun too can see the beauty that steals its warmth.

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After that had been written, I had planned on submitting it into the Thoughtwell.  
However, before this had happened, tragedy struck. My moon's orbit had gotten further. But we  
still stayed connected by the draw our gravity had. I had seen a phrase, possibly from a poem,  
talking about how the moon is surrounded by darkness, and that had inspired me to write "The  
Moon You Are To Me."  
Thank you for reading. I hope you enjoyed and continue to enjoy the poems.  
Sincerely, John Green  
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The Moon You Are To Me  
By: John Green

I never realized until now  
just how perfect the moon is to compare you to.  
You feel as though there is constant darkness surrounding you,  
and only when you are in those dark places do people truly see you.  
And then, there's the Earth,  
the life you wish was yours so badly.  
You see the stars that shine around you,  
and you are so distracted by the light they give, trying to enjoy the brightest ones,  
that you don't realize that you have your own beautiful glow that lights up the night.  
You forget that to us, you are the brightest thing in our darkest hours.  
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I'm cool as a snake  
Cause I got a rake  
People call me Jake  
But that's all fake

Haters gonna hate  
But that's just fate  
I just ate  
That sandwich is gone from my plate

This is all just game  
But I need my fame  
So back off or your lame  
Cause I've just won the ballgame  
By Donovan Garren

DOWN, DOWN, DOWN WE WENT  
SPLASH! INTO THE COLD AND WET  
THE WICKED GRINS OF THOSE ABOVE  
GREW LIKE THORNS FROM THE STEM OF A ROSE.  
AS IF WE WERE ANIMALS THROWN INTO A RING  
THEY CLAPPED AND CACKLED AS WE STARTED TO SING  
NUMB AND GRUELING WAS OUR BODY AS WE MOVED.  
ROARING AND FLOORING WAS THE CROWD IN TIME,  
AS OUR MINDS QUIETED, AND STUTTERED TO A STOP.  
OUR MINDS AND BODIES WERE NOT OUR OWN TO KEEP.  
HOW COULD WE GO ON IF WE WEREN'T OUR OWN?  
NOTHING IS WORSE THAN BEING A DOLL OF A CHILD.

BY REBECCA HAYS

# ***SENIOR YEAR***

***BY AMAZIAH WINCHESTER***

***WHEN YOUR JUNIOR YEAR ENDS,  
YOU CAN'T WAIT FOR YOUR SENIOR TO BEGIN.  
THE THOUGHT OF TRAVELING IS TRULY BEAUTIFUL  
THE THOUGHT OF GROWING UP IS FANCIFUL  
ITS OVERWHELMING AND SCARY  
LIKE DEMONIC TOM AND JERRY  
WE NEVER THOUGHT THIS DAY WOULD COME,  
BUT WE CAN FINALLY SHOUT "ITS DONE, I'VE WON"***



## **The Knight**

**By Titus Churchill**

My feet ache as I tarry

This weight I can no longer carry

Vanquished the dragon and my sword blacken

The armor clanks and creaks as I see now how bleak.

Is This broken world that has made me weak

Then I begin to think

Why all those that came before

Their spirits hath broke

I reach but my hand stills and I swallow

Have I finally gone hollow

The heart holds a sadness  
When the world turns to madness  
And no person could bare to be there  
When the world is sick with disease  
The heart will want to appease  
And the heart will sink  
As the people start to think  
If anything could have been prevented  
But the image has been dented  
As people perform the possible illusions of perfection  
In the end we will have no connection  
To what the world could have been  
Had it not been for them.

By Marley Donoho

To love is to hope  
And to hope is to love  
The heart will tear  
As they depart from the fear  
And the heart is beating out of the chest  
As the people have left  
The people are banging on the gates  
But everything is gone without a trace  
The lungs constrict like a belt  
But nothing can be felt  
We feel for forever  
But how can we be clever?

By Marley Donoho

**RON THE ROACH**  
**BY JAYDEN HAMMOND**

**IN A SMALL APARTMENT, IN THE CITY OF NEW CHICAGO,**

**LIVES A SHREW CRITTER, ALWAYS ON THE GO.**  
**RON THE ROACH.**

**RON THE ROACH IS AN EXCELLENT FOOTBALL COACH,**

**RON THE ROACH IS HORRIFIC TO APPROACH.**

**MUCH LIKE A STORMY NIGHT, RONALD ROACH IS ALWAYS IN**  
**SIGHT.**

**SMALLER THAN AN ANT, RON THE ROACH LIVES IN THE**  
**WALLS.**

**RON THE ROACH IS A BEAST,**

**ALMOST ALWAYS PRESENT AT THE FAMILY FEAST.**

**RONALD ROACH, THE MAN IN YOUR WALLS.**

## **"Spindles"**

**Spindles of carefully constructed strands,  
Woven tight by broken hands,  
Peel back the false prophecy,  
And give way to relentless agony.  
Fact is fiction, hopeless and vindictive,  
Yell to the endless abyss,  
And knit a new understanding,  
Empowered by truth.  
Let those who follow not the call, but the reward,  
Be cast away, never heard.**

**By Dominick Winkler**

## **"I Will Continue"**

**Do not grieve for me,  
I will continue tomorrow,  
And when I wake,  
Thunder will silence its crash,  
Countless hours tick by,  
Like a heartbeat pounds,  
In time, it will fade,  
into a melancholy record.  
Light creates shadow, dawn creates dusk,  
And the grieving will cease.**

**By Dominick Winkler**

# Summer Days

By Jazmyn Guenard

The sun shines bright  
Right before the night  
The wind whistles through the air  
It was a nice day  
The kids scream as they play  
Lots of lollipops laying lonely  
Ice cream, they all scream  
Fuzzy buzzing bees  
Miles to go before they sleep  
Summer days come to an end

SHORT  
STORIES

# The Jock

By Elissa Tipsword

*Gina is a 16 year old sophomore at Caligate High. She is pretty, smart, and hot according to the guys at school. She had never had a boyfriend before Brooks or went to a party. He changed her life, for better and for worse.*

Gina walks into her first hour P.E class. The boys are whispering while Brooks is staring right at her. As she goes into the girls locker room Maddie runs up to her and says, "Gina you're famous. Brooks broke up with Brittany and now he wants you, he thinks you're the hottest girl at our school." Some of the girls said it was a dare or a joke, but Gina was dumbfounded by it.

"RINGGGG", the bell rang, school was finally out. Gina walked through the halls racing to get out the door, bumping into at least 50 people on her way. As Gina runs outside she gets tumbled over by a senior jock named Brooks. He looked at her and smiled. "He was so hot", Gina thought. She got up nervously looking at him while he picked up her books and organized them. Before he gave them back he wrote his number on a blank page in her folder.

Later that day she put his number in her contacts. It took a lot of courage but Gina texted him saying hi. They got to talking and he showed a lot of interest in her, he called her beautiful and told her she was by far better looking than any girl he had ever met. Through the next couple months she told him about the future she wanted. She wanted to be a nurse, happily married with at least two kids. He told her he could make it happen. She felt amazed that a guy would take interest in her like that, she didn't see any of the red flags. They went on dates, he met her parents, although she never met his or knew any of his dreams. Gina didn't care that she didn't know much about him, she was blinded by the attention she got from him. She thought she loved him.



On a Friday night she went to a bonfire with Brooks. He called her before and they went shopping for something new for her to wear. Brooks bought her a black v-neck that was skin tight. She was never the type to show off too much skin but she wanted to impress him.

Later that night on their way to the bonfire, Gina asks, "Brooks are you going to be drinking?" He says, "Yeah. Where's the fun in not? You should too." When Brooks gets drunk he is a ticking time bomb. Gina never likes him drinking, it made her feel like an object, he was never kind when he was drunk. Gina didn't want to drink, but she didn't want him to change the way he thought about her if she told him no. So she did.

"Chug! Chug! Chug!" boys chanted, as Brooks lifted Gina over the Keg stand. She lasted a couple seconds before she coughed up half of it. Gina hated the taste of beer, she didn't want to drink at all. When she got up Brooks took her over to a table with alcohol, and poured a shot of whiskey for her and him. She pushed it away and said she didn't want any more. He asked her to play spin the bottle, she told him no. Brooks slammed his hand down on the table and got upset because she wouldn't drink or play a game with him. Gina tried to calm him down but it didn't work. "Babe can we just go home?" Gina said, trying not to make it worse. He didn't say anything, he walked to his truck and got into the driver's seat. Gina didn't get in. Although she didn't have her license yet, she asked him to get out and let her drive. Still without saying anything he got out and got into the passenger seat.

The whole way home neither of them said a word on the ride back. Until Brooks broke down yelling at her for not wanting to drink or play games with him. Gina started crying, while yelling at him to stop. All the sudden she's speeding up, going faster and faster. "CRASH". They crash right into a telephone pole.

Gina takes a deep breath in. She's okay. She's alive. She gets out and runs to the passenger side to get Brooks out of the truck. She opens the door and he's alive, but he's bleeding from his head. Gina cleans the blood off and it's just a cut. "Thank god you're okay", Gina says. He pushes her off of him and runs to see the damage on his truck. The front is totaled. Smoke coming from under the hood. As she turns toward him she can almost see the steam coming off him. Gina backs up as he starts walking to her. "You're going to pay for this!", said Brooks. "No please! Don't tell anyone i'll never

get my license.”, says Gina. “Walk now,” said Brooks. His house is only half a mile away. They get there and no one is home, he says his parents are on a trip. All the lights are out and it's dark outside. Brooks pulls her into the house, roughly. He slams into the wall while taking her clothes off. Gina begs him to stop, but he doesn't.

He eventually let her walk home, at this time it's almost three o'clock in the morning. She was tired, she felt violated. When she got home her parents were already asleep. Gina ran to her room and went straight to sleep. She woke up thinking back on what happened. She thought maybe she did something wrong, maybe she should have just played a game with him, maybe she could have called someone to come get her. Over the next couple days she tried to forget about it. She went to school on Monday and acted like she was fine, she took different routes to her classes to avoid Brooks.

The next day she was ready to talk about it. Ready to get it off her chest. Ready to forget about it. Gina asked Maddie to come over later that day, and she told Maddie what happened. Maddie was filled with rage, she told Gina to tell her parents before or she would. So, Maddie went with Gina and they told her parents. Maddie was worried she might be pregnant. A week later, Gina finally accepts that she needs to take a test. She does. It comes back positive. Now this 16 year old girl has to decide to be a mom or to give up her baby. Be careful who you hangout with. Some people might seem good, but we aren't always thinking clearly.

THE END

## From the Beginning to The End

By Cole Wimberly

Waking up to an empty house and a knock on my door was how the end began. The night before, my parents sent me to bed early, for my birthday was the next day. They explained to me, "We have some last minute presents to buy so go to sleep and they will be here in the morning." As an eighth grader I obviously didn't listen. I waited for 1 hour... 3hour. I began to worry, and after the fifth hour had passed it was 2 in the morning. I called the police, and they said they would send a car if they had not returned tomorrow. I began to cry for hours, then I fell asleep. BOOM BOOM. The house shook from the knocking at the door. I yelled for mom to get it but no answer. I walked down stairs and the light burned my eyes. I opened the door and there stood a police officer. His exact words were, "your parents were in a head on collision with a semi, and they were airlifted to the hospital." "They passed away early this morning."

I left with the cop, and he took me to my uncle Bill's house. My uncle Bill was the only relative still living. Bill wasn't really part of my life before that. He and my dad got into a fight, and he almost killed my dad. We arrived at his home, and from my watery eyes I caught a glimpse of the rundown trailer. The trailer had rats running about, and had the smell of a dead horse. The windows were boarded up, and the of the trailer was a color was a dark, dirty yellow. We knocked on the front screen door. The inside door opened and from the dark came the smell of alcohol and a raspy voice. "yu.. You be gu... gone now pig," Bill stuttered at the cop clearly intoxicated. The stench that came from Bill smelled of cat pee and liquor. "I am not here to arrest you sir," the cop explained, " Your brother, Dave and Misty, passed away earlier this morning in a car accident, and you are the only relative of the family which means the boy is now in your custody." "I DON'T WANT EM," Bill shouted. "I apologize sir but i am not the person to take that up with," the cop explained, "However, if you don't take him I will take you in for child endangerment," the cop protested. " Whatever," Bill said in anger. He showed me to an

empty room with a mattress on the floor with what appeared to be a blood stain, or maybe pee. I

put my belongings on the mattress and broke down. All I brought with me was a blanket, a pillow, and a picture of my parents. Shouting rose from the living room, so I went to see what was happening. The second I stepped into the room a bottle flew by my head and crashed against the wall. "Now I just want you to know I don't like you and you're not gonna be here much longer," Bill sternly said, "now go make dinner." "But it's my birthday," I cried. SLAP! "I don't CARE whose birthday it is as long as you're living here you will NOT talk back to me," Bill said enraged, " Now go make me DINNER."

