

Creative Writing

Chapbook

Session Three

2021

*Notes from the Editor*

This summer at 6 Points Creative Arts Academy marks the third year of our creative writing major. This session we welcomed poets and storytellers from across the country, each with their own unique viewpoint and fascinating stories to tell. Our creative writing majors spent hours upon hours learning and understanding the building blocks of writing, from how a plot is constructed to the importance of a character’s emotionality. In this chapbook you will find the culmination of 12 days of learning and writing, of exploring dialogue, and character, and studying scene in the form of narrative poems and stories. Our writing this session centers around our summer theme, which comes from Pirkei Avot: “Make for yourself a teacher, acquire yourself a friend and find in every person their merit.” Please enjoy these collected works, we are so proud to present the Creative Arts Academy’s very own creative writers!

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*In my poem my main character is lost, in all senses of the word. Until, he finds a teacher (“Make for yourself a teacher”). She introduces him to the world again, where people judge him based on who he truly is (“Find in every person their merit”). Through that, he comes to life.*

**The Mycelium Corpse By Jack Paransky Age: 16**

Hear oh tavern,

Gaze oh muse,

Behold this old bard’s story,

Of the Mycelium Corpse.

The dead who became living.

Night had cast its blanket,

So the sibling moons looked down somberly,

As the body had awoken.

One jolt to awake,

One to break out of its wooden box,

A final to bring it above ground.

Its old marker read one word:

Drew.

His creaking body stepped forward,

No one limb moving right.

Fires of pain erupted in him.

He lurched forward,

Grabbing an old metal beam,

As an old man does with his cane.

The trees parted for the life brought back.

Mountains avoided his bright dead eyes.

The mushrooms gave him life,

Burrowing their stems into his back

Using lightning to move their marionette.

Memories swirled inside Drew’s head,

As flies and beetles flew around it.

He knew what he was,

But what was he before?

He was a solider,

He was a botanist,

He was a woodsman,

He was Evergreen’s.

The winding forest path slithered,

Carrying Drew on its spine,

He moved through the night and the day,

Those cycles spinning as the forest continued on.

The mushrooms knew rest was for naught,

For the puppet could march,

Until its feet touched the world’s end.

Traveler’s passed by,

Their carts and songs bright,

Until he crossed their path.

Music stopped.

People ran.

Dogs barked.

Swords were drawn.

Shambling to running,

Running to hiding,

Hiding to praying.

Prayer to Gods unknown.

Prayer that was heard.

The corpse stayed away,

From the slithering trail.

Time flowed forward as he was alone.

The mushrooms were no friend.

They were both parasites.

He lived for months.

He searched,

Searched for something,

Someone,

Her.

With a radiant smile,

And eyes like the stars in the sky.

Evergreen.

Every memory,

The solider,

The botanist,

The woodsman,

All led to her.

As the corpse grew colder,

Like the snow that fell on his back,

He needed people.

He needed more than his creators.

Drew walked with his cane,

Following the brightest star in heaven,

Until the city’s walls came into view.

A row of iron goliaths that stood in arms,

Protecting the town behind them.

Travelers flooded into the city.

Souls arriving to find their fortune.

One corpse hid amongst the living.

Structures shot out of the ground like trees.

Towers seemed to touch the stars.

The corpse couldn’t see where the buildings ended,

And the night began.

One place stood out,

A wooden building that was older than time.

With the star of a king on the door.

The Rabbi opened to the knock,

White waves cascaded down her head,

Nearly reaching the floor.

She had seen many moons,

But her brown eyes were quick and new.

An inquisitive look followed a quick welcome.

Drew finally found a voice to say thanks,

The sound of an old frog rang true.

Food that would go untouched was served.

Twin candles were lit,

Casting long dark shadows across the room.

The Rabbi asked questions.

Why mushrooms?

Why a corpse?

How is this life returned?

How was The Reaper met?

Drew could only shrug answers.

Memories swirled once again.

The rivers of thought rushed.

Many moons ago.

A knife in his chest.

Looking down on him,

Was a radiant smile,

And eyes like the stars in the sky.

It was her.

Her.

Her.

It always ended with her.

On the dark road side,

On their wedding’s eve.

Empty tears rushed down the corpse’s face.

His stomach twisted and nearly snapped.

The Rabbi offered her attic to stay,

Giving advice that was not heeded.

Gentle condolences were given,

As he shambled up the stairs.

Drew felt trapped in a second coffin.

Light barely made its way in his new home.

The mushrooms grew quiet.

The creator distant from their creation.

Old texts lined the attic walls,

Words from a distant time passed down.

Though the sages sang hymns,

And the prophets yelled warnings,

Drew still felt alone.

The Rabbi appeared in her attic,

Beckoning the corpse to join,

Her community’s festivals of light.

There was dancing and singing,

Cheers to warriors and miracles.

Drew reluctantly joined,

The Rabbi introduced him.

Her new friend was merely tired from his journey.

Some shied away from the dreary one,

Some went to meet a new friend.

Hands clasped hands,

The Rabbi brought her timbrel,

And the night truly began.

He danced.

He sang.

He became more lively,

As the moon marched through the sky.

The mushrooms were merely a thought.

Curs’ed be to Evergreen.

For Joy was his leader,

And Drew was alive.

So hear oh tavern,

Raise a glass dear muse,

To Drew!

To the dead who became living.

*This story connects to the summer theme in multiple different ways. For example, ‘acquire for yourself a friend’ connects to the story because the two main characters meet each other for the first time. This is the beginning of a long-lasting friendship that they’re going to have. Evangeline is going to be the teacher for Nathaniel, she is going to teach him how to survive on his own. This is highlighting ‘make for yourself a teacher.’*

**Scorching By Carrie Tananbaum Age 16**

The sound of an explosion jolts Evangeline from her dream. It was a good dream, one that made her wish that it was real. There was a young boy… and… and…now that she’s awake the dream slips from her mind. A loud crash echoes off the alley walls where she was sleeping. She thought that her tired mind had imagined the sounds, but now she’s certain that someone is in trouble. Stumbling off the ground, she throws off the newspapers she was using as a blanket, grabs her backpack full of belongings and begins to run towards the noises. Her bright red hair is whipping in the wind looking almost like a racer trying to reach the finish line. Evangeline knows she should be careful, that she should not be running into danger this early in the morning, especially after what happened last week… But she can’t help it, she feels as if the noise is calling her, like this is her destiny.

Breathing heavily, she turns the corner and sees the cause of this early morning disruption. A little boy. A little boy who at closer examination appears to be fighting off a group of men. Evangeline stops running immediately. Her mind goes fuzzy and all she can see is the men. The men in the white uniforms with blue buttons running down their sides. Seven men who are all wearing sunglasses, covering their faces in order to keep their identities hidden. The same group of men who have been chasing Evangeline for the past two years. The men who ruined her life, caused her to live in hiding, and leave everyone she ever loved behind. The men are right there in front of her, and she has no idea what to do. She has dreamed of getting revenge, but now that they are standing there in front of her, she feels frozen in place, unsure of what to do.

The sound of screaming allows her decision to be easier. The little boy is screaming out in fear, tears streaming down his face like a waterfall. There’s no way she is going to sit around and watch this young boy get beat up. Trying to ignore the feeling of nausea in her stomach, Evangeline runs out into the middle of the men’s line of sight. They immediately lower their weapons. They have spotted her. She grabs the little boy and puts herself protectively in front of him. The only thing she cares about is getting him out of their safely. Evangeline will not let another life be lost because of herself.