Weeks passed of foodless cold nights. By the time my freshmen year ended I had no friends, and I was Bills slave. The abuse I received from Bill grew worse through the years. He would hit me if I did wrong, choke if I spoke back and beat me when I said no. I was too scared to go to anyone at school because Bill would kill me if he found out. No one at school ever cared anyways. By my junior year I developed early, so people assumed I was in my late teens early twenties. Bill sent me to get alcohol everyday. I would steal some from him time to time, and I would stash it under the trailer. If Bill found out he'd try to kill me, and I was right. I arrived home from school one day, and Bill wasn't shouting as normal. He just casually said, "go to bed." So that's what I did. I was happy, so happy I thought he changed, so I waited for him to go to sleep.

I snuck outside and grabbed a few beers I'd been saving for something special. I fell asleep around 12-1 a.m. within the next 2 hours I woke up to a CRUNCH! I felt a surging pain shoot through my leg. " YOU THINK YOU CAN STEAL FROM ME BOY," Bill shouted while continuing to smash my leg with his boot, "I PRACTICALLY RAISED YOU AND YOUR GONNA STEAL FROM ME!" I kicked him away with my other foot, and he spilled his beer. "I'm sorry," I cried, "please don't hurt me... PLEASE!" Crash he broke a bottle on the wall creating a sharp weapon from what remains. "Oh imma do a lot more than hurt you," Bill smiled in rage. I tried to crawl away, but he leaped on me, cutting me all over with the bottle. Blood and tears were

everywhere. I got the edge to fight back and I pushed him away. We both stood up, and he was quick to swing. However, I dodged the bottle, and he lost his balance. He slipped on the beer he spilled earlier and tumbled to the floor. He didn't move, and a blood pool began to grow below him. I turned him over and saw he slipped onto the bottle. He stabbed himself in the heart. A grin appeared on my face, then a chuckle, a laugh, and then began to laugh hysterically. All my hopes and dreams had finally come true. There was nothing I could do but laugh.

I grabbed my belongings and walked. I walked so far I didn't even know where I was anymore. I ran for days, weeks, months. I walked until I reached Chicago. I walked into a nearby gas station with the small amount of money I collected along the way. I only had enough money for a protein bar, and a bottle of water. I walked outside and a man walked up to me and stole the bag of food. I chased him into a deep alley. Shadowy figures began to appear the farther down I got. The next thing I knew I was surrounded. "Give us what you got," the shadows yelled. "All I have is 2 dollars and this blanket," I explained. "That's all we need," the figures smirked. A fist came from the right, and a foot from the left. The next thing I knew I was being jumped. I heard a CRACK, SNAP, then I passed out. When I woke up I noticed very quickly my arm was broken. My belongings were gone. All I had left were my shirt, and shorts. I began to walk and this older homeless man said, " You look like you've had a rough night, I know how you can feel better if you got the right amount." "No, I don't have any money," I exclaimed. "Well if you get any money I'll be right here," the man smirked. Through the next few weeks I was treated like dirt by strangers, and gangbangers. I needed a way out of This stressful life, so I got some money from begging. I went to the man.He gave me a needle and a bottle of a mysterious liquid. He wouldn't tell me what was in it, but I didn't care I needed an escape. It was the greatest thing I've had in a long time. I did it and I finally found something good in this world. However, the time I spend apart from it is the worst time. I long for it, I need it. The depression and anxiety spike. I just want to be happy.

I walk now... well it seems like I've always been walking. Moving forward is the only option I have. I'm in the ghetto now, it seems like there are gangs everywhere. "Hey white boy," a gang member laughs, "what you got in your pockets boy." "All I have is a shirt, and shorts," I explained, "I got jumped a while back, and they took everything now I'm out here on the streets."

"Well you best get off my streets or there's gonna be trouble," the man demands, "I don't like your kind around here." "Yeah uh sorry sir," I stammer. Late that night I was in a gas station. The door was open and no one was around, so I grabbed chips, candy, and drinks what ever I could get my hands on. I ran out the door as fast as I could. "GET BACK HERE!", the store owner ran after me. He chased me to the road I was on earlier. I turned around and saw no one behind me, and I was relieved. Seemed like God had finally taken pity on me. BOOM! A sharp pain shot through my body from my back. "I told you not to come around here no more," the man from earlier yelled. He ran away, and left me there. I stared at the sky spitting up blood, and I knew I wanted it to happen. To be released from this world to the next. It didn't matter to me where I went. It was sure to be better than this hell hole. Then I woke up.

I woke up in a hospital with no pain at all. "Am I alive?" I questioned, but the doctors voice brought me back to reality. "A woman heard gun shots so she called the police. They found you and brought you here," the doctor explained, "you were lucky to be alive after that." "Thank you," I grinned. "I'll leave you to rest now," the doctor left the room. I quickly stumbled out of bed, and out of the hospital. It hurt so bad to walk, but I had no other choice. I don't know what the bill was gonna be, but I can't pay for it. I didn't know where I was, so I began to walk, and I walked for days until I found the man with the liquid again. I only had 20 bucks on me, and it didn't get me much. I kept walking thinking about life and what's good. What life has done for me. And when I saw the rope on the ground I knew what I had to do. I did it... I found a cure to

life. A new beginning, and maybe a better beginning. It was getting dark so I needed a place to  
Lie, so I continued to walk until I found this bridge.

Now, I'm under the bridge with a needle in my right arm, and a rope around my  
neck atop a chair. This was my life, and I have nothing to my name. I am nothing, and I  
have nothing. This is my goodbye... my goodbye to the world that never liked me. So me,  
the writer of my biography will write no more, so for my last line  
Goodbye.

## The Party Plan

By Emma Wood

It was a long weekend at our lake house. It was a cold fall morning when my dad and I went fishing on a lake in my backyard. We got out on the lake and started fishing, when he started to yell and started paddling the boat, but he was paddling too hard and I fell out. He was screaming because he saw an alligator. I started splashing around which caught the alligator's attention. He swam towards me with all his strength and pulled me under! I couldn't catch my breath. I saw blood everywhere and then felt a hand around my arm. It was my dad. I looked down and saw nothing but blood and skin and pieces of clothing.

Now we are here in the present, and I'm starting my first day of junior year. I have gotten a lot of stares because I have a prosthetic leg, but it doesn't matter. The accident happened 5 years ago and now I'm 16 so I'm used to the stares. Even though I have spent 2 years already in high school people are looking at me in a different way than they used to. "HEY JADA WAIT UP!" I heard from afar. I turned and saw the quarterback of the football team running towards me. Which was weird because he had never even noticed me the past 2 years. He stopped just shy of running into me. I took a step back and said, "What are you doing, Preston. You almost hit me!" He was shocked by the annoyance in my voice, and said "Sorry did I do something." "Did you do something?" I added, "You almost hit me." I could hear people whisper and laugh.

I turned and walked off hearing him run after me. "Hey I'm sorry, what can I do to make it up to you" he said. "You can start by not hitting people with a prosthetic leg," I said annoyed. "Ok next time I won't hit you, but how about I take you to the yacht party to start off the beginning of the year" added Preston. I don't think he saw but I was blushing a lot because to be honest I have had a crush on him since the beginning of the year. "Fine, but just so you know I have a fear of getting in any large body of water" I said. "Oh I know," he said with an oddly malicious smile. "Ok so it's a date?" he added. "Yes it's a date." I said.



A couple of weeks passed and it is now a few days from the party and Preston has been talking to me like we have been dating since we were in diapers. It's only a few hours till the party and Preston asks "Are you ready for the party?" "As ready as I'll ever be" I said in return. Preston and I are about to load into the boat when I start to cry because I'm so scared, but Preston grabs my hand and yanks a little harder than expected and pulls me onto the boat. Once I get onto the boat I calm down a little bit but I'm still not so sure that I want to do this. All of the football team is there and no one else. Which was a little suspicious. Preston leads me over to the balcony of the boat. He tells me how it was all a dare and how he really never liked me, how it was all a plan to kill me and then he pushes me. I scream and scream but it does no good no one can hear me, I'm underwater, I can't breathe, I'm stuck, then everything goes black.

To be continued

A short story

By Ava McLean

Waking up is always my least favorite part of the day. Peeling open my eyes to be greeted with the smell of cheap, burnt coffee and a pounding in my cranium. Upon putting my feet on the floor I remind myself of the words my therapist has told me time, and time again. "One breath at a time." I stand up and start working on breathing in the power. Whatever that is supposed to mean. After brushing my teeth and getting dressed, my mom meets me at the bottom of the staircase. She is wearing that ugly sweater my aunt brought her last Christmas. I can smell the coffee and diet pill breakfast she just finished. Her lipstick stained lips parted to wish me a good morning and I sent her a mumbled response. She must be used to my hungover mornings by now. Although her pride would never allow her to admit it. The golden child of "the most perfect family" in Prescott, Arizona could never wake up hungover. The son of the most successful insurance agent and his stay at home wife would never partake in such illicit activities. Yet, what they don't know will not hurt them.

School is the same as it always is. Arriving 10 minutes early to make some deals in the street by the parking lot. From there, surviving through my AP classes while struggling to fight off the cravings. As soon as that bell rings, I know the hard part is over. Being sober, that's the hard part. I put the keys in the ignition of my perfect little BMW and make the way back to my perfect little house. At this point, my mom will be doing her hair and makeup getting ready for dinner with my father. This leaves me home alone for approximately 2 and a half hours. The perfect amount of time. I reach into the center console of my car, and remove 2 pills from a ziploc bag. Both are circular, but one is a light green and the other is baby pink. As I pull into the driveway, my after school routine begins.

Since I experimented for the first time at a party during sophomore year, my evenings have always consisted of colorful little pills. I wouldn't say it is anything close to an addiction, more

like a hobby. I find it fun to come home as the world begins to get fuzzy, climb into bed while my brain fills with emptiness, and doze off at the same time that my parents are realizing they forgot to ask me how my day was. It's all a great excuse, a great escape. Maybe that's why I enjoy the little colorful circles so much, because once I swallow them, I swallow all of my responsibility and thoughts. Reality slips into something I can control, not something that controls me. When I am in this reality, I am no longer my last name, or my parents' net worth, or my GPA; I am just another person, inhaling oxygen and exhaling carbon dioxide.

I think of myself as a sharer, not really a dealer. See, I'm not selling people pills with the intention of making money off of other peoples' issues or anything like that. Consider it more of a, if I sell more of these little things, there are less of them that will end up in my system, and less that might get found in my possession. Of course, selling illicit substances is risky. But what is even more risky? Sitting on a big pile of them. That's why I do what I do. Not to make the money, or have power over anyone or anything, but to keep out of suspicion of taking the pills myself. My usual customers are people I know to trust with these sorts of matters. They are people who would never rat you out, because they need your product too badly. They are the people that I have dirt on, and could bury them twice as deep if they thought about putting me in the ground. They are the people who enjoy the thrill of a secret, and love keeping them. However, you can never be too careful. So I make sure to always make my sales at the high school I attend, however, never from my car. I will always set the product in a mailbox, trash bag, or windowsill in the neighborhood surrounding my school. Then my customers will drive past the recycling bins at the far end of the parking lot and dispose of a soda bottle with their payment inside of it. The cameras reach only to the last row of parking, and therefore hide the bins from their view. Every day, I drop off my own recycling and receive my payment. The system works beautifully.

Upon reaching my bedroom, I am eager to escape the reality that has been this Wednesday. Throwing my backpack on the ground, I remove the ziploc baggies out of the outside pocket,

and place them into the air vent about a foot from my bed. I crawl into bed and close my eyes before a text alert forces them back open. I expect the normal homework question, drama update, or sale requests for tomorrow. However, I am met with something completely irregular. A fake number of course, some random area code followed by some mismatched numbers has texted me. Even more strange than the number itself was the message it delivered.

“I know your secret, and I also know of some teachers at school who want to buy some of your products.”

When I say that my eyes probably almost bulged right out of my fuzzy head, and my heart sank into my stomach, I mean it. I absolutely could not understand how anyone could have been able to trace my little “business” back to me, let alone have the guts to tell me that they know. Although there was no obvious threat typed on my screen, the message was loud and clear. It’s either I sell, or I get sold out. I am gathering what little thoughts my brain can produce as another text filters to me reading, “It will be an anonymous system. Bring it to the library tomorrow morning before the first bell.” At this point, I would have been overthinking till the sun came back up, but the fuzzy feeling took over my brain and I was enveloped in sleep.

It is not until I am halfway to the school the next morning that I remember the text I received. Instantly, a wave of adrenaline, fear, and dread fill my veins. I mean sure, there are worse ways to be blackmailed. I can almost guarantee that the person who texted me will not show up, or leave when they see me. I highly doubt many things about my letterman’s jacket, full-ride scholarship offer for football, or perfect reputation scream drug dealer. But, I can’t risk walking into the library and being 1. Discovered. 2. Arrested. 3. Met with one of my teachers or peers that know me somewhat well. To avoid this problem, I walk into the library 10 minutes before the bell, and start looking for a book. After a few passing glances between the librarian and myself, I found the book I was searching for. Stephen King’s “It”. After placing one small pill wrapped in a folded gum wrapper, I closed the book on the deceitful bookmark and placed it back on the shelf. As I walked out of the library, I began typing a text to the same strange number that went

as follows, "IT is in the library." Was I a genius for this plan ? Oh, most definitely. Whatever blackmailing scheme was sure to have ensued, I perfectly managed to avoid.