“Try me,” she says to the men who have their weapons pointed at her. “I won’t hold back this time. I swear it on my life.”

One of the men laughs cruelly like a hyena. It sends chills down Evangeline’s spine. Taking off his sunglasses Evangeline sees the cold blue eyes that she’s come to detest. Blue eyes and blonde hair. Alexander. Alexander Jemine. The man who is in charge of finding Evangeline. This man singlehandedly ruined Evangeline’s life. He was given a job to try and catch a ‘dangerous member of society.’ He followed these orders without looking into the case. Without realizing that Evangeline was nothing but an innocent fourteen-year-old.

Evangeline hasn’t seen him in nearly six months. She forgot how much his presence used to scare her. Forgot his cold piercing blue eyes. His smirk, that she always wanted to punch off his stupid face. He looks older now. He looks wearier, and Evangeline bets he even has some grey hairs. After all, Alexander was the only man still alive from the original search party. All of the others were dead.

“Why hello Evangeline. How have you been? Dear, dear, dear don’t you look surprised to see me,” Alexander says.

Sucking in a breath, Evangeline plasters on an overly fake smile and says, “Alexander. Wow, it’s been so long since I’ve seen you. Oh my, is that a new wrinkle on your face?” Evangeline laughs sarcastically, rolling her eyes.

“I see you’re still rude to your superiors.”

“Cut it out Alexander. Why are you here? What exactly are you doing with him?” Evangeline asks gesturing to the little boy behind her. Evangeline has a firm grip on the boy, ready to take off running in case something goes haywire. She can feel the boy trembling in her grip and swears right there that she will protect him with her life.

“Oh. Well, you see, this boy here is a menace to society. He threatens the very existence of the human population.”

Evangeline knows those words. She has heard them before. A cool September afternoon comes to mind. A two-story house. A happy couple. Two daughters. One with a special talent. A talent nobody knew of. A knock on the door. Men came barging in. Cold blue eyes. Tears streaming down their faces. Screaming. Screaming until their voices went hoarse. They dragged the girl away. And when the couple sobbed asking why, why. The man said, ‘she threatens the very existence of the human population.’ And then, fire, fire, oh god so much smoke and fire. She can still feel it burning now. The smell so intoxicating, that all she could smell for weeks, and weeks was fire. No matter how hard she tried to wash it away, the fire stayed. Black soot underneath fingernails. In her hair. The neighbors called 911. The firemen had been too late. The family was gone. The men as well. All except the girl with hair as red as fire, and the man with the blue eyes.

Shaking her head to rid herself of the memories, Evangeline feels her blood begin to boil. Her face is hot, and she can feel herself shaking. Looking straight at Alexander, Evangeline’s eyes flash red. They flash bright red like the color of a freshly picked apple on an autumn day. She is angry now. So angry. And when Evangeline becomes angry bad things happen. Someone is going to get hurt.

Evangeline can see a flash of fear travel throughout the group of men. Even Alexander looks afraid. They know what she is capable of, how dangerous she can be when she wants to. And they know that they are in big trouble.

Without saying any words, Evangeline pushes the little boy out of the way, making sure that he won’t get hurt. Turning back to the men, she sees that they all have their weapons aimed at her ready to attack.

Laughing, Evangeline says, “You really think that is going to stop me? Try again next time.”

Evangeline uses her talent. Her special talent that is the cause behind the hide-and-seek game she has been playing for the past two years. Fire. Evangeline summons fire to her hand. Real, red, hot fire. The glow of the fire causes the men to shield their eyes. It doesn’t burn her, but she can still feel the heat emanating from the fireball.

Playing with the fire like a violinist would pluck the strings Evangeline says, “This is your last chance. Go before things get ugly.”

The men stand their ground. None of them move. No sound can be heard, everyone is holding their breath.

“Fine. But don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

Evangeline is prepared. She has known that a fight was very likely to break out. She summons fireball, after fireball throwing them at all of the men. The men fall to the ground screaming, trying to put out the fires that are spreading on their clothes. Two years later and the men are still not wearing fire proof clothes. This gives Evangeline a burst of adrenaline. She moves faster now, making sure to avoid the weapons designed to hurt and restrain her. As the minutes go by it is getting harder and harder to see. Smoke covers the alley looking almost like a foggy morning. It is getting more difficult to breathe through all of the smoke. Some men drop to the floor wheezing, while clutching their sides. The fires don’t bother Evangeline.

The men are affected though. They drop one by one like flies. They lay there on the ground, unmoving, no longer alive. One, two, three, four, five, six… six bodies on the ground.

The smoke clears allowing Evangeline to see clearly again. Looking around, Evangeline can see that one person is missing. Alexander. He is nowhere to be found. He’s escaped once again. Slipped out during the chaos of the fight. Her chest hurts and her eyes begin to sting. Three lone tears slip out from the corner of her eyes. Two years later and using her powers still makes Evangeline feel horrible. Like a monster. The voices in her head are screaming at her, telling her that she is a murderer, that she doesn’t deserve happiness.

Evangeline comes back to reality as she feels a tap on her leg. She summons a fireball preparing herself to use it. However, when she turns around, all she sees is the little boy. The little boy who she was protecting. He backs up quickly obviously afraid of the flames in Evangeline’s hands. Extinguishing the light, Evangeline puts her hands up and smiles gently.

“Hey, hey. I’m not here to hurt you. Don’t be afraid.”

The young boy approaches Evangeline tentatively, like a mouse. Silent, afraid to make any sudden movements. Reaching out her hand, Evangeline allows the young boy to place his own hand in hers. Their hands fit together perfectly like two pieces of a puzzle.

Careful to not spook the boy, Evangeline says, “My name is Evangeline. What’s yours?”

There is a response. A response so quiet that Evangeline almost misses it. The boys voice responds, “I am Nathaniel.”

And hand in hand, Evangeline and Nathaniel walk out of the alley away from the bodies on the ground and into the world again. But this time they are together. They’re alone no more. They have finally found each other. Evangeline and Nathaniel.

*This story will be continued in the near future. This part is only one chapter out of a future work I will eventually write. The story will be in the Sci-Fi or Fantasy genre. The two main characters Evangeline and Nathaniel will continue to go on an adventure, all the while avoiding the bad government organization. It will have lots of action and heartfelt moments.*

*This story is a series of letters sent by one character to another. This relates to the theme because in the end the main character decides that he must acquire himself a friend in order to live a more fulfilling life.*

**Letters to Elran by Lili Appio Age: 14**

*Sent 2nd day of the first month*

Elran, hello,

 I hope this finds you well, though you remember I never preferred less flashy spells like a simple letter sending.

Three years, huh? It’s been a long time. I don’t know what compelled me to write, maybe some sort of nostalgia for the old days. Remember when we would go chasing dragons or rogue sorcerers. Those days are far behind us aren’t they. Maybe they were dead and buried the day you decided to just leave. I can never quite pin down which argument caused it, looking back on it they all seem like the squabbling of young children. Gran would kick me for calling myself old though, wouldn’t she? “You don’t know old,” she would say. “You won’t know old until your bones creak and groan like an ungreased doorway.”

 I bet she misses you. I’m pretty sure she liked you better than she liked me, which doesn’t even make sense because she knew me for twenty-three years longer than she knew you. I guess you were just that charming on the day you randomly wandered into our village, so much so that she trusted you immediately with my safety. I still insist I didn’t need the protection, but that woman was crazy, whoever knows what she was thinking.

 Anyways, what’re you up to. I doubt you could get into many adventures without me, not to give myself all the credit or anything, but what can you really do by just swinging a sword?

 That’s all I’ve got to say to you for now, I guess. And forever if that’s what you’d prefer. I promise to stop contacting you if that’s what you say you want. If I get no response however, I will take that as invitation to be a thorn in your side until the end of my days.

That’s all,

Kirka

*Sent 16th day of the first month*

Hello again,

Two weeks and no response? I see how it is. Honestly, I know we didn’t part on the best terms, but I didn’t expect you to hate me this much. In all seriousness I wasn’t kidding. I genuinely do want a response from you, and I find it rather offensive that you haven’t given me that. The only possible way you’re off the hook is if you’re dead, but I’d hope you’re not stupid enough to go and die the minute I’m not watching you.

Write back,

Kirka

*Sent 4th day of the second month*

 This is getting old. Two letters, one month? I know it’s been a while, but I remember you more reliable than this. If you’re not dead yet I’ll kill you myself. Maybe my father was right about you. He never liked you, I don’t know if you ever knew that. Gran just thought you were all smiles and honesty, but Father thought you had a more sinister plan. I guess I did too, when we first met that is, but now I know you were simply a fool. Your recent actions are only further proving my assumptions, as only a fool wouldn’t write me back.

I’m not joking,

Kirka

*Sent 6th day of the second month*

 I don’t care if you write me back this time. Just read this, it’s important. You’re in trouble, I don’t know what you did but people are coming after you. I’m with two goons who fancy themselves some sort of unofficial law enforcement and they’re looking for you. One of them used to work for the king, and the other is a part of a very powerful religious society. I might not be able to get you out of this. Not this time. If you write me back and tell me what’s I happening I may be able to help. If not, I don’t think I can stop them, physically or morally, if they want to do anything unsavory to you. That should tell you the trouble these folks can cause if I can’t even help. I always thought that a man who learned magic through books would never be as smart as someone who had to learn to live with it, now though, in the face of these people, I doubt myself.

Be careful,

Kirka

*Sent 9th day of the second month*

 As we journey searching for you, I’ll be passing home soon. I haven’t been back to my neck of the forest ever since I left with you, so I’ll be sure to tell Gran that you’re a jerk and Father that he was right. You know he loves hearing that. He loved thinking he was the backbone of our village, but come on, we both know that was all me. He just sat in his big chair banging his big fist, but I was the one who could leave, who could try to make it better for us. If I were a younger man, I might’ve agreed that caution was necessary, that we had already lost so many men, it wasn’t worth it to lose more. But I am not a younger man and I now say what is the point of being sitting ducks, prisoners of our own home. What is the point of simply taking what they’ve decided we must endure from them? If we, if *I,* am never to act then we will end up worse off than before.

Father says he didn’t want me there because I made us seem like more of a threat, but I bet the only person I was a threat to was him. I mean, do you remember what the village was like when you first saw it? Empty houses and mothers struggling to keep their kids from straying too far to the edges of town, and what was he worried about? His son had acquired magic that some may find creepy or unsettling and that was his biggest issue. Come on, I made us seem like a threat? No one made us seem like a threat, to them we weren’t even people, we were lesser than that, so much lesser they blockaded our entire little forest village just to keep us out of the main city. They found us disgusting, dangerous, monsters, they would barely notice if one boy’s eyes turned black.

 Sorry about the tangent, I just wanted you to know that you should still feel guilty for not writing me back and I guess I got caught up in what was. But who knows, maybe they’re thriving without me. Maybe that’s why Gran never wrote, and Father never answered. Hey, I guess you two have that in common, he’ll hate it when I tell him.

I hope your bed is very uncomfortable tonight,

Kirka

*Sent 10th day of the second month*

Did you know? Did you know that they were all gone? Did you know there was nothing left? Did you know I was walking into an empty village, a ghost town? Did you know and kept up this stupid stunt of not replying to me?

I hope to all heavens and all hells that you did not. If you did know, it means you could not stop them, or worse, it means you helped.

Kirka

*Sent 10th day of the second month*

 I love you more than you could ever know. Or will know because I wish with my whole heart you are not reading these. I hope that you are somewhere in a far-off town, maybe where it’s too snowy for my letters to reach. A place you are blissfully unaware of everything that has happened, everything I have said. I just need to believe that you do not hate me, and that you are not dead. I need to still believe that these are the facts of life, the facts of us.

So much love and so much sorrow,

Kirka

*Sent 11th day of the second month*

 I’ll keep it brief this morning as I am feeling rather ill. Ignore my last letter, I was not in the right state of mind when I wrote it. My companions are unaware of anyone in the area who used to live here and thus they are unaware of the tragedy that has occurred, though the king’s man says he heard tell of soldiers’ hunting parties in the area around here though he never knew what they were hunting. This fact has made me sick to my stomach, like that time I made the mistake of eating something you cooked. I apologize, it is not the time for jokes, as I must warn you that we are about a day away from your supposed location. Don’t be there.

Kirka

*Sent 13th day of the second month*

 How long have I been writing to a dead man? How long have a been sending letters to nothing but a headstone? These facts I do not know, nor do I know if you have any of their blood on your hands. I’ve decided I’m fed up with the not knowing, and instead I will focus on what I do know.

 I do know that I loved you, that I still do and probably always will. I do know that I miss you, have missed you for three years and will continue to miss you for the eternity to come. I also have decided with all that I have lost, I will not be alone. I will find people, and I will stay with them, in a way I never did with you, with my family. Allowing my father to push me away, leaving my family, leaving you, those are my biggest regrets. But regrets are regrets, one’s that I can never change. I will send this last letter out, to wherever they’ve been going as my final goodbye. Thank you.

Rest well,

Kirka

*Written 4th day of the first month, sent never*

Kirka,

 How delightful it is to hear from you. As much as I miss you, I fear I do not have time for catching up.

 There are things you must know. Things I have done and things that have happened. Your family, I am so sorry. I tried to stop it, but my plan was to stop them from the inside and those crazy schemes were always your department. They found me out the moment I couldn’t bring myself to hurt anyone. They notified the king’s men and some other organizations and now there’s a bounty on my head. I wasn’t clever enough, not in the way you ever were, and I fear I have gotten myself in trouble, maybe too deep that I cannot get out. You’re right that I can’t seem to get much done without you, but it would be best if you were not to contact me for now. Maybe I will write you again, but in this moment, I think this should be the end of our correspondence.