Walking towards the left wing of the building, I bumped into a person that I hardly know. Angel Finch, the most goody-two-shoes girl to ever put her blonde hair in a ponytail and attend highschool. Angel is a practical celebrity, for having the highest GPA, and being the closest thing to Einstein in Arizona ever. We both mumbled apologies before I caught her award winning smile shining up at me. My heart nearly stopped, as she is most definitely used to. After what seemed like an eternity, we both went our own ways. Maybe this was the mistake that changed my whole life. Or maybe it was just another example of teenage boy brain taking hold of my life. Regardless of what this turns out to equate to, I turned over my shoulder to catch one last glance at Angel, a very fitting name for the most perfect girl in the whole county. My eyes watched as her ponytail swayed from left to right with each step she took. My hands grew sweaty as I thought back to the encounter I had with her only seconds ago. My heart absolutely fluttered. However, whatever butterflies or other insects that were causing the tingle in my stomach were quickly engulfed in flames as I watched her round the corner and enter the library. Of course, there would be no way of tracing the hidden treasure back to me. And the chance that she would even find it was so small, it barely existed. Yet the possibility of ruining Angel's day by causing her to find drugs in her newest read, burned my throat like smoke.

Days passed without ever hearing back from the mystery blackmailer, and this relieved me. I continued through my normal routine : wake up, make sales, survive school, pop pills, sleep, repeat. Any wrinkle that seemed to have popped up with the suspicious text message was ironed right out with my clever thinking. That was until another text message filtered into my phone and lit up my screen late at night. Anxiety instantly coursed through my body. And my entire being nearly came to an end when I read the text, " Your product sold almost immediately,

and there are many more customers who are eager to pay you. For 30% of the profit, I will greatly increase your pool of buyers. No funny business.” I almost laughed. Who does this person think they are? My mind could not even fathom trying to blackmail someone into selling drugs to their teachers. I failed to formulate a response before sleep took over my body, and my mind melted into a state of relaxation.

Waking up the following morning was especially difficult, and was made even more unpleasant by the text I had received sometime around midnight the previous night. “Need convincing.” Um no, actually, was my initial thought. However, the documents that followed, which contained all of my personal information; proof of some suspicious activity, and a picture of my car was all it took to change my mind. Feeling cornered and outsmarted, I asked how much this person wanted, and where they wanted it at.

Despite my rocky and terrifying morning, the rest of the day followed normally. And it was not until the final bell rang to dismiss all students from school, that I resumed the anxiety-inducing conversation with the stranger who newly became my business partner. Before making me swear to not ever speak about our encounter, and threatening to leak all of the evidence they have stacked against me, the stranger asked where I would like to meet in order to create a contract and discuss things further. I thought that this was definitely a scheme to get kidnapped and murdered, but it felt like I really did not have a choice. So, I offered to meet at Turtle Park. This used to be the main park in town, however it has since been retired and is now just an open lot with a swing set, and a rotting jungle gym. Despite the area no longer being used for its old purpose, people have still found ways to utilize the space. For example, drug deals. At any time of the day, a various number of cars could be settled at the lot, yet due to its location and lack of police who care, the spot is rarely ever of interest to anyone besides those looking to make a buck, or buy drugs.

We had decided to meet on Friday, after 9 pm. This was an optimal time, as this is the most busy period of the night on weekends. The cops would be far too preoccupied with traffic stops, bar fights, and domestic violence calls to be out searching for crime. As I pulled into the gravel parking area, my legs began to shake. What if this is an undercover agent? What if I am meeting with someone who plans to kidnap me? What if they don't show up and leak my information anyways ? Nervous thoughts flooded my mind, and I was not pulled from them until a light tap on my window nearly scared me out of my skin. I looked across the interior of my car and out of the passenger window to see.... Angel? I quickly rolled down the window and asked what she was doing here at this time. Obviously she was not the stranger who texted me. There is no possible way anyone like her could want anything to do with such risky business like this.

“Will, you know why I am here. Will you open the door please before someone drives by?”

The words sent shivers down my spine. How in the hell could this actually be happening? While lost in my thoughts, I switched the unlock button and allowed Angel to sit in the passenger seat next to me. Instantly, my nose was filled with her perfume, it smelled far too clean to be worn by a girl who has blackmailed me into a scholastic drug ring. She wore a set of black jeans and a vintage sweatshirt. Everything about her contradicted the situation she was in, all the way to her perfect blonde ponytail. Yet, the words that spilled out of her mouth threw any old ideology of her out of the window. The sweet, perfect, Angel everyone knew was nowhere close to this new devil that was sitting in my passenger seat. “ Okay, so, look. I'm sorry I had to basically force you to meet with me and stuff, but I had to be sure that you were not going to flake or snitch. This was my only option to ensure you would be honest in your actions.” Her professional demeanor scared me. The way her eyes bore into her knees, how her hands fidgeted; it

seemed like she had practiced the words a million times but not once rehearsed the act. She continued, “ I didn’t get as much as I was hoping for in terms of scholarships, and I need some extra cash. I have already thought of all of the details, and I know how to make this undetectable.” My mind was running at a speed of millions of miles in a minute, and all I could manage to ask was, “how?” Almost instantly, Angel began to describe how we would cover this whole scandal under the façade of a highschool relationship. We would act as a couple, and spend time together like one. She continued by explaining her plans of how to distribute, acquire, and disguise our illicit money-makers. My jaw must have been resting in my lap. Shock is the only word I could have used to describe this situation. Not only was Angel Finch in the passenger seat of MY car with just the two of us, but she was there on the premise of forcing me into starting a student-to-teacher drug distribution system. This had to all just be a bad reaction to some pills I forgot I took after school, or a really realistic dream. Her long and perfect eyelashes could not be capable of looking over the contact she asked me to sign. There is no universe in which her manicured fingers could have typed up and printed the document to swear us to secrecy. And there is absolutely no chance in hell that I signed the paper with her sparky little gel pen. But I did. It was not until after Angel shot me a giggle filled “goodbye” before stepping out of my car and into hers; that I was able to process what had just happened.

Driving home that night was strange. My brain struggled to understand the gravity of the events that just transpired. This new experience had my mind foggier than any drug ever had. Through the confusion bubbling in my cranium, I fought to ignore the warm and sweet feeling in my abdomen. The only thing worse than a girl blackmailing you into a drug ring, is the girl being really cute. I fell asleep that night wondering what kind of mess I just got myself into, and imagining every possible scenario. However in the midst of the worry associated with the job we had employed ourselves with, my imagination always managed to sneak in a slight chance of



holding her hand, or taking her to a basketball game. The excitement of these events heavily outweighed the pressure I felt on my chest about all other related occurrences. I wasn't worried about putting on a facade, I was very good at that. I was more concerned that I would begin to like the facade more than the reality.

I wasn't always good at putting on acts and pretending. Although my life might have been easier if I would have learned this skill earlier. Speaking of which, my life hasn't been anywhere close to bad. I was never concerned about when I would get to eat, having clean water to use, or even having both parents in the house. I consider myself lucky to be in a financially stable household. However, where the Edison's excelled in finance, we lacked in humanness. For as long as I could remember, my parents have never been very involved with me. My childhood consisted of expensive sports camps while my parents took vacations out of the country, or staying with babysitters when they wanted to spend their night out getting drunk at a bar. Instead of apologizing to me when my dad forgot to pick me up from the first day of the third grade, he threw a 10 dollar bill into the back seat. Since what seemed to be the day that I was born, love followed a dollar sign. Secrets and mistakes could all be covered up with a gift of an expensive item, or money. Wearing name brand clothing erased the fact that my dad cheated on my mom for the first half of my life, and the diamond necklace she wore covered up the fact that she found out. Similarly to how my athleticism canceled out all of the mornings I woke up hungover, my parents were great at allowing pretty things to sweep ugly truths under the rug.

Maybe this is where my little habit started. The comfort of knowing that I could never do anything bad unless I didn't have something good to present afterwards. Maybe only ever knowing love as a value, and not as a valuable, led me to chase other feelings. Or perhaps it was the lack of authentic love in my life that seemed to swallow up any positive emotions; that

sent me down a pursuit of a sense of security and peace. Regardless of why I started taking pills, it is for sure that I started selling them because of the most beautiful girl in all of Prescott.

After a few weeks of sitting together at lunch, taking turns driving the other one to school, and going on fake dates; Angel and I had almost everyone right where we wanted them. Of course, we had to lay low for a short period of time. It would be foolish to suddenly be dating at the same time that drugs started floating around the school. And despite the risky work hanging over me like an impending doom, I really enjoyed the weeks that consisted of Angel being my fake girlfriend. Throughout that short period of time, I picked up on many of her little secrets and habits. To start off, almost everything about Angel seemed like a perfectly painted mask. Her perfect outfits and hair contrasted the beat up apartment complex she lived in with her mother. Her perfect grades fought to conceal her addiction to marijuana. And her picture perfect smile shined far too bright for a girl who had 3 burner phones. These weeks broke my heart in so many ways. I was sad that such a seemingly bright and beautiful girl could get wrapped into these sorts of lifestyles. I felt stupid that I would have never detected even a trace of her second life had I not been pulled right into it. But I think I was hurt the most by her lack of true interest in me besides the advantage I was to her. In public, she would hold my hand and laugh at all of my jokes. Yet as soon as the car door slammed shut, she was cold, and distant. I hated that I had let myself fall into the trap that was her daytime act, and I hated even more that I could not get out of it. I hated that I wanted to get to know the real her, not the two acts or her issues, but her.

The day of our first official sale had come, and I would be lying if I said that I wasn't a little bit nervous. The risk greatly outweighed the reward for me, but I could not handle having Angel expose me and potentially ruin my life. Our plan was solid. First, we had spent the previous weeks photoshopping fake teacher's catalogs. They were placed in white envelopes and disguised as regular spam mail. We then were able to place these envelopes into the trucks of

mailmen through the post office. Angel apparently has a buddy who is allowing us to use his old P.O. Box that was never closed before he skipped town years ago. In the "mail", there is also a paper that holds instructions on how to provide a payment. At either the McDonald's on the south side of town, or the gas station close to the very center of the town; we have instructed our customers to leave their payment in cash. The cash will rest in two small cracks in the bricks of the buildings, both perfect hiding spots residing just feet from the entrances. The paper also informs the client that if the money is not present 3 days after the mail is sent, for reasons either regarding late payment or the payment being stolen, the client will be removed from the selling list after the payment is finally received. If this payment is not received, the client is to be exposed via all receipts of the illicit transactions. The plan seemed fool proof, and Angel seemed confident. However, both of these things failed to ease my nerves.

2 business days later, we discovered our plan was successful. \$50 hiding in plain sight at the gas station was the reassurance we needed, we were going to be able to make this happen. Angel was over the moon. Her masterful plan was going to be everything she hoped for it to be, and she could not have had a bigger smile on her face. She gratefully took her 30%, being \$15 and went home. Her cold demeanor chilled me to the bone. I don't think I will ever understand her ability to display such intense emotions, and then turn them off in a matter of seconds.

Weeks passed, and we made so much money. No one seemed to catch on to our little façade, and even better, no one caught on to our side hustle either. My heart was broken on an almost daily basis however. Pretending to be in a relationship with Angel was making my brain only fathom the possibility of it being a reality. It really appeared that Angel was better than me at many things, and pretending was the one she was the best at. I relished the moments she spent nuzzled up on my shoulder in public, and tried to forget the ones in which she treated me like a stranger. No amount of the money we made could ever equal the one thing I wanted the most,

her. I tried multiple times to have conversations with her that were not just small talk or friendly time-fillers. And I never even got a glimpse of a genuine emotion or thought. That was until I asked Angel about her desire to be involved in something like this. She spoke with a tone that screamed deceit. Every word that left her mouth felt like more were begging to follow that she was not permitted to say. She lied and said that she needed the money to get into college, that her mom couldn't handle the financial burden it would place on her. After that, she paused for a long time before asking me that no matter what, if I promised to never tell a soul that she was involved in this. She explained that it would ruin her reputation and furthermore break her mother's heart. I promised, and almost smiled because I felt like this was a small peek into the real Angel I so badly wanted to see. I was wrong.

As the school year was coming to an end, and our bank accounts were filling up at a ridiculous rate, I expected nothing except moving the tassel to the other side of my head and never returning to this high school again. I intended to leave everything about this school behind me, yet I did not know that I would never truly escape from this school. Angel and I were filled with panic when it was discovered that one of the English teachers for underclassmen was found dead in her home. With the teacher being a seemingly healthy and young woman, questions immediately buzzed through the hall. Everyone seemed to have a theory about what happened, but no one was prepared to fathom the truth. An overdose. Of all the horrified students, Angel and I definitely went the palest. Obviously, people would want answers about this incident, and we never calculated an overdose into our plans. I instantly started formulating plans to evade this fiasco. Creating alibis, making lies, misplacing blame and suspicion. However, my worries were quickly settled when Angel touched my hand and whispered "don't worry, I have a plan." Maybe it was her perfect smile, or the out-of-the-blue affection that distracted me from thinking sensfully, but regardless, I believed her.

I thought about her plan frequently, often wondering what it was. And I did not ever know of it until a loud knock boomed on the door of my chemistry class. The principal, Angel, and 2 police officers walked in. Instantly my heart dropped into the pool of my abdomen. As handcuffs were placed on my wrists, and my rights were read to me, all I could think about was how beautiful Angel looked while she explained to the officers that I was in fact the right guy.

Being charged with the possession and distribution of a drug in a school area would not have been the end of the world. In fact, it wouldn't have been the worst thing whatsoever. A drug charge with a sentence of 5 - 11 years sounded favorable compared to a manslaughter charge. My attorney, who was paid for by my heartbroken parents, stated that the drug charges were non-negotiable. He explained how there was so much evidence showing that I in fact was selling the pills to members of my community. However, it could be possible for me to get out on a plea deal in order to evade the combined sentence of a manslaughter charge and a drug charge which could earn me upwards of 30 years. In order for this to happen, I would have to plead guilty to both. I knew pleading guilty to the drug related charges was the smart thing to do, but in regards to the homicide, I had no idea. If I plead guilty, I would be taking responsibility for someone else's misuse of a pill. However, if I plead not guilty, a trial would follow and I could be left with a heavier sentence. I felt stupid for so many reasons. First of all, for selling drugs in the first place, then for allowing Angel to blackmail me into such a disastrous situation, and finally for trusting her enough to not snitch on me. I pleaded guilty to the distribution of illicit substances within a drug free school zone. My attorney gave me an assuring look as the judge then asked how I was to plead in relation to manslaughter by means of illicit substance distribution. My voice quivered audibly as I said "not guilty."

In the weeks following, the trial ensued. Witnesses, evidence, it all flew over my head. I could not seem to shake the feeling of betrayal that had put me here. When Angel finally took the

stand to testify against me, I finally learned why she had done the things she did. It turned out that Angel ratted me to a detective who had been trying to trace the seller of pills in the community for months. In exchange for immunity and a reward of a matched amount of money to which was involved in the drug ring, Angel told him everything. She went on to explain that the only reason why she got involved in this situation was to generate funds to pay for her mother's hospital bills, who was dying of cancer. Between this testimony, the text messages, and receipts that Angel and I carefully made to keep track of outstanding payments; I was practically already buried. In fact, I had been digging my own hole this entire time. After hearing Angel speak for what I thought was the last time, my ears began to ring. I knew my life was officially over. And my sentencing only confirmed this fear. 19 years for a felony drug distribution charge, and a charge of involuntary manslaughter.

I walked out of the courtroom with my head down, the expensive suit I wore was suffocating me, but I luckily got to trade it out for a super cool orange jumpsuit. I knew being in prison would not be anywhere close to the hell that was high school. But a whole new bell started for me when a big guy approached me in my cell and asked me to help him start smuggling in pills and trading them for commissary.

# What happened to \*\*\*\*\*?

By Jace Gordon

## Chapter 1:Confusion

Where am I? What is this place?

“Hello!?” shouted \*\*\*\*\*

There was no response. I was in a dark room, there were no windows, and only a small lamp was on. I wonder what happened. All I remember is being at my birthday party. I don't get it. Oh my god, was I drugged!? Wait there's no way, No one would do that to me, especially people at my birthday party. Or at least I think not. While my thoughts conclude, I hear footsteps approaching.

“Is someone there?” asked \*\*\*\*\*“

Finally you have woken up.” said \*\*\*\*\*

“Who are you?” asked \*\*\*\*\*

“Oh, who am I? What a wonderful question” said \*\*\*\*\*

“My name is Mike,” said Mike

I have never heard that name before, is it even his real name? Why is he wearing a mask? Is he using a voice changer? So many questions, I need to ask them.

“No need to introduce yourself, I already know who you are, Rosaline.” said Mike

How does he know my name? Does he know who I am? Has he been watching me?

Who the crap is this?

“So what do you want with me?” asked Rosaline

“Haha you will find out soon enough,” said Mike

What does that mean? What does he plan on doing with me? Another person walks in. Mike goes to the corner of the room, with this guy. I wonder what they are saying. Is it about me? It has to be about me. He is also wearing a mask, I wonder if he has a voice changer too, probably.

“Hello?” asked Rosaline.

“Shut up, Rosaline,” shouted Mike

Why was he so aggressive? What does he plan on doing? Is this new person going to take me somewhere?

“Hi Rosaline, my name is Karma,” said Karma

So that is who you are. I don't think I know him either. He is also using a voice changer. Maybe they are using fake names? They have to be fake names right? Why would they kidnap me, just for fun?

“Why are you doing this?” asked Rosaline

"That is none of your concern," said Karma

"Please I beg of you, please tell me what you want from me," said Rosaline

"Stop asking, you will find out soon enough," said Mike

"You can beg all you want, but you will have to wait," said Karma

Well crap, they don't want me to know anything. No matter how hard I try, I can't seem to figure anything out. I need to figure it out, I have to come up with a plan.

## **Chapter 2: Thinking Of A Plan**

"What are you thinking so hard about?" asked Mike

Huh, oh crap, I gotta think of something quick.

"Um, just thinking about how I'm super cold," said Rosaline

"You're cold?" asked Mike

"Yes, I did just say that, didn't I?" asked Rosaline

"Okay, here have my jacket," said Mike

That was unexpected. Wait a minute, they haven't done a single thing to me. They have just been "nice". Rather than me being tied up, and snapping at me, that's it. Maybe I should ask about it.

"Why are you being so nice to me?" Asked Rosaline

"You haven't hurt me in the slightest, you just won't tell me what's going on," said Rosaline

"Well because...we have to wait for another person to arrive," said Mike

"Shut up, Mike," shouted Karma

"Gosh, okay," said Mike

Why wasn't he allowed to speak about it? There is another person. I need to think of a plan before the third person gets there. At that very moment, my stomach growls. I had no idea how long I'd been down here. Has it been a few hours? A few days!?

"Are you hungry Rosaline?" asked Mike

"Uh, yes I am, can I please have something to eat?" asked Rosaline

"Also how long have I been down here?" asked Rosaline

"Karma, go upstairs and go get some food," demanded Mike

"Fine, I'll cook something up," said Karma

"To answer your second question, a couple of hours, now shut up." snapped Mike

So there was an upstairs, am I in a basement? I wonder how many floors there are, hopefully only two. I need to think of a plan. After I eat I need to do something. Oh my gosh, what if they put something in my food!? No, if they wanted to drug me, they would have already, right? I can surprisingly smell the food from here. That means that the kitchen is close to the basement, or wherever I am. Would I have time to go? No, I need to think this out, I need a good plan. At that time Mike checked his phone. It went quiet for a bit, but then Mike said.

"Rosaline, the food should be done soon," said Mike

"Okay, uh thanks I guess" said Rosaline

"Of course, I mean you will need to eat," said Mike

What did that mean? Why would I need to eat? I mean I know why, but he sounds like it's for something specific. At that same time, Karma came down. The food smelled so good. I could



not wait to eat that. At that time, I heard the basement door open and heard Karma coming down the stairs.

"Here you go Rosaline," said Karma

"Thank you I guess," said Rosaline

"Come on Karma we need to eat as well, let's head upstairs," said Mike

"We will go and we will see you in a bit Rosaline," said Karma

They walk upstairs, the walls are very thin. I can hear everything. I can hear their footsteps. This is the perfect time to come up with a plan. So I first need to make it upstairs. I need to ask what time it is. I need to get out of here by nightfall. So when everyone goes to bed, I need to get out of here. As I conclude that thought, I suddenly hear arguing. As I try to listen this is what I hear

### **Chapter 3: What I heard**

"What do you mean!? Asked Mike

"You're telling me that you kissed her!?" Shouted Mike

"Calm down, how did you even figure it out?" Asked Karma

"Look, it's right here on my phone!"

"Bro, that was not the case, I swear!"

"No shot, nice try."

"When did you do it huh?"

I hear shuffling, it starts to get loud. Are they shouting? What about? Omg, they are distracted, I can try and free myself." Luckily, I had swiped the fork from my plate. I don't understand how they didn't see it, but I am glad. As I try and cut myself free, I hear them shouting.

"I didn't mean to do it, I had tripped!"

"It was a setup I swear!"

"I don't care, after this is over, I don't want to talk to you."

"Ever again, understand?"

"Okay, whatever."

"It's not whatever, you kissed my girlfriend, accident or not!"

Wow, Mike was getting more aggressive. Not going to lie he kinda reminds me of my boyfriend, Tyler. Oh do I wish he was here right now, I miss him so much. As I conclude that thought, tears start to roll down my face. Crap, I don't want to cry. I just try to continue to get myself free. I struggle for a while, but then the rope slowly comes loose.

"IT WAS AN ACCIDENT, GET OVER IT!"

"I WAS SET UP!"

"I DON'T CARE NI-"

Wait what, did he just say? I mean he stopped himself, but still. So I was right, they are using fake names. Hm, I wonder what their real names are. All I know is that Karma's real name starts with an N. After all, that's all I could make out. They were so loud, it was starting to get on my nerves.

"Crap dude, I'm sorry I almost said your name."

"Dude, it's fine, you caught yourself, but you might want to stop talking about it."

"The walls are very thick, and it's very doubtful she is asleep."

"Yeah, you're right."

"Look man, I swear it was an accident, I didn't mean to."

"It's alright, I believe you, I kinda overacted."

"So forgiven?"

"Only if you forgive me too."

At that moment I kinda forgot that I was kidnapped, they seemed so sweet. At that time I end up getting myself free, but then I hear them coming towards me, so I had to act like I was still tied up.

"What are you doing!?" asked Mike

"N-nothing," said Rosaline

"It looks like you have been crying, I wouldn't say that is nothing."

"Okay yeah I have been, but what is it to you?"

"You are literally the reason I am in this situation."

"Okay, that might be true, but we haven't even done anything to you."

"That is true, but your excuse was that you were waiting on someone."

"That's right, so stop crying."

"You will need your energy."

Karma had been awfully quiet, I don't understand. What was going through his mind? At that time Karma's phone started to ring. He picked it up.

#### **Chapter 4: My Plan**

"This is Karma speaking, who is this?"

"Okay, yes she has been given food."

"She was crying, but she has stopped."

"Okay, see you soon."

"Mike, that was boss, she is on her way."

"Hm okay, let's go upstairs and meet her."

"We will be back, no funny business."

"Okay.."

Who was the boss? She was a girl. I need to get out of here. I don't know anything though. I guess I'm just going to have to make a run for it. I carefully slip my hands-free. I take a breath, and I slowly start to move. As I go up the stairs, it creaks. I hope they didn't hear that I'm almost there.

"Karma, did you hear that?"

"No?"

"Hm okay, I guess I'm just worried about meeting the boss."

Okay, good they didn't. I make it out the door. Wait, why does this look like Tyler's house? Hm must be a similar house. Wait, that means it should have the same layout. That means that there is a back door. I will make a run for it. As I'm running, I stop. Why is Kate's car here? Omg, wait why is Tyler's car here as well, and Nick's? I turn around.

"The gig is up, Mike."

"She knows."

"W-why?"

"WHY DID YOU DO THIS!"

“HOW COULD YOU DO THIS.”

I break down in tears. I can't breathe. Why are they running towards me? I get dizzy. Then everything goes black.

“Rosaline?” asked Tyler

“W-what happened!?” Asked Rosaline

I feel really tired. I look down, I'm tied up. I can't move. Ugh, I feel like crap. As I conclude that thought, I start to remember what happened before.

“TYLER GETS AWAY FROM ME!”

“Calm down Rosaline, we don't want to upset her.”

“Upset who? Kate?”

“No..look Rosealine, this was originally a joke. It was supposed to be me, Nick, and Kate.”

“We told your parents, and they thought it would be funny to see how you would react.”

“Okay, so then where is Kate?”

“That's the thing, we used a real app...to communicate.”

“I guess someone saw these.”

“Tyler...what are you trying to say?”

“Where is Kate!?”

“She's....she's dead Rose.”

“We don't know who the person is, but we think it's real.”

What..no. She was my best friend. They said this was supposed to be a joke, a prank. No one was supposed to get hurt, right? Tears start to run down my face. As I conclude that thought all I hear is a scream. I then realize Nick is not here.

“Tyler, who was that?”