Thank you for thinking of me,

Elran

**The Moon, The Tomato Gamble, and Nothing’s *Always* Good written by Jessie Weiman Age: 14**

*One part of the summer theme is “Find in every person their merit” and I think this quote relates to my pieces because they talk about finding the merit within myself, the writer.* ***The Moon*** *and* ***Nothings Always Good*** *is about how life is everchanging. How I cope/understand life’s up and downs. Ultimately finding the merit within life.* ***The Tomato Gamble*** *is about finding the merit within all kinds of tomatoes (which I know sounds silly). Appreciating their differences and acknowledging then, even the not so good ones. Thank you :)*

**The moon.**

As I lay on the blades of grass

I look up at the moon

The moon that sparkles in the night

I have to remind myself that on tough days

The world keeps going around

Every morning the sun rises

And every night the sun sets

As I think back on my day,

The moments that stood out reoccur in my head

Some nights I remember how tired I was that day

Or how first period felt like it was never going end,

How was I going survive another 6 hours in that School building?

Days like this can feel very discouraging

My life is so messy, and I have little motivation

So many thoughts fill my head

Making everything a blur

However other days can feel completely different

And on those nights,

I think about how productive I was

Maybe I had been progressing really well for that One assignment

Or I completed all my work and had a

Homework free night

Being able to relax gave me a sense

Of accomplishment making me feel warm inside

I was satisfied with my personal progress and goals

Feeling like I can take on any

Challenge that comes my way

Hope lays ahead

Not every day is going to be a good one

And that’s ok

The will to want to keep going is most important

So, at the end of any day I can still appreciate

The colors of the sunset

How they blend in the sky

Like watercolor on canvas paper

And when the color fades the moon rises again.

**The tomato gamble.**

Each tomato a different size,

Some wonky shapes,

Certain varieties of tomatoes come in a

Plethora of colors,

Like a rainbow filling the plate

Green ones give the illusion that they are unripe,

Unwanted by most.

But if you prepare them in the correct ways,

Like pickling or frying,

They can explode with flavor in your mouth.

Each bite Juicy, tangy, crispy.

The underrated Green tomatoes.

The orange tomato’s.

I imagine them as little golden suns.

Reflecting the light that comes from the sun setting.

Juicy and sweet.

You can see the sugar granules inside the

Skin if you look close enough.

The light shade of orange ignites a spark inside me.

They are special,

 In an unexplainable way.

Each tomato’s taste is slightly different from the Others,

Some more sweet,

Some slightly sour,

Some a little mushy,

Some firm.

More factors of the tomato: where it is grown

Some grown in hot houses,

Not preferable

The kind grown at local farms often taste better

More flavor,

And better quality

Usually…

Some exceptions

Like when a tomato sits on your kitchen counter for Too long,

But you don’t want it to have to go to waste

And it’s not quite moldy yet

But also not the freshest

And there’s a chance you cut it open and its Perfectly fine

Maybe just a little mushy

Or you take a leap of faith and bite into it

The juices slowly dripping down your face

Looking at the inside of it only to see the seeds are Black

Uh oh

Running to the garbage can

Seems like the best option

And spitting out all the rotten guts of the tomato

Instant regret

You had hoped it would be a good one

But no

And that’s the lesson of the tomato gamble.

**Nothing’s *always* good**

Happiness doesn’t last forever

Sadness doesn’t either

But sometimes it feels like it does

Life is just like a book,

Mainly filler chapters, and once in a while some Action

Background knowledge that’s needed to

Understand the story

And life’s daily reoccurrences

But the action chapters make it worth it to read

Life is mostly routine, and tasks

Pretty boring

You don’t live for the boring moments

You live for the amazing, fun,

Life changing moments

They don’t usually last long

But they make life worth living for

It’s like taking a walk on a path of nature

And a butterfly lands on you

Its wings the color of a halved tangerine

The most beautiful creature you’ve ever seen

And it make you really happy

Such a minuscule moment, but it makes

Your day.

*"Find in every person their merit" I decided to use the third part of the camp theme to my story. Almost everyone is worth saving. We might not know what's going on in someone's head. Be kind, kids!*

**Glass to Cloth by Gabriela Sissman Age: 14**

 There was once a time when Alex's soul radiated energy, sounds, colors, and emotions. Glass surrounding the soul refracted the light. The energy blinded and burned and pleased all who felt it.

 Over time, their soul grew dimmer and more solid. Radiant glass grew opaquer. Thin grey cloth replaced the glass. The fabric restricted movement. Flowing became harder, flexibility restricted, off-beat most of the time.

*It's just a nuisance. I can’t do anything about it. I'll survive.*

But the cloth grew thicker, heavier. From fabric to plaster to concrete. water turning to Ice

*It's just a nuisance. I can’t do anything about it. I'll stay alive for a while longer. I can't die this way.*

 By this point the light was gone. All was grey and hard angles. Their throat hurt, their heart hurt, legs, arms, everything hurt. Sound disappeared. Not even a dull thrumming was left. Where emotion had brimmed, only emptiness. Even the sobbing was gone. Their cries lost to the wind and dank air that was their prison.

 The prison was dark. Inky black without the comforting sparkle of stars. Concrete walls. Silence reigned. No water. No air. No food. A punch to the walls. A stomp on the floor. A cry of rage. Just this left them exhausted.

*I'm fine. I can’t do anything about it. I may die this way.*

 All these impulsive actions changed nothing. Nothing but a minuscule thread in the weaving. This tiny thread momentarily turned into a knot, complicated and tangled. However, the knot soon smoothed itself out, untangling its loops gracefully and slowly. Lacing a new path in the stars. Changing other paths as well.

 Sound returned. Light humming that seemed to take the shape of a song\*.

All is for the best or something's our test

It is what it is and whatever

Time is still the infinite jest

The arrow flies while you dream

The hours tick away. They tick away

The measure of a life

Is a measure of love and respect.

So hard to earn

So easily burned.

In the dullness of time

It's the only return you can expect

 Blinding colors and light seeped through an overlooked crack. A chink in armor. The crack closed a bit. After so long without the luminescent colors, it hurt. But... somehow the pain felt good. Like food for the starving, money for the broke, and homes for the displaced. They reached out, despite them-self, and grabbed the outstretched helping hand. And... the concrete cracked. A butterfly emerged from a hard, grey cocoon. Still covered in plaster and fabric, they began to shake. Like a dog emerging from the water. Shaking them-self dry. Plaster flew.

 Applause. At this, they looked up. A few family and friends of years past were watching, chanting words quietly. A warm tapestry of sound. Proud of their little one. Circled around the still-covered person. It looked as if the people had been there for years on end. Their clothes were old and worn, shoes with holes, bodies smelly and dirty, and long hair greasy and disheveled. Some even had beards.

 The fabric covering Alex was now colorful, but still somehow muted. A small amber wave of the old energy unconfined itself from the tangled human. It seemed to make the little forest clearing brighter and return the watchers to their clean selves.

 New, colorful clothes covered limbs, shoes grew to cover feet properly, bodies and hair looked freshly showered and cut. The beards were gone. Still, the atmosphere of the forest remained somber, yet hopeful. The chant continued, nevertheless. If one stopped, the others would sing louder to compensate for that missing voice. Their voices were pleading, pleading for Alex to come out of their shell.

 The vibrant green and brown trees added to the chant. Like gold glitter hanging in the air, glimmers of life whirled around the clearing. Flowers swayed, squirrels shook maracas, jumping about the trees, birds sang praises, bandying about here and there, flying in the air, cicadas beat tiny drums, and crickets played violins.

 With careful strokes, the watchers cut the fabric away. Careful to never let the knives touch the person in the center. Amongst all this, words were heard and recognized from the chant. Safe, home, warmth, missed, agua, food, abrazos, luz, seguridad, and names: June bug, little one, dear, dove, Alex, Alexei, Alev. As much as the chant helped, someone uttered the most profound and moving sentence of them all. "You were dearly missed, Alex."

 At this, Alex's heart burst with warmth. Their soul regaining the lost light. Shining with color, sounds, sights, and emotions. It blinded and burned and pleased all who saw. A true sight for the ages. It really was good to be back. However, from that day on, Alex wore a tiny grey cap on their head. A remembrance.

\*From song The Garden by Rush, fullness changed to dullness

*My piece relates to the theme of “make for yourself a teacher, acquire for yourself a friend, and find in every person their merit” because of the way the characters interact with each other. Many of the characters in the orphanage have to make themselves a teacher because they don’t have lots of other people to do that for them. To acquire yourself a friend is also demonstrated by the main characters and something that they need more than anything. Finding the merit in every person is shown because later in the story,* *when the character’s true motives are revealed, revelations will occur that shows that there is good in every person.*

**Orphans by Rachel Boyette Age: 14**

The bell on the front door rang as a woman entered. She was wearing a suit with her blonde hair in a low, tight bun. She had no umbrella even though it was pouring rain outside. The woman approached Elijah, who worked at the front desk. He was the only one in the whole orphanage who genuinely cared for me. Elijah had just turned 17, six years older than me. He has always been like an older brother figure to me. He talked to her for what seemed like forever. There was a lot of head shaking and quick glances around the room. She gave me a wink before heading out the door. Elijah ran over to me with a shocked and terrified look on his face.

“That woman just said she wants to buy the orphanage,” he said, his voice echoing off the walls.

 “Shhh! Keep your voice down, do not let anyone else know. What do you mean? She can’t!” I replied.

 “She came up to the desk, I asked her how I could help her, like I’m supposed to, and she plainly stated that she wanted to buy the orphanage,” he paused, “I wasn’t sure what to say but I told her that it wasn’t for sale. She insisted she was going to buy it, so I gave her one of Mr. Medina’s cards. She thanked me and left.”

 “Well, why did you give her one of the cards?” I screamed.

 “What was I supposed to do? I didn’t want to be rude but I also, obviously, didn’t want her to buy the orphanage.” Elijah sighed, then sat down in one of the little chairs meant for the toddlers. He held his head in his hands and might have even shed a tear or two. I have never seen Elijah like this. I’ve always looked up to him. He would be funny when I needed it, quiet when I needed it, even tough when I needed it. I suddenly felt bad for screaming at him.

 “I’m sorry,” I said. “You did the right thing. I wonder what Mr. Medina will think about this.”

 “Well, he won’t be happy, that’s for sure.” Elijah said.

 “Should we tell him, or do we let him find out on his own?”

 “I think it’s probably best we tell him. He might get mad at us if he finds out through the woman and then figures out, we’ve known all along.” There was a moment of silence between us. You could hear the engines, horns, and sirens perfectly clear from our orphanage in the middle of Brooklyn, New York. The large windows on the side of the building look like they haven’t been cleaned in years, since the orphanage was opened in the late 1950s.

 I was put into this orphanage the day after my first birthday. I don’t actually remember anything. I only know stories of what people have told me. We were on the way to my aunt and uncle’s house in New Jersey when a semi-truck swerved around us, hitting our car, and causing my mom to swerve as well. We fell over the guardrail down into a small valley. By the time anyone got there, both of my parents had passed. My birthday is in December and by then, there were already piles and piles of snow the ground. My car seat and jacket saved my life that day, at least that’s what the doctors said. My thoughts were interrupted by Elijah tugging on my arm.

 “Are we going to go tell him or not?”

 “Yes, let’s go.” We walked past all of the children who hadn’t gone for their afternoon snack yet. We knocked on Mr. Medina’s office door and entered when he called for us to come in.

 “Hello Elijah. Hello Julia. What brings-”

 “It’s Jules. I go by Jules,” I blurted out.

 “Right, sorry. Hello Elijah. Hello Jules. What brings you to my office?” Mr. Medina finishes. Elijah looks at me, I look at Mr. Medina, Mr. Medina looks back at me, and I look back at Elijah.

 “You talked to the lady,” I whispered to Elijah.

 “You should tell him though. Come on, just go ahead and-”

 “Enough,” Mr. Medina cut us off, “Jules, please tell me why you’re here.”

 “You should really be asking Elijah, but I was sitting in the main room and I noticed a woman walk in and start talking to Elijah.” I continued to tell him the rest of the story. When I finished, Mr. Medina sat there, awestruck.

 “Buy the orphanage? She can’t do that!”

 “That’s what I said!” I replied. We all sat there in silence, again.

 “We thought it would be best you heard it from us instead of when that lady calls you,” Elijah said, his voice getting quieter and lower with each word. As if the woman could hear our conversation, Mr. Medina’s phone began to ring. He glanced at both of us before picking it up.

 “Hello, Brooklyn Orphanage Center. How may I help you?”

 “Daniel? Hi, I’m Stephanie Russell. I believe I spoke to someone earlier when I came to the orphanage that gave me your contact information,” she said. A clap of thunder rang out as lightning flashed across the sky.

 “Yes, I believe you did as well,” Mr. Medina said, looking unsure of a proper response. Stephanie was silent for a moment.

 “Ok, I am going to make myself clear,” she paused once more. “I have researched the comparable sales in the area as well as past purchase history and I have decided that I am going to buy this little Brooklyn orphan whatever.”

 Mr. Medina spoke at once, “Well, Ms. Russell I would love for someone to take this ‘little Brooklyn orphan whatever’ and transform it into something much more amazing, however, I simply do not think you are the right person and it is just fine how it is. Thank you for calling. Have a nice rest of your day,” Mr. Medina said then hung up the phone. Elijah and I sat there dumbfounded. Mr. Medina was the co-owner of this orphanage along with Mrs. Ross. They usually play a good cop-bad cop game where Mrs. Ross is the bad cop and Mr. Medina is the good cop. Although Mr. Medina wasn’t being mean, Elijah and I had never seen this much attitude out of him.

 “Wow,” I said.

 “Wow is right. I didn’t expect that out of me either,” Mr. Medina sighed before continuing, “look, I love this orphanage and I love all of you guys but at the end of the day, we can only do so much. If Ms. Russell speaks to the right people, this place will be in her hands in no time.”

 “What does that mean for us?” Elijah questioned.

 “Yeah, if she ends up buying this place, is she going to keep it an orphanage? She has to, right? She can’t just throw all of us kids, who aren’t even 18 yet, out on the street!” I said, my voice rising with each word.

 “Unless she finds owners. Who knows what contacts she has? She seems immensely powerful,” Mr. Medina said, eyebrows raised, a worried expression on his face.

 “Well, we missed our snack, Jules. I’m sure they’re expecting us for dinner soon, so we should go,” Elijah sighed.

 “Ok, I guess.” We thanked Mr. Medina for having us, then left to go to the dining hall. “What’s going to happen to us?” I asked Elijah, looking up at him.

 “I don’t know, Jules. I wish I did, but I don’t.” The rest of the night was glum and quiet. The thunderstorm outside didn’t help either. I went to the girls sleeping quarters after saying goodnight to Elijah.