“That was Nick, she took him, it's been like this for almost an hour now.”

“What..no..I don't, I can't lose another person.”

“I know, I don't want to lose anyone else either.”

“Tyler, why?”

“We thought it would be funny, we didn't think anything bad would happen.”

“I guess...I just can't believe she is gone.”

“How did you know?”

“She showed us, it was so disturbing.”

“What..what happened to her..”

I don't know why I asked that, but I did. I wanted to know, she was my best friend of 15 years. I don't understand why she had to go.

“Her throat was slit, there were cuts all over her arms.”

“It looked like she was tortured beforehand.”

“She also had rope burns everywhere, her face was beaten up, and there was blood everywhere.”

“I think that is what she is doing to Nick right now.”

“I'm sorry.”

## **Chapter Five: The last breath**

"It wasn't your fault, this all was supposed to be a prank."

"Yeah, but I can't help but feel that it's all my fault."

"I was the one with the idea."

"I get that, but still."

"Well, thanks."

"Yeah of course."

"By the way, I can get loose again."

"The fork is in the front pocket, that's what I used before."

"Um, but you will have to grab it.."

"That is fine, I can do it, it's not that big of a deal."

We struggle a bit, but then we finally get it. Tyler gets out first. Nick screams again. I hate hearing him scream, it sounds like he is in so much pain. Tyler then gets me free.

"Okay, let's go, Rose."

"What no, we can't just leave Nick here."

"It would be 2 against one."

"Uh okay fine."

We walk to the kitchen first, and we grab some protection. We then head towards the room, where we can hear Nick. We open the door, it's just some sound playing off of the tv. We looked around, we found Nick, he was already dead. His throat was slit, there were slashes all up his arms, he had rope burn, his face was all busted, and there was blood everywhere."

"Looks like this killer has a pattern."

"Come on Rose, let's go."

"Okay."

He let me go first, I found that weird, but I didn't question it. I just continued walking, how I wish I didn't.

"We need to go to the police, let's go Tyler."

"I'm sorry Rose."

"For what?"

"We already said this wasn't your fault."

"No, not for that, for this."

"What do you me-"

I stopped. My throat...it's sliced. No..no way. This was Tyler all along. I fall to the ground, gasping for air.

"W-why..?"

"You cheated."

## The Project

By Isabella Krajefska

My name is Finn. I have a very complex brain. I love to research and explain and know things. I know a little just about everything. My mom is a forensic biologist. She also used to be a professor at a college near our city. I used to come in with my little Go Diego Go notebook and take notes on analyzing evidence to solve most common everyday crimes. You know, your ordinary frequent armed robberies in the projects, or the occasional hit and runs in the heavier trafficked parts of the city. Little did I know just 9 years later, I would encounter something dark myself, something very unexpected.

*~Two weeks earlier~*

The sound of chaos consumes the air. Lunchboxes hastily thrown off the top of the fridge, papers flying every which way, and an iPad somewhere in the distance playing an endless loop of child sensory videos. Wallie is crying because his heel won't go into his light up Paw patrol shoes and Slyvie is silently sobbing over her nightly journal that she forgot to do and is sloppily writing down words. Mom is back and forth, down the hall, down the stairs, up the stairs with Wallie's shoes that he threw down (out of frustration) and back up the hallway. Her forehead is sweaty and goes wrinkled with anger when she sees that Slyvie hasn't touched her soggy

waffles, and is still trying to finish her homework from last night. "Alright get in the car everyone."

She says sharply. "Are you coming Finn? Or is Jonah taking you?" "J is taking me." I say, not looking up from my iPad. I'm sitting at the kitchen island waiting for my human biology grade to go through. J will probably be another 5 minutes, which is kinda pushing it but we'll somehow still make it to school with 10 to spare. "Okay" mom says, peeling Slyvie away from the counter.

"We're heading out. Wallie has soccer after school and Slyvie has a tumbling recital. If you even want to come to that. And thanks for the help this morning", she says, in such a sarcastic tone I almost cringe. Her look is stern and disappointed. I didn't help her at all this morning with the kids. But before I can say anything else she's already halfway out the door with a bawling Wallie- in his crocs, now. "Bye Mo-." The door slams shut. Something heavy draws in my stomach. I dance around my last remaining Cinnamon Toast Crunch in my cereal bowl. Before I can dwell on feeling like a shitty son for too long, a loud knock is at the door. It's J. "Aye cmon man! We've gots to go!" He yells. Anyone can tell who "J"(aka Jonah) is based on his out of pocket comments and his distinct dialect. As of last year he will only respond and acknowledge the title "J". Not "Jay". Just "J". His supposedly goody-two-shoes real name of "Jonah", was not cool enough to be called by. All of his football friends have short unique nicknames, like Duwane Wilson. They call him "Dubs". J, unlike "Dubs" , nicknamed himself though. J has a chronic case of trying-to-fit-in-so-hard-it's-extremely-obvious disease, so he gave himself the title. Little does he know people call him "J" just because it's funny. I have to humor him though. J has been my best friend since I was practically a fetus. I grab my Ipad and binder and head out the door to his old blue ford escape. It's a beater car, but he keeps it nice. I get in and immediately smell

strong febreze masking a lingering smell. "J. Did you just light one?". "No". He says as he looks at me, his eyes bloodshot. I sigh. Only J.

School starts at 8:05, and we're pulling into the back parking lot at 7:56. "I still have time to get a honey bun from the vending machine", J says, his voice excited. I tell him bye almost immediately after we park because I need to review one more time for my vocab quiz in American History, and, quite frankly, I just can't stand the smell of this car anymore. Inside the school I walk past all of the homecoming king posters, well, Isaak Shattler's posters mostly. That stuck up prick knows damn well he's going to win no matter what. By being the son of the most famous realtor in the tri county area, he's basically guaranteed to be king. My dad used to be the co-realtor, but Isaaks mom left his side of the company to upgrade hers. My dad now is an insignificant part of her multi million dollar buisness. She even sells merchandise. Isaaks ego pisses me off, probably because his parents do. And girls just magnetize toward him like a moth to a street light. I don't understand. But who am I kidding? I've never even had a significant girlfriend- unless you count the time Serenity Kramer and I held hands on the bleachers in 7th grade, and it got put on every social media platform in less than 3 minutes. Oh "by who"? You ask? Johnny Bravo himself, Isaak. Serenity told me she wanted to be "just friends" that next day, and that weekend she went to the Valentine's dance with Isaak. Maybe I'm just bitter.

Regardless, he just makes me mad. I made it to Mr. Leonard's room with 5 minutes to spare. I look over my really easy vocab nonchalantly and wait for the principal to come over the intercom with his same old same old "Good Morning Trojans"! Followed by the pledge of allegiance and some generic quotes about changing the world or the golden rule or something. After all of that's

over we start the quiz. I'm done first of course, and once I turn it in, Mr. Leonard tells me to grab from the stack of papers off his desk. He says we'll be talking about it once everyone is done. The paper is about this group project that involves going into the woods and using the same tactics that Lewis and Clark did to map out a small area. Gross. I hate being outside. And group projects. I walk up to Mr. Leonard's desk to see if I can work alone. Before I can even say anything he says "Finn, it has to be a group project or you'll get a zero". Whatever. At least it's Friday.

School passes by fairly quickly and as soon as J sees me in the courtyard he starts quickly heading towards me. "AYE! Finn, wait up!" I slow my pace with a huff under my breath. "You wanna be my partner for that Clark and Kent project"? He says. "You mean Lewis and Clark"? I say sharply. J just gets on my nerves. "Yeah, same dif. Also can Chrissy work with us?" "Who is Chrissy?" I stop and say. "My friend, she's in the same hour as me and she's cool. Leonard said we could work with people in other hours." "I mean fine whatever." I say, annoyed. "Where is she?" "She's at math team or something. I don't really know. You wanna get taco bell?" Math team... I think to myself. That girl must be smart. So why on earth is she friends with J? My inner monologue continues as I agree to J's T-Bell idea and head towards his car.

The next day I wake up around 9 o'clock. Mom's in the laundry room talking to my dad, and it smells strongly of coffee and Lysol. J texts me. "Yo, so Chrissy says she's got like this chess thing next weekend and band every day next week so we have to do this project like, today". Ugh. I was really looking forward to binging a new true crime documentary today but whatever. "OK. Meet at the south side of Brooke Crest Park in a half hour." I got a bag together



with the map paper Mr. Leonard gave us for the project, bug spray, a small first aid kit, a journal, and binoculars. I can already hear the degrading comments about the contents of my bag from J. I don't really care. I want to do this project and I want to get it done right (and safely). I ask my mom if I can take dad's car, since he has nothing to do. He was supposed to be on a business trip in Florida, but he got screwed over by the Shattler company. Again. She hesitantly says yes, and I grab the keys and head outside.

## ACT 2

The air is brisk and the air is slightly misty at Brooke Crest. It's very dim and gloomy out. A perfect day to lay in bed and watch my shows. I sigh, grab my supplies and head over to the entrance. To my astonishment J is already waiting at the gate, along with a girl with red hair, in neat braids, and wearing glasses. "Sup Finster!" J says obnoxiously. "This is Chrissy. She loves like history and maps and whatever." J sounds so unintelligent sometimes, especially trying to impress a female. Chrissy shyly waves. That poor girl doesn't know what she's gotten herself into. "The forecast is calling for weather around 1, so we need to get a move on." I say, already advancing into the park. Brooke Crest is a recreational park, with pathways along the perimeter for runners, a children's playground, senior citizen areas, and even a dog park. It's like a smaller version of Central Park. People take yoga classes, meditate, and have picnics all the time.

That's why I hate it. Lots of people in lots of nature. That's why I suggest we go over to the well wooded areas, that have less traveled running trails and paths that go deep into the area. The other two don't bat an eye. I think J is stoned again anyway, and Chrissy just keeps staring at him with this stupid smile and her face is red. Ugh. I can't wait for this to be over.

I get out the paper and sketch a small circle to mark where we start. I give Chrissy the journal, to observe our surroundings as we go through the woods; and J my binoculars to “help”. We all take turns deciding where to go. First we went right, my decision, and we walked a good half mile before we found a small creek. J is staring at something through my binos intently. “What do you see J”? Chrissy asks, eagerly waiting to write something in the journal. “Just a bunch of these giant birds. There’s gotta be a hundred.” My ears perk up. “Give me those”, I say and look through the binoculars. To my surprise, there are lots of birds, like 10-15, and they’re vultures I think. “That’s weird”, I say out loud. Chrissy is mouthing numbers and counting each one. I’m glad that she’s putting effort in but I don’t know if this is important to our project or not. It is quite strange though. “Let’s go left towards them next”, J says eagerly. I sigh. “J that path is so small, we’re gonna get thorns and ticks all over us.” Chrissy shivers. “Isn’t the point of the project to venture out of your comfort zone like these guys did?” J says as he points at the paper. That has to be one of the most intelligent things he has ever said. “Fine”. We march forward. A quarter mile in, I smell something of gas and eggs. “J! You’re so gross”, I yell, covering my nose. “Whatchu talkin about man?” J says, ticked off. “I smell it too”. Chrissy states as she puts her crewneck over her nose. “It’s not me!” J exclaims. “Yeah right J.” We keep advancing on. The smell gets undoubtedly stronger. J covers his nose. “Dawg what is that? That’s awful man.” About 50 yards from where the birds are perched, the smell is repulsive. It almost knocks me backward. Like every dumpster in the city was dumped and blended with roadkill. “Guys, let’s just go back the way we came.” I say through my shirt. “Oh thank God.” J says as he turns around. Chrissy is behind him. She doesn’t move. She’s staring at a spot in the

woods. Emotionless and still. "Come on Chrissy", J says approaching her. "We'll just map the other side of th-" J goes dead silent. "What. The. Fuck." He whispers. I walk up to them, utterly confused. "Guys, what are you look..." Blood. Matter. What is that from? I follow the path of it on bedded leaves and brushed vegetation, until I see an arm. And a torso. And legs. Legs that are still. A Halloween store. A horror movie scene. The smell. The flies. The maggots. My brain feels heavy and my stomach is burning. I feel acid in my throat. My heart is going to fall out of my ass. My eyes are drawn to the head. Posed to the side, turned, facing me. A head. A head with a face. A face that used to smile, and cry, and see, and now it's dead. It's not real. I'm dreaming. Wake up. Wake up. WAKE UP. Before I can compel myself, and before my brain can trigger the rest of my body to turn around, I notice the clothes. A tie and a blazer. And dress pants. All stained with blood. I look back at the face. It all comes together into one unfortunate click. The lifeless blue eyes and stained blonde hair stare at me, cold and dead. I finally gasp. Because the breathless body on the ground is Isaak Shattler.