 Stephanie Russell...Stephanie Russell... where have I heard that name before? I thought to myself. I began tracing shapes on my bed with my finger, trying to jog my memory. Finally, I gave up and tried to fall asleep. I was drifting off when the sound of a telephone ringing startled me awake.

 “Hello, Mrs. Ross speaking.” What is she still doing up in her office?

 “Hey, it’s Stephanie.” The voice on the other end of the line says.

 “Oh, sorry! I didn’t recognize the number, how have you been?” Mrs. Ross replied. Stephanie? The Stephanie from earlier who wanted to buy the orphanage? How did Mrs. Ross know her?

 “I’ve been fine. I actually dropped by today to no avail and then I even called later to no avail either. Presumably, Mrs. McCall wasn’t available?” She drew out the word McCall.

 “She was. Maybe someone wasn’t doing their job,” Mrs. Ross said. Who is Mrs. McCall? What does she do? The voices got quieter as I got sleepier and eventually drifted off to sleep.

 The next morning, I was rudely awakened by Mrs. Ross kicking my bed and yelling at me to get up. I never got to hear the end of her and Stephanie’s conversation last night, but I know it wasn’t good. We walked into the dining hall, but there wasn’t food there like there usually was. Just many groups of seats, separated by age and gender. I glanced at Elijah and he seemed as unsure of this as I was. I also looked over at Mr. Medina and he had an extremely uncomfortable, almost sad, look on his face. He may have even mouthed the words, I’m sorry. Once every single person was seated and quiet, Mrs. Ross began to speak.

 “So, there will be some changes around here,” she started. “A new person has bought the orphanage and she is now in charge of all of it and all of you. However, she would like to make some changes. The reason why you are separated into groups like this is for her choosing. She is going to be picking six of you to come to her house, live with her, and help her. I am not sure what gender or age she is looking for which is why all of you are gathered here.” This made me mad. How was I supposed to know what she was going to do with the people at her house, but at the same time, how was I supposed to know what she was going to do with the people who stayed here at the orphanage? My thoughts were interrupted when Stephanie walked in.

 “Hello all! I am Ms. Stephanie Russell, but you should address me as Ms. Russell. I think Mrs. McCa-,” she paused. "I mean, Mrs. Ross did a splendid job of explaining to you what I am going to be doing. Like she said, I will be picking six of you to take home with me. I need one person to clean the floors, one to dust the house, two to staff the kitchen, one to maintain the landscape, and one to befriend my daughter. Before I get into my choosing, does anyone want to volunteer?” The room was so silent, you could hear a pin drop. No one moved a muscle.

 “Come on now, don’t make Ms. Russell have to pick,” Mrs. Ross said. Still, no one moved.

 “Ok, looks like I am just going to have to pick then,” she said, clipboard in hand. “You, over there with the black rimmed glasses, what’s your name sweetie?” She pointed to a girl a year older than me.

 “Ashley,” she whispered under her breath, “Ashley Dunn.”

 “Perfect! Come stand over here by me. You will be in charge of cleaning the floors. Okay, who’s next? You, in the way back with the red hair who’s facing the back. Turn around. What’s your name, sir?” She pointed to a boy who, I thought, was the same age as Elijah.

 “Stephen Collins.”

 “Thank you. Come up here and stand beside Ms. Ashley. You will be in charge of dusting the house.” Stephen was the tallest one here, it made sense for Ms. Russell to pick him. “Two for staffing the kitchen. Girl with the black hair in a ponytail and boy right behind her. Come on up. You two will be in charge of staffing the kitchen.” I didn’t

know either of them but just by looking at them, you could tell that they were related.

 “How many more do we need, Ms. Russell?” Mrs. Ross asked.

 “Only two! Who are our lucky two other people going to be? Boy in the corner with the

blond, curly hair. Come here. You will oversee maintaining the landscape,” she pointed to the boy sitting beside Elijah who I recognized as one of his best friends in the orphanage, Alex. I could see the disappointment on Elijah’s face and it made me sad too.

 “Last person! The one who is to befriend my daughter. I will pick you, on the right side of the table with the long brown hair and olive skin.” Me? She pointed at me? My stomach dropped. I walked up to her and told her my name. She stood there with her line of slaves looking out at the rest of people who didn’t get chosen.

 “Well, thank you, Ms. Russell for coming. I believe we shall see you again soon?” Mr. Medina said through a fake smile.

 “Yes, I believe so as well!” Ms. Russell

replied. Mrs. Ross motioned for everyone to start clapping. While the clapping was still going on, Ms. Russell turned around to the six of us and whispered, “You all should be very thankful. I just saved your lives.”

*Although the protagonist and Anthony are siblings, their bond also grows into that of friendship. As the three siblings continue on their journey, their bonds with themselves and others only get stronger. Through their story, they are forced to not only become better friends, but also teach themselves and others as they find merit and forgive those around them from past mistakes.*

**Break Ins by Abigail Zahalsky Age: 14**

“It’s almost like your mind is a house,” she said in her young voice, bouncing on the balls of her feet. “And the only thing I have to do is break into that house. It’s super easy! Well, most of the time.”

At that time she was young. She hadn’t thought she was doing anything wrong. She didn’t know who the man she was talking to was. She couldn’t think someone was able to be so evil. After all she was only nine. At that time she still had so much to learn.

Now she was older. Now she was out of that awful place. She had dreamed of this moment for so long, but now she had no idea of what to do.

+

 The building was empty and almost liminal. Rows upon rows of un-stocked shelves surrounded me. Bright lights illuminated the room so that no shadow could even think about appearing. The place didn’t seem real. How did I end up here of all places? My memory of the past few days was foggy. I was only able to grasp at a few nonsensical fragments. However, I knew that I was outside. Outside in some forest I had never seen before. I had been running. That was for certain because my calves were still sore, and I still felt sticky from sweat.

 Had I fallen asleep, passed out, or something else? I had no idea. But now I was here in this strangely empty building. It was also somewhere I had never been before. At least I don’t remember ever being here.

 I surveyed the building around me. Large rectangular lights hung down from the tall ceiling. The whole building was full of empty shelves. More of them sat to my right than my left. Everything was painted an off-white color.

 I walked over to the nearest shelf and shook it. The metal barely rocked under my weight. The whole shelf started by the ground and stretched up to only a few feet below the lights.

 I pulled on the shelves, testing them with more of my weight. When they still held, I started climbing. My legs still ached from running, and they continued their protest through my whole journey upwards. My arms joined in as well when I was only halfway to the top, and that, combined with my slippery hands, made me take a break.

 I took a few deep breathes, sitting on a cold shelf. They would groan if I moved too much, but otherwise they were completely stable. I shook my hands to let them rest too. Even from this height, all I could see were more empty shelves. In the distance was a wall, but there was no exit in sight.

 With one more huff I wiped off my sweaty hands and continued my climb upwards. I barely made my way to the top without stopping again. My whole body pulsed as I lay on the top shelf, staring into the lights with stars in my vision. Considering how awful I was at exercising, I probably passed out during my run earlier.

 After a few more moments I rolled over and sat back up. Black spots littered my vision, this time from the ceiling light I had been staring into.