J is violently throwing up. Hands on his knees, painfully heaving. Chrissy is still standing there, silently crying. Two streams of tears going down her face. It felt like hours. Just standing here. Trying to figure out what to do. It feels like my body is weighed down. I can't move. The loud buzzing of flies and the horrendous, god awful stench. Why. There are so many questions flooding my brain. But I finally come to. "I have to call 911." I say monotonously. J continues to hurl. Chrissy silently nods. Her eyes still stuck on the horrific scene. I fish my phone out of my backpack. My fingers are shaking when I tap in the numbers. "911, what is the nature of your emergency?" An older lady states. "Hi I just discovered a body at Brooke Crest Park." I hear the

ladle audibly gasp. "Sir, where exactly are you located? Are you sure the individual isn't breathing? Have you checked for a pulse?" I glimpse back at Isaak's body and wince. "Ma'am, the body is decaying." I say awkwardly. "I'm near the south side of Brooke Crest on a path in the woods. I'm with two other people. We believe the body is Isaak Shattler." "Okay sir, I need you guys to just sit tight and wait for authorities to arrive. What's your names?" She says with a slight panic growing in her voice. "I'm Finn Campbell, and I'm with Jonah Wilson and Chrissy..." I look over at her. She quietly whispers "North." "North." I say as I watch J steady himself, and softly turns Chrissy around. She hugs him and starts sobbing. I kind of forgot I was on the phone until I hear "OKAY SIR?" Loudly in my ear. "I'm sorry, what was that?" I say, shaking my head. "I said stay on the phone with me till the officers get there." She says sternly. "Okay ma'am."

What feels like an eternity passes before a bigger built officer comes trucking through the bushes. I hear sirens in the distance and the occasional cut in of the radar on his shirt. He comes up to us and asks if we're okay. He solemnly takes in the scene of the crime. "Alright guys my deputy is gonna come get you and take you to the car for a couple questions. You're not in trouble." Right as he finishes his sentence, a scrawny, tall, younger looking cop approaches us. He looks over at the body. "Sweet Jesus." He proclaims. "Just get them out of here!" The older officer barks. J takes Chrissy's hand and I start to walk behind the officer and out of the woods. Word must have broken out quick. Lots of vehicles are scattered throughout the area. People are holding each other, crying. A news reporter fixes her hair just before speaking in an overly positive voice for this kind of situation into a microphone. It's almost like

people want stuff like this to happen. I see a solemn faced woman silently walking towards the path. A police officer looks like he's trying to reason with her. Her blonde hair flies over her head as she continues on. I can tell by her pristine makeup and flowing blouse, it's Rebecca Shattler. Isaaks mom. Tears create stains on her powdered face. She passes us and I realize I that too have tears forming.

The road to the police station was a completely silent journey. My mind was racing. Who could have done this? And why? What's wrong with people. We walk inside with the skinny cop and his radar goes off. "Uh the body is confirmed to be -static- Isaak Shattler- static-. I hang my head down. "Yeah -static- the mother said the victim has been missing since -static- Thursday after school -static-." The radar goes on. I knew it was him, but part of me hoped I was just seeing things. There's so much confusion. He was missing? And no one said anything? The radar cuts in to interrupt my thinking. "Officer Deginero -static- the mother says the victim was thought to be at a friends house -static-". J is silent and stoic, his arm around Chrissy, who's emotionless. "What were you guys doing in the woods?" An officer asks. "Sir, we were doing a group project for our history teacher, Mr. Leonard. You can call the school and ask to speak to him." I say. "We're not accusing you of anything, we were just worried about other high schoolers being in the woods during this time." We clearly are fine. They searched our bags and clothes for a gun because Isaak was shot. We don't have much more to offer, unfortunately we were just the ones that found the body. My mom comes into the station in a hurry, followed by J's aunt, and a frail old man, who must belong to Chrissy. J embraces his aunt and starts crying, my mom comes up to me and lightly rubs my back. The old man walks up to Chrissy, takes her

hand, and leads her outside. The way home is so surreal. It's like I was just in an alternate reality. Like I'm going to go home and it's all going to go back to normal, and Isaak will be alive, and we never saw that horrific mess, and I can go to sleep like nothing happened. As soon as I get into the house I head for the bathroom. I take a scalding hot shower. To burn the memories, the smell of the woods, and the sight of someone I once knew. After that I get right into bed. I close my eyes so tight my head starts hurting. With every blink I see his body. His dead eyes. His purple hands. His head cracked open. Everything. I'm scared to keep seeing this image so I turn on a movie to calm myself. Luckily, I eventually succumbed to my racing mind that I became so tired and racked out.

I wake up, and a solid 5 seconds pass before it hits me all again. Suddenly, I am the weak stomached one. I sprint to the bathroom and throw up acid. The roar of my heaving is fueled by the sight of Isaak in my brain. I walk into the kitchen to grab some medicine, because I have a headache as well. I see bags. Three or four, decent sized suitcases laid out in the living room. It's all my dad's stuff. At first I thought my mom was kicking him out. My dad storms in with another sweatshirt. "Where are you going?" I ask. "Northern Cali for some realtor conference." He mumbles. "Oh. I'm sorry I left your car at the park." I say. He perks his head up. "It's ok. Mom is going to take me to it and then I'll be out of here." He says wishfully. I find it funny he's so eager to leave in such a traumatic time. I walk near the medicine cabinet and look out the kitchen window. I see an officer outside. I rub my eyes, almost comically, because at this point I think I'm still asleep, or the amount of officers I saw yesterday is messing with my mind. I can't even get a word out before a loud knock is at the door. The officer holds up his badge. My mom

opens the door. "Is this the Campbell residence?" He says strongly. My mind is going insane. Do they think I did something to Isaak?" "Um... yes" my mom squeaks out. I come back to reality. The officer barges in. My dad stands up straight. "James Campbell?" The officer asks. "Yes". My dad says, without an ounce of fear. "Sir. You're under arrest." He turns my dad around as my dad willingly sticks his hands behind his back. "For what?!" My mom screams. "For the murder of Isaak Shattler." My dad stares me dead in the eyes, a slight smile pulling at his lips, as the officer clicks the handcuffs.

## Working With Nightmares

by Kialea Hardin

On this rather spine chilling Halloween night in St. Louis, the full moon lit up all that the city's street lights couldn't reach. People lined up shoulder to shoulder, despite the cold air, to be the first crowd of the night to visit one of the biggest haunted attractions known there: The Darkness. People waited impatiently, chattering over one another as they hoped for the stone building's large metal gates to open. Soon, their fear filled screams would flood the building followed by the laughter of their friends. Or so they thought.

Listening to her favorite rock music, Clarice Romero tapped the eraser of her pencil on her sketchbook that was filled with creatures and ghouls of all shapes and sizes. Some of the creatures were gruesome things from the darkest of nightmares, while others were cute and unsuspecting. Her mind was always running with different ideas that she could use to transform the actors of The Darkness into. It was her job after all. She has been working there for years, every year adding a bit more each time to ensure the place continues to live up to its name. Clare was snapped out of her deep thoughts, though, as she heard her phone ringing beside her on the desk she was sitting at. She quickly put away her earbuds and grabbed the phone once she saw the name Alex pop up on the small screen.

Clare has been friends with Alex for longer than she can remember. Long enough that they pretty much think of each other as sisters. Both of them have endured their own fair share of haunted attractions and late night horror movie binge watching. And now, after their many years of knowing each other, they have gotten their life long dream job of finally working at a haunted house together. Clare was known as the "monster creator" and Alex's talent was creating an eerie ambiance through the haunted house's interior decoration.



Clare picked up her smartphone and swiped over the answer button, leaning back in her swivel chair as she chimed out a "Hello?"

"Hey Clare! I know you're probably busy brainstorming or something, but I kind of need you over at The Darkness as soon as possible." Alex was trying to sound calm over the phone, but Clare could definitely tell that her voice sounded rushed.

"What seems to be the problem?" She was now talking while gathering up her things that she would need, as well as tying her long hair into a quick ponytail.

Alex was writing down where the new mechanical props were going while continuing on with the conversation. "Well apparently the word spread quickly about how we are going all out tonight, and people are already flooding in. So, we need the actors ready to try to open early to satisfy the crazy people."

An audible sigh could be heard from Clare through the phone. Sure she was excited about her job, but that was a lot of stress unloaded in just the span of a couple of minutes.

"Alright I'll be on my way."

"Great! See ya when you get here!" Clare could just imagine the silly grin on her friend's face.

Clare then tucked her phone into the back pocket of her ripped jeans while grabbing her favorite hoodie that was already stained from different splotches of paint. She half ran to her living room, threw on a pair of black Converse, grabbed her car keys and ran out to her car after locking the front door. She turned on some music to mentally prepare herself for the work she had ahead of her, keeping images of creatures she could use as examples for when she arrived. Really-- she tended to overthink things, but having music to block out the negative helped out with her constant anxiety of messing up and disappointing her co-workers.

After driving for about fifteen minutes, she arrived at the haunted house and parked out in the back to avoid the large crowd that was indeed still growing. She made sure to lock up her car, and walked down the dimly lit back alley. Her shoes sloshed in puddles now and again due to the many unseen potholes. She groaned from annoyance. The walk seemed to take twice as

long as it normally did to make it to the back of the building, its shadow looming over her. Clare opened the heavy metal door, cringing slightly from the loud creak it made as she walked in.

Inside the building, everything was dark, and every inch of the walls was covered in some kind of horror themed decoration. The few spot lights, props grotesquely covered with fluorescent paint, and the erratic strobe light kept Clare from seeing clearly. The instant smell of the fog machine helped her to find her bearings. Off in the distance, the timers set off the laughing and screaming animated props. Even though this place was made to terrify visitors, this was paradise to Clarice. She was able to put her imagination and art techniques to the test on everything and then some.

Clare went down a hall and found the door to her studio which was originally used as a security office. The room held cosmetics of all kinds, as well as costumes of all shapes and sizes. One wall, however, was used for the security monitors to ensure the safety of the visitors and workers. After she set down the rest of her coffee from her trip on the security desk, Clare glanced around the room for anything new as she usually did. Everything seemed normal, except for a small stack of yellow papers that wasn't on her desk a few days ago. Now curious, she picked up the stack and began reading the bold print at the top.

**"Mysterious Disappearances at The Darkness"**. Shaking her head, she continued reading to find out that this had happened just last year when she was on a haunted vacation. Though it seemed to be a small group, that was still a group too many. No one even knows how it happened either. She set the papers down and turned around just to come face to face with Alex, causing her to jump back in surprise with a loud gasp since she was already on edge from the new found information.

"Jesus, Alex! You could've given me a heart attack! You know that's what knocking is for!" She leaned back against the desk to catch her breath as her friend just gave a small, light-hearted laugh.

"Well. First, your door was open. Second, what has you so on edge anyways? You're never spooked this easily." Alex crossed her arms and leaned slightly to the side to see the papers that Clare had just finished reading. It seemed as if a lightbulb had just gone off for the

red head once she spotted them. “Oh, those. I was meaning to tell you about them when I saw you. Rumor has it that some beast formed itself from all of the fear in the building, and went after those who showed the most fear themselves.” She then shrugged it off like it was nothing. “But a rumor is a rumor, maybe those people didn’t really go missing in the first place. Maybe it’s some Halloween joke to scare people even more than just the haunted house itself.”

Clare still didn’t know what to think, whether it was true or not. What if she was going to be involved in something that would only show up in someone’s nightmares this year? “I don’t know... But what I do know is that we have a lot of work to do if we want this place to be open now. Just, let’s make sure we keep a closer eye on any suspicious people walking in. OK?”

“Yeah, yeah. I get it. I’ll keep track of the people coming in. I’m also going to tell the actors that the makeup artist is ready.” Alex tried giving a reassuring smile to hopefully calm her worried friend down before going out to find where all the actors were hiding out.

Clare shook her head again, letting out a sigh as she looked down at the floor. After hearing footsteps coming down the hall, though, she took in a deep breath and stood upright to get her things ready. That way it was easier to go through the motions. As her co-workers walked in, one after another, she grabbed costumes for them to change into before she started on their masks and makeup. As she was working on their makeup: blending, shading, and sculpting, she felt as if the actors were talking amongst themselves about her. She could even feel their glares burning holes through her as she was working on another person. Clare was honestly starting to believe that they were saying how they could do better on their own than what she can as a whole. It was really making her anxiety skyrocket. But, as she did before, she had to push all of the negative down and continue on with the task at hand.

Eventually, after some long hours of non-stop creature making, she was finally done and the actors set out to their posts. Now all she had to do was sit in her room and wait for when the actors needed a touch up, and to keep an eye on the monitors to make sure everything was running smoothly. Which, for the most part, it normally did.

After a couple of groups went through, she was glad to hear everyone having such a great time. Maybe she was a little too worried about everything. So she took an opportunity to

get away from her desk and go to a vending machine that was just a few halls down from where her office was. A long night like tonight was going to need a lot more caffeine than just one cup of coffee. Clare got to the little break room at the end of the small “Employees Only” hall and pulled out some money from her hoodie pocket to buy a soda from the machine.

For the minute it took for the soda to fall from its place in the machine, Clare was zoned out on the slightly open door of the break room. She couldn't help but have this off feeling that someone, or something, was watching her from some unknown distance. The thud from the soda reaching the dispenser opening made her flinch as she shot her gaze back to what she had been doing. “Jeez Clare, get out of your head...” She spoke to herself to hopefully calm a nerve as she grabbed her much needed drink. Turning on her heels, she peaked out of the door first to make sure no one was there before heading back to her studio.

On her way back, there were more screams, much louder than those from the previous group that had gone through. On top of that, the props and actors were beginning to sound quite a bit more realistic. Clare shrugged this off for now, setting her drink down on her desk once she entered the room so she could check the security monitors just to ease some growing suspicion. Hoping to see everything in order and everyone having a great time, she switched on the screens and selected the main halls with a few clicks of a mouse. What Clare saw made her blood run cold.

What she saw on the screens was something she only thought she'd seen in movies. Blood. Lots of it as well as carnage and wicked beasts everywhere. The actors that were once people were no longer humans wearing costumes of creatures from one's nightmares. It was as if the costumes had taken over their bodies and reanimated themselves to bring those nightmares to life. The harmless weaponry props now shone in the lights of the haunted halls to further prove Clare's worst thoughts, and that these people were being murdered before her eyes in real time. It was a massacre... And it seems as more people walked in, the more the monsters became bloodthirsty savages.

She had to step away from the desk, grabbing onto her office chair to lean her weight on before she allowed herself to pass out. “This can't be happening... It was only a joke! Right?”

Alex had said so!” Clarice was trying to assure herself that if she believed it wasn’t happening, then everything would go back to normal. “Yeah, I must have fallen asleep from lack of things to do. I’m dreaming some kind of sick night terror...” But she was snapped out of those thoughts at the sound of something sharp being dragged along the hall outside her room.

Thinking fast, Clare scanned the room for a decent place to hide herself. She’s seen enough movies to know closets and tables were the first things to be checked. So in the time she had, she quickly ran to the back of the small room and covered herself in the leftover costumes and props that were lazily tossed around to begin with. Having a small hole of a half finished mask to look through, she watched to see who, or even what, would walk through the door. She practically held her breath from the amount of fear that was bubbling inside her.

After what seemed to be an eternity, to Clare at least, she could see a figure take its first couple of steps into the room. It was eerily slow, as if it was also scanning the room itself for any signs of life at all before it completely made an appearance. From the poor angle she sat herself at, she tried her best to see what monstrosity decided to come looking for her. With what she could make out, she could see that the figure was abnormally tall and slender to the point it had to duck down to move into the room. Its face was ghostly pale and lacked all features, except for a large grin that reached from each side of its face, extending enough to make the ends rip through the skin. How it was able to “look” around was beyond her since it didn’t have any eyes.

The thing, when it walked, used its long arms as an extra set of legs to keep its balance since it had to stay hunched over due to the lower ceiling in the room. Clare held her hand over her mouth to ensure her breathing wouldn’t be heard. She heard that when you lose one sense, the others heighten. So since this thing can’t see, surely it’s using sound and touch to determine what is near. Or even infrared... in which case Clare would be caught and the thing is just toying with her. When she leaned back into the mask, the thing was gone from its original spot, and she couldn’t see it.

Before Clare could even react, she was ripped out of her spot by long, slender claws as the beast just grinned. It was holding her high enough for them both to be face to face, its already sickening smile widening furthermore in satisfaction as it practically dragged her out of

the room. Clare was speechless from fear, not even capable of letting out a yell for help of any kind. Thoughts were running through her mind at a million miles per second. “*Where is it taking me? Why me? Why is any of this even happening? What even is this **thing**?*”

Yet again, Clare jumped back into reality as she was dropped off and left in the center of the haunted house. She knew this because it was the biggest room in the building, where all of the actors normally met up to get the best scares. The more she looked around, the more she wished she could just go invisible. Bodies of all of the innocent people who visited were strung out, mauled and mutilated in different, psychotic ways. Some with weapons still left in them as if the killers didn’t even care about what they used.

The other thing that caught her off guard, was how quiet it was. The blood curdling screams of people, and the monstrous roars of the creatures, as well as the sound of large objects being flung across corridors, has finally stopped. She hesitantly stood and looked around the room now seeing that everything that she has created, that is now living, has stopped their massacre once every last visitor was “taken care of”, and has created a large circle around her. They were all just standing there, all eyes on her. Even the things that didn’t have eyes were practically staring into her very soul.

All at once, the beasts slowly lowered down into a bowing position as if they were worshiping something. Clare, needing to know for herself *again*, scanned the room and saw that she was indeed still the only one in the center of the room. Her whole body was shaking, and she felt cold despite the heaters working due to the October weather. Were these monsters really showing respect to her? Surely the actors that she worked with just moments before were still there... at least their minds?

Clare thought that all of her work had gone unnoticed by all of her coworkers for all of the years she had been working for The Darkness, just to see it all take a full 180 turn— in more ways than one... An event like this is going to take a while for Clare to fully understand, and to be able to cope with the carnage that is still surrounding her. As well as the nightmares that are going to haunt her in nights soon to come. Though another thing on her mind is how she is going to be able to get everything cleaned up so The Darkness won’t be found accountable for

all of the disappearances like last year. Surely it would be shut down, she would be arrested, and the creatures either locked up or killed. Half of her doesn't want any part of the current situation she is stuck in, but the other half of her is ready to start working with her new "friends".

## The Forgotten

By: Savanna Davis

"It has been almost 2 years we need to get help, it will only get worse from here!"

"We just need time to cope, it is just a phase, he'll move on."

"NO I'm tired of my child suffering this long!"

My parents always fought, for as long as I can remember they just never clicked. I always try to keep my sister from hearing any of it, so she doesn't get scared. But that night it was unusual it was almost 12 when they stopped and Claire was in bed sound asleep. I heard a bang and decided to peek out the door and saw nothing. I couldn't sleep that night either so the yelling didn't help.

Ever since I was 10 I couldn't ever sleep. It was just a click in my brain. My parents spent money on doctor's, therapists, and even more. But I never really understood what was wrong with me. I mean I never hurt anyone, but I couldn't make friends with anyone. Then I met Ben Adams who was the one that changed everything, he didn't care about the rumors or the fact that everyone warned him about me. We did everything together, watched movies, played video games, explored the woods where our treehouse was, and even had the same classes. Ben's family was broken, mom dead, siblings out of the house, and his father was a drunk that had a job at a car dealership. So really he was with me all the time, and no one ever complained.

Then there was our tree house, which was a mile and a half away from my backyard. It was a simple treehouse, a ladder going up it with old wood all around, with a window open to the town but really you could only see the sky. We don't know who made the tree house. It was just here one day that we came into the woods. All our toys and books and even so food that were our favorite, and of course some big bags to sit in. Sometimes we would have Claire over



but she never stayed long since she had strict parents. It was crazy how something that was supposed to be a lifelong friendship got taken away so quickly. After Ben went missing it was just a problem to be friends with Claire.

People say he wandered too far in the woods, others say he was locked in the basement of his house by his mom. The police investigated for almost a year and stopped because they hit a dead end. I always thought they were cowards for not searching, I mean why would Ben leave me, when I was already lonely enough. I was filled with anger and confusion. He said he would never leave and that he wanted to be friends forever. WHY would he leave his best friend!

All of a sudden I opened my eyes, it was cold, dark, the room was blank, and had no decor or detail. I was in a bed that had thin blankets and for some reason I was wearing a gown, it was loose and I felt revealed. Where was I? Why does this place smell sour? A woman walked in carrying a tray of cups. She looked nice, kinda looked like my mom, and smelt like apple pie. The cups were filled with pills of all sorts of colors.

“ Are you ready for your afternoon medicine”

I said nothing, why would I? I didn't know this woman and my mom told me not to ever talk to strangers.

“ Okay I guess you don't want your gummies”

I did like gummies so I snatched them from her, and gobbled them up.

“Why am I here?” I said

“ You are in a helping hospital, to keep you safe.”

“ Why would I need to be kept safe?”

“Well because there is certain qualifications for you and to make sure everyone is safe”

“Where is my family, and where is Ben?”

She stopped what she was doing, then turned and looked at me. Her warmth that she brought in was gone and the apple pie smell turned into a rotting smell.

“Um... your family is safe back at home.”

“What about Ben?”

“He is home with his parents.”

“LIAR! BEN'S FAMILY IS DIED ALL HE HAS IS A DRUNK FOR A MOTHER!”

I try to break from the bed but it seems I am tied to it. I struggled to get out, my chest was so heavy and my blood boiled. Why does no one tell the truth? Quickly the woman grabbed a syringe and stabbed me with the needle. Everything got fuzzy, I was so tired, and weak, I guess I can take a nap for a while.

“How is he?”

“ Frightened, and confused, I tried to calm him but he just won't stop asking questions.”

“His family told us to keep him safe and unaware. We can not tell him anything that happened or he will go into a more crazed state than he already is.”

I looked at the boy, he looked like such a peaceful and sweet kid, it was crazy that he was seen as a criminal. Steven came here almost two years ago, because of a court rule. But the rules were to keep him happy, make sure he feels safe and secure, and never let him know what happened that night. Where the town's sheriff found Steven's mom on the ground with her head broken open, the father shot 3 times, and his baby sister suffocated by a pillow. But sadly that was not the worst of it all. Steven's best friend Ben Adams was found in their treehouse in pieces, with Steven who was scared of his own doings. So he was sent here to heal and live, but never find out the terrible fate his family and best friend had met.

## The Birds Didn't Go South For the Winter

By Marley Donoho

The birds didn't go south for the winter. Every day I look up and see them huddled in trees. It almost looks like they're waiting for something. I pass by them on my walk to and from school. Everyday it looks like more gather there, but I hope that's just my imagination. When I bring up the birds to anyone else, people look at me oddly as if they can't see them all shivering in the trees.

I pointed them out to Jacob, my best friend, once. He never saw the trees the same. I now wonder if what he saw were actually birds, he only looks down while walking by them. No one else seems to see anything on the trees, apparently they're "bare". I know Jacob saw something but he just keeps saying, "They're not birds." I woke up one day to see them not on the tree, but on the ground around the trees. I made sure to guide him to school that day. When we left to go home all the birds were back on the tree, as if that morning was just a dream.

Before, the birds would watch and wait. Some even seemed like they would watch us walk to our homes. Now, a few birds will follow us, not just with their eyes, but will walk behind us. I keep asking Jacob what he sees, but he never tells me. The birds seem to start multiplying. It feels that there is always a crowd of birds walking us to and from school. They never try to come inside, but they also don't fly away as soon as we leave them.

Sometimes when I look at them, it seems like they get bigger. I hope they don't grow in size, but I also can't tell. When I ask Jacob he tells me to stop looking at them. How can I stop looking at them if he won't even tell me what he sees?

One day while we were walking, I thought I saw a person. Except you couldn't see any features, it looked more like a shadow. The figure was gone in seconds but it still made me question everything around me. It made me wonder if the birds really were birds. My friend said they weren't, but how could I be sure?

As the days went by I kept looking around me. Every now and then I would see the figure but it was always gone before I could point it out to Jacob. Today while we were walking we almost slipped. Ice had formed in some places on the road. As I regained my balance I saw the figure again. Instead of it being in the distance, it seemed as though it was only a few feet in front of me. I almost let out a scream, but held back. There was no point in worrying Jacob more.

Every time I see the figure, it seems as if time slows. It looked more like a person's shadow than an actual person. I just want to know what's going on. It's 30 degrees outside, the birds should be gone or at least heading south. There's no reason for them to be here. They

could die of the harsh winter. They won't stop following me. Jacob doesn't have any of them follow him, they all follow me.

At first I thought they followed the both of us, but I was wrong. I walked out of my house and almost stepped on a big group of them. I looked next door to see none waiting on his doorstep. I awkwardly stepped around them, not really sure where to go from there. That's when I heard it. A chirp. The birds had never chirped at me before. They would just stare or follow me.

I turned quickly to see which bird it was. Soon more than half of them were chirping at me. I quickly, and awkwardly, ran to Jacob's door. After knocking for an eternity he finally answered. He took one look at me before trying to close the door. Before he could fully close the door he heard it. The several chirps happening around me. He grabbed me inside and shut the door, making sure to lock it.

"Olivia! Why would you bring them here?!" He demanded. I thought this was peculiar as he said they weren't birds. I know he heard the chirps, what is he seeing?

"Tell me what you're seeing! I need to know before I tell you what else I've been seeing." He gave me a bewildered look that basically demanded to know why I wasn't telling him something.

"I see shadow figures. They surround the trees, your house, they've started following you to school!" He paused. "Why do you keep saying they're birds?"

I gave him a look. They were all birds. Not people. There'd only been one figure that I kept seeing. Although the more I saw the figure, the more "features" I could see. The figure looked more masculine so I assumed it was male although I couldn't entirely tell. "He" had a slim look, although the creepiest thing would be his eyes. They looked pure white, like they could light up the darkest room. It felt like they could stare into my soul and I would be helpless to stop it.