 I made the mistake of looking back down to the ground, sparking a newfound fear of heights. I jumped back and almost tumbled down off the other side of the shelf. This time my sight was being disrupted by spots from fear. Even when they cleared my vision was still blurred. The adrenaline that I had just worked down shot back up again. With a shaky hand on my heart I took even more deep breaths.

 Now that I was at the top, I took a few more looks around but was only met with shelves. Not any sign of an exit was visible.

 I sighed but was more happy to get off of these shelves than upset about the lack of exit. I started to climb down, ignoring the pain in my limbs with the need to get down as quickly as possible.

 My journey down took forever. My hands shook each time they moved, and I held my breath in an attempt to slow the loud drum of my heartbeat. The ground seemed miles away, and each step barely moved me closer to its safety. When I was four shelves above the ground I jumped off, grateful for the shock that ran through my body. I had made it to the ground without any real injuries.

 I sighed again, this time one of relief. It took a few minutes for my body to understand that the danger was gone, so I spent the time continuously wiping my sweaty hands on my jeans and doing little jumps of joy.

 After one more minute, I took a lasting glance around the room and started left in search of an exit. I reached the wall and didn’t find a door on its whole length. There were no windows either. No other way to see outside.

 However right on the middle of the next wall there was a door. It was wooden, painted the same dull white as everything else in the room.

I bounced over to it in hopes that it would be an easy way out. With all of my current luck it would probably be locked. I jumped once than turned the handle.

My eyes widened and I took a step back when the door actually opened. Beyond the door was a small bathroom. Of course it wasn’t an exit. The bathroom consisted of a toilet and sink, all the same sickening color of everything else. I stared at it for another moment then decided to use it.

I stepped out of the tiny room when I was done then paused. Questions that I was previously too scared to acknowledge started to flood my brain. Where in the world could a huge…whatever this place was be built and also have running water without anyone asking any questions? How did I end up here and where…? Where was I before this? Before the running. Where was I when I was a child?

I started walking again to clear my mind. I could worry about all of that later. All I needed to do right now was find a way out. The next wall still didn’t have a door. I ran to the final one without any more luck. This wall just looked the same as all the others: long and white and empty and awful. Was it even a different wall, or had I gone the wrong way and was now staring at something I had already seen before?

I walked again and again around the room until I was dizzy. The color around me was hypnotizing and everywhere. I couldn’t get rid of it, even when my eyes were closed. It devoured me, crushing me under its invisible weight.

I sat down with my head pounding. What was my purpose here? If I hadn’t come here myself than someone or something put me here. Which means there must be some way to get out. Would whatever brought me here really put me here just to die? I mean, they gave me a bathroom. Yet I didn’t have any food. I could just use their way out when they came to give me food—assuming they did.

I took a deep breath. Now all I had to do was wait. I drummed my fingers on the ground until I felt something tingle on the right side of my mind. My head jerked to the side without my permission in an attempt to get rid of the sudden change. The feeling only shifted to the front of my mind before engulfing it all. It felt strange and uncomfortable at first, almost like it was an unwanted itch. But soon I found a sense of familiarity in it. It faded into a low hum that I could somewhat ignore.

I started drumming on my knees. The feeling, although I didn’t know what it was, was a nice distraction from the blinding light in the room. In a few minutes my drumming was stopped by a voice, coming from the right. When I looked, I didn’t see anyone. These walls hadn’t struck me as thin, but I hadn’t necessarily tested them or anything.

I couldn’t yet make out what the voice was saying. I pressed on the nearest wall. It seemed to be pretty strong, but maybe if I punched hard enough…. The voice neared me, so I walked along side it to hear the conversation. In the quiet my footsteps echoed. I tiptoed so they wouldn’t know that I was listening.

The conversation was one sided with pauses in between words. A man was speaking. “Oh yes of course…yes, I’ll be sure to…not exactly… hmm?... oh, ok…no, I understand...yup…I…Ok sure!...yup …yes.” His voice lowered throughout the conversation, slowly showing more emotion. After another moment he sighed and started walking quicker. His footsteps were loud and distinct, so he was probably walking on some sort of hard ground. He reached the corner of the wall and stopped.

After what seemed like forever of both of us waiting there, he knocked a few times on one of the walls. I stepped back, my heart pounding in my ears. Was I finally going to get out of here? I stepped back up to the wall and pressed my fist against it. I held my breath and knocked back.

“Ok, good,” he said. I had never heard his voice before, but it was slightly comforting. Maybe I was just relieved to hear another voice. Either way, the voice calmed my jumpy heartbeat. “Watch out.”

I stepped back, immediately realizing what he was going to do. I heard a thump, and he swore. With a few more thumps his fist came through the wall. I stepped back a few more times as chunks of wall flew at me. Once he had a decent hole he kicked it bigger with his feet.

Once he was satisfied with its size he stopped and said, “Come on.” He kneeled by the opening so I could see his face. He was younger than I thought he would be, but still older than me. I couldn’t help but smile at seeing another person. He smiled back.

I waited a moment then stepped awkwardly through the hole. It was slightly tight, but otherwise I fit through. One piece of the wall did get stuck in the messy fluff of my hair. I pulled it out and tossed it to the ground.

“Sorry about that,” my rescuer said, helping me up with the hand he used to punch through the wall. His whole arm was still red from the impact. He winced slightly as I grabbed it, so I pulled away quickly. “I don’t have access to the real door.”

“There was a—” My voice croaked, so I coughed to clear it. It must have been a while since I last spoke. “There was a real door? Where?”

The man shrugged. “Somewhere I don’t have access to.” He pulled me into a hug.

I pushed back to get a better look at his face. He was vaguely familiar. His warm eyes examined my face. I hugged him again. Human contact was nice after being stuck in that room for so long. How much time did I even spend in there?

The man started to walk down the hall. “Glad to see you again,” he said, turning to look at me over his shoulder.

I started to follow. The walls out here were still white, but a cleaner one. The change was slight, but it still made a difference. They felt less crushing than the ones I was surrounded with before. “Um,” I said, “who—"

“Do you happen to know where Tanya is?” He continued to walk then turned a corner.

I slowed my pace. “Um….” The name Tanya was familiar—very familiar. Fragments of memories flashed before my eyes, not many of them staying for more than a few moments. There was a young girl with braided hair, an old man with a suit. There were visits with doctors and phycologists and people whose profession I didn’t know. There was yelling and crying and anger, but sometimes there was laughter. And then there were houses. A lot of houses. The one that stayed in my mind the longest was of a mansion with a hedge maze in its backyard. I felt at home there, but don’t have any memories of *really* being there. I knew the general feeling of the place but nothing more.

“Hey, Tanya, remember?” The man snapped in my face a few times. I shook my head, but the snippets of memories didn’t leave. They just faded into the background of my mind, sitting next to the strange tingling that only seemed to grow in this man’s presence. I started walking again when the man gestured for me to continue.

When I reached his pace I said in a hard voice I hadn’t realized I possessed, “Don’t touch her.” I almost stopped walking again. I didn’t really even know who Tanya was, but her name sparked sometimes in the bottom of my mind. Maybe I did know who she was, and something was just messing with my memory. It would explain a lot.

The man gave me a hard side eye. “I- what?” He sounded almost amused with me.

“You heard what I said. You are not to touch her.” I matched his stare.

“Touch her as in hurt her? Why would I do that?” He stopped and pushed my shoulder so that I faced him. “What is up with you today?”