I decided for right now I would keep this information to myself. He was already a mess of anxiety, he didn't need this weighing on him as well. "Never mind." I told him. "You don't need to worry about it."

He looked like steam was coming out of his ears. He didn't comment any further and decided to keep an eye on the birds through the windows. I looked around the room, it had been awhile since I stepped inside his house. Everything looked the same. Pictures of his family perched on the mantle above the fireplace, the hardwood floor gleaming, and leather couches surrounded the fireplace. Everything seemed perfect.

*I should have realized at the time that something was wrong besides the birds surrounding the house. His parents weren't home. His parents always try to be at home with him, that day it was silent. His parents didn't have very demanding jobs. His father, a teacher,*

not one that worked at our school though. His mother, a therapist who always had a very set schedule so she could be home by the time he was done with school.

When I looked back at Jacob I swear I saw something shift. Except it wasn't *something* it was Jacob. It looked like his body was trying to choose between being him and being shadow. I immediately screwed my eyes shut. This couldn't be happening right now. I slowly opened my eyes again to see him look perfectly normal besides his raging anxiety. I guess it was my imagination running wild.

My past self was so oblivious to the obvious of truths. My name is Olivia Barron and everything that has happened so far will forever be Jacob Emerson's fault.

I walked to the windows to try and see just how many birds were swarming to his house, but he pushed me away. I gave him a curious look. When he didn't say anything I decided to just walk to his kitchen to see if there were any birds on that side of the house.

I looked out the kitchen window. Snow was still sparkling on the ground. Clearly they just want to come through the front door. Although they've never wanted to come inside before now. What changed?

I decided to start making dinner for Jacob and I since it was nearing 6:45 and there was nothing cooking yet. As I started to gather the ingredients for some quick pasta, I thought I heard something behind me. I turned around quickly. Nothing. I shook it off and began boiling water while I continued making sure I had all the ingredients.

As the pasta finally finished cooking I turned the heat off and headed for the sink to drain the pasta. I got that feeling again, something or someone was watching. I turned around, being careful with the pot of pasta. Nothing. I turned to go to the sink, and right as I saw it I almost dropped the pot. The figure was back. "He" didn't do anything but stare. "He" disappeared shortly after that. It seems like his visits are getting longer.

I got everything prepared at the table and went to find Jacob. When I walked into the living room he wasn't at the window. In fact he wasn't there at all. I walked to the window. No birds. *Wait*. I looked again. Still no birds. Where did they go? I decided to go back to the kitchen to see if maybe he made his way there. I turned and bumped into Jacob. I'd rather bump into him than whatever figure has been around lately.

Jacob looked... different. Nothing physically. Just something about the air around him seemed different. I decided to ignore it for now and dragged him to the kitchen. As we sat down at the table I took a quick glance around. "He" was here again. I decided to ignore it.

As we ate I noticed Jacob would glance around. If he could see the figure then I didn't really have anything to tell him, but he hasn't mentioned it. Maybe he can't see the figures or the birds? *No*. He wouldn't have freaked out like that if he really couldn't see anything.

I glanced around again. The figure got closer. "He" seemed like he was slowly going to stand beside my chair. I continued ignoring it but I couldn't stop the goosebumps that settled across my arms as it got closer. As I went to say something to Jacob I noticed he was staring. Not at me, but beside me. He *could* see it, but maybe he didn't want to worry me? That seemed strange though, he always told me everything no matter how small. I'm really getting into a habit of shrugging things off.

As we sat in silence eating I thought I heard something. It seemed like a whisper. "Marcello," it whispered. First of all, a weird name. Second of all, Jacob looked like his head was going to explode. I kept that name in my head but didn't say anything to Jacob. He's been acting weird lately. As soon as I was done eating I packed up all the leftovers and put it in his fridge. Said a quick goodbye and went out the door. I needed to understand what was going on.

I got home and went directly to my computer. I looked up the name, "little warrior" it said. I quietly laughed to myself. This figure was so lanky, either it was lying or it's had a growth spurt since getting the name. I needed to figure out if this "thing" was gonna hurt me or not, and I needed to figure it out soon.

I turned around to see it right in front of me. Today was a day of jumpscares I guess. Instead of screaming I just put my head in hands waiting for it to go away. Instead of leaving, it stayed. Just staring at me. Then it started to speak.

"My name is not weird," it said.

"What?" I paused. "Your biggest concern is that I think your name is weird? Aren't you more concerned that I can see you and the weird birds outside?"

"Those aren't birds, your friend is right. Although he shouldn't be able to see them in their true form."

I paused for a moment. True form? Clearly they weren't birds after all but I think I've accepted that at this point. Just as I went to speak again, "he" interrupted me.

"He is not who you think he is." Before I could ask what he was talking about, he disappeared again. This was becoming a much too common theme with him.

As I laid down for bed that night a recurring thought kept coming back to the front of my mind. What did Marcello mean? Jacob told me everything. Was he actually hiding something? If he was then how important was it that I didn't know? Everything was too much. I needed to get away from it all somehow.

As I woke up the next day, something felt off. I didn't know why or how but something was wrong. I stepped outside my room to see Marcello down the hall. "Do creatures like you not sleep or something?" I asked as I side-stepped around him to get to the kitchen.

"I don't need sleep and you should be glad I'm watching over you. Your friend doesn't seem to sleep either."

"What's that supposed to mean? Isn't he an insomniac?"

"He seems to be closely related to the things that have been surrounding your house lately."

I shrugged it off. It felt like nothing could surprise me anymore. Although now I think he was lying to me. "I'm not lying to you even if you think I am." He said.

"Just because you can somehow read my mind now doesn't mean we're friends. You don't even know Jacob. He's an anxious mess but he's never done anything horrible in his life."

Instead of replying Marcello disappeared. I don't know where he goes but I don't really care. I went and got ready for the day. Thankfully our winter break had just started so I didn't have to worry about walking to school in the bad weather. I decided to see how Jacob was doing. I needed to start keeping tabs on him.

I walked up to his door, ignoring the birds following after me. I already knew they weren't birds but they didn't know that I knew. I stood silently for a moment. Just as I went to knock, Jacob was already opening the door. Deciding to just ignore it, I walked inside.

Quiet. It was too quiet. His mother, probably at work. His father though should be home. All schools in our area had their winter break at the same time. In fact their cars had not been home in a few days. Although I'm hoping they've just been busy at work.

Right as I went to say something, everything went black. *Sometimes I wish that I had just passed out, instead of where I ended up.*

I woke up. As I opened my eyes it seemed like there was nothing around me. I was in a big empty room. It looked like a warehouse. It was hard to see, but it looked like a cliché movie scene. Especially with the single lightbulb in the middle of the room. Thankfully I was just on the floor and not tied up but how did I even get here?

As I started to get up I thought I saw Marcello in the corner of my eye. "Marcello! Come on, help me get out of here." Instead I looked over and saw Jacob. His eyes narrowed. He was leaning against the wall behind him. He slowly took a few steps toward me.

"Who is Marcello? I thought we told each other *everything*?" I stood there silently. I couldn't tell him that Marcello knew he could see the figures. I couldn't even tell him about Marcello. "No one you should know about." *Why am I talking right now? That was stupid.*

I looked around. There was a door and right as I went to run towards it, I woke up again. In the same room. Jacob leaning against the wall. I couldn't figure out what was going on.

I woke up again. When I saw Jacob, I thought I saw Marcello again, but it was gone before I could tell if it was him. When I looked around this time, there were birds. Hundreds of birds. I tried to stay still so I wouldn't touch any of them but it felt like they were trying to surround me. Trying to make sure I couldn't escape. Before I could speak, I went unconscious.

I'm awake. Is this the same day? Am I reliving something? I look around. Instead of birds, their true forms are surrounding me. They know that I know. Some of them look like Marcello. Others look like people but with something more. Some have antlers, some tower over everything in the room, some are only as tall as small birds. They gather around me like I'm an art exhibit, ready to be shown to the world. It feels like I'm being hunted. All of the soulless eyes on me.

I finally saw Marcello in the midst of them all around me. I didn't want to move, but my only way out of here was with him. He seemed to have a similar idea and started to shove past all the others. He got to me just before the others could even register what was going on. As soon as he grabbed me it felt like something had washed over me. Something like comfort. I looked around, we were outside. Not anywhere near where I'm guessing was the warehouse.

We walked for miles but it seemed like the fields were going on forever. In the distance there seemed to be a small shack. It was getting dark so it seemed like our best option. As we got closer to the small building, the hair on the back of my neck stood up. Before I could say anything, I was unconscious again. This was happening too much.

When I woke up I was in a building. I'm not sure if it was the shack or not. It didn't have any of the birds in it though. When I looked to my right, there was Jacob. How did he get here? I looked around. Thankfully there was a door right behind me. I glanced at Jacob and ran for the door. He didn't try to stop me. I was soon running through a field, it seemed to go on for miles around me. And just like that it was like I had woken up again. I was back in the room. I ran back outside and kept running through the field.

I woke up again. No Jacob in sight, but Marcello was actually standing in front of me when I woke up this time. "Marcello! What's going on? I keep waking up here." Marcello looked at me and started flickering slowly like he was disappearing. Then he turned from Marcello into Jacob. What was going on?

"It seemed like Marcello was the only way to get you to come here with me. Although you were taking too long so I decided to make things easier and knock you out. You're part of the plan that I'm putting a stop to. So sadly these will be your last few days."



...Jacob was Marcello? He's the one who's been watching me? What plan am I a part of? Jacob wasn't someone who I had spent my whole life with? Jacob wasn't someone I could put all my trust into? Marcello wasn't someone I could trust after all? Why do there need to be so many questions that I can't answer?

If I had some purpose in this so-called "plan" then who was supposed to save me from Jacob? No one was going to save me. There's nothing I can do.

*Although my past self was unaware, this was the day my fate would be sealed. Would Jacob ever feel remorse for my death? I would never know and I still don't know now. I'd like to think that telling this story would bring me closure, but it's only made me question my existence more. The journey goes on without me. This story was never about me. Now I'm no longer alive but my spirit wanders to tell others like me to not always trust those around you. Do not trust those who come into your life easily. And definitely, whatever you do, **do not see the birds in the winter.***

**The End**

ACADEMIC  
ESSAYS

## The Monster in Your Head

By: Alyssa Keserauskis

Every morning starts the same way; you wake up with an awful stomach ache while you're drenched in sweat. As you sit up to possibly calm your stomach, your head starts spinning like you've spun around in circles to hit a pinata.

You grab your phone with your mind empty letting your hands do their daily scrolling. Your fingers aimlessly tap on your social media scrolling through all your friends posts of their success and their lives. You begin to panic because you start to think about how you've barely thought your life through. After some more thoughtless scrolling, you toss your phone to the corner of the bed and roll back onto your back, staring at your blank ceiling letting the anxiety seep in. Your mind starts racing and the thoughts come pouring in faster than the old ones can leave.

Hastily, you begin to think, "What do I wear?" "Who's gonna see me?" "How fast can I make the drive?". Then to snap you out of those thoughts, your alarm starts blaring, it blares the same annoying sound you hear every morning at the same time, 6:30 am. You begin to panic, it's 6:30 am and you're not even out of bed. Instantly, you jump out of bed and grab some random clothes and throw them on and you pray that they fit together. You frantically brush your teeth, and wash your face. Your book bag is sprawled out all over the floor, homework papers everywhere, your pencil bag is missing but you're late.

Something you never want to be because you like to be on top of things.

You're finally ready; your phone screen says 6:55 am but you have to leave by 7:00. Thoughts start pouring in and your hands start doing their aimless scrolling once again. Soon you're seeing all your pretty classmates on Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, all of the apps your hands seem to press on without any thought needed. By the time you're done scrolling, it's 7:10 am, the clock is ticking on how long it'll take you before you're ready to leave. Passing by the

mirror by your bed you catch a glimpse of yourself, your hair isn't sitting right, make-up isn't done, and you don't have the fancy clothes. You realize you're even later than before, you're sprinting to the car frantically putting your key in and shoving it into drive. By the time you get to school, you realize your seatbelt isn't on, your head fills with thoughts as your body gets hot and your mouth starts to water. You finally rush through the doors and sprint up the stairs to get all the way through the top floor. Your chest gets tight and you're gasping for breath as you finally make it up to the door.

You're right on time, 7:55 am, the first bell rings. You get to your seat and shove your headphones in and start blaring your music as loud as it'll go so everything is drowned out. Finally, your stomach starts to calm down, class starts and you're already worn out from thinking all morning. You lay your head down so you can take a small nap to pass the time in your class.

Then, you jolt awake, except you're in your bed, alarm blaring by your head, drenched in sweat, with the same stomach ache you get every morning. You realize your day went by so fast because of your worst monster in your head: anxiety.