I shoved his arm off me, and he looked slightly offended. After a long pause I said, not trusting in my voice to speak any louder than a whisper, “Who are you again?”

His gaze bore into my skull, like he was trying to figure out what I was thinking. Something in the back of my mind itched, but I pushed it down. After a while he looked away and sighed. “T-Tanya. Do you remember her?”

I started to shake my head but stopped halfway through. I did remember her, somewhere in my mind.

“Tanya as in your sister.” He looked back at me and nodded a few times to confirm his statement’s truth. His voice was high with worry. “Tanya as in *our* sister.” He kept staring, waiting for something to register in my mind.

I looked up into his eyes, hoping the same thing he probably was. I sifted through the memory fragments I had, but neither his face nor the word “sister” appeared. I averted my gaze. Looking at him was suddenly too hard. “I’m sorry?” I said. A gross feeling surrounded my mind. Why couldn’t I remember?

He shook his head and grabbed my arm as he started walking again. “Ok,” he said, ridding the emotion from his voice, “well, I’m Anthony, your brother. Something has happened to your memory, and now we need to find Tanya before the same thing happens to her. Then we’re out of here. We’ll make it this time.”

*As the story continues, the protagonist and Anthony find their youngest siblings and escape their imprisonment surprisingly easily. They appear in a busy world that two of them barely remember. They* *uncover secrets about each* *other—some wanted and others less so—as they try to reunite with their lost family and get rid of the people who originally stripped them from it.*

*My story is about an old lady who befriends and confides in a young woman through letters. It connects to the theme in three ways. Lucy gives Alice advice, making her a teacher. Lucy also makes several friends, including Alice. Finally, Lucy is able to find the merit in her frustrating children.*

**Letters from Lucy By Keira Feuerstein Age: 15**

Alice,

Thank you for your letter.

 I don’t get them too often

You know, these days.

Technology and all that.

Not that I’m complaining. I love my new smart refrigerator.

It’s nice to see words on paper.

However, I think you may have

(And I hate to say this, in case it’s embarrassing for you)

But you may have sent it to the wrong address

It’s an easy mistake to make.

There are dozens of Main Streets across the country

Three in my town alone

The city planning is very stupid here

So don’t feel bad.

I get it.

Anyways, I hope you reach whoever you are looking for

Sincerely,

Lucy

Alice,

I’m happy to know that you’ve received my letter!

Thank you for writing back.

Your response simply made my day

I’m glad to know that

You were able to send your letter to

The proper recipient

And I totally understand

How easy it is

To write a one

Instead of a four

In the zip code.

I’ve done it myself too many times to count.

If you’d care to write again, I would love to know how you’re doing

Me, I’m just fine.

A bit tired recently, but

I just chalk that up to old age

I turn eighty-two next week

Disgustingly old, I know. I never imagined I’d get so far.

But old age isn’t so bad

Some young whippersnapper carried my groceries

As I crossed the street

Yesterday.

He’s a good kid.

You seem good, too. Thanks for writing.

Sincerely,

Lucy.

Alice,

I’m grateful for the birthday wishes.

It’s nice to know someone thinks of me

Since my kids

Didn’t even bother to

Send a note.

I’m a bit angry

If you couldn’t tell.

They could have at least bought flowers.

And thank you for enclosing that picture of your dog

In a birthday hat.

I think that he is quite adorable.

I’ve never had a dog

But I have owned two cats.

Ruby was my childhood cat,

Always a rascal

Who would dig through our trash.

She loved to eat anything in her line of sight

Unlike Tom

Who was the sleek black cat I owned in my twenties.

Tom refused to eat anything

But fine pieces of meat and fish

And he would scoff at normal cat food, hitting it away with his paw.

He was quite annoying

But I loved Tom dearly.

I’m sure you love Cat just as dearly

(Although I wonder if it ever gets confusing, having a dog named Cat)

Please send more pictures of Cat in silly outfits.

Sincerely,

Lucy

Alice,

First of all,

I greatly appreciate the images of Cat wearing a bow

and dressed as a taco.

When Halloween rolls around

I’m excited to see what you come up with.

Yesterday my smart refrigerator broke

And started shooting ice

All over the kitchen

It was nice to cool down in the dead of the summer

But it was not nice to call the repairmen.

They are downstairs fixing it

right now, as I’m writing to you

And they are

Very

Very

Very

Loud.

It is quite hard to focus on writing,

What with all the noise.

Sincerely,

Lucy

Alice,

My son, Charles, came by.

He said that he was worried

Because I told him about you

And he thinks that it’s not healthy for me

To be writing to random strangers.

He stayed for four days

So that was why

I could not respond.

But now he’s gone again.

I love him, but he can be…

Frustrating.

He thinks I’m unable to function on my own

Though I am perfectly capable of deciding what’s best for myself.

Anyways.

Enough about me.

Please write soon. Your letters are the highlight of my day.

Lucy

Alice,

Congratulations on getting the Starbucks job!

Starbucks is one of my favorite inventions of the modern day

It’s like coffee

But better

And more expensive.

I can’t write for a while

My son is coming back

And he’s bringing my daughter, Gloria.

She lives in Seattle.

Have you ever gone to Seattle?

Don’t.

It’s dreadful.

I don’t know how long they will be staying for

But just know that if I don’t write for a while

I’ll be alive.

Lucy

Alice,

I was so excited when I got your letter

It is 1 AM right now

My children are asleep

Which means that they cannot patrol my writing.

I’m glad that you like your new job.

Also, the story you told about the lady who wanted twelve espressos

Is… interesting.

I hope she’s okay. That’s a lot of caffeine.

After I finish writing

I am going to sneak out to the mailbox

With a flashlight

And an umbrella

(because it is storming severely)

And mail the letter.

That way, they’ll never catch me.

I feel so sneaky, like a criminal

But the good kind,

The glamorous ones

who make daring escapes

And have delightfully jazzy theme songs.

I love a good theme song.

Lucy

Alice,

Greetings from Lakeside County General Hospital!

On my way back from the mailbox

I slipped in a rain puddle,

Which to you might not seem terribly hospital-inducing

But I am old

And I have brittle bones

So when I shot out my wrist to protect myself

It snapped in two.

(Fortunately my writing hand remained intact.)

The neighbors heard me yelling for help

(but not Charles and Gloria, apparently. I guess they’re not as observant as they think)

And took me to the hospital.

My neighbor, Mrs. Greenley, is lovely. I think you would like her.

In the car ride, to keep me distracted,

She told me about her husband

(Mr. Greenley was not there because he was waking up my kids)

And how they had just moved in

Because they were newlyweds.

She also laughed at all of my jokes.

And let me wear her jacket

since my dress was covered in muddy puddle water

And I didn’t want to look shabby

In the hospital waiting room.

The hospital is ridiculously boring

But that’s good since there’s a lot of time to write.

Also I told them not to let Charles and Gloria in

So they can’t take away my paper and pens.

I will have the nice nurses mail my letter.

Hopefully when this reaches you I will be out of the hospital.

Write soon!

(and send more pictures of Cat)

Lucy

Alice,

Thank you for the picture of Cat dressed in hospital scrubs.

He looks very professional.

I am back home now.

Charles and Gloria are fighting downstairs

Which means they are distracted

So I can write.

Charles thinks that I can’t handle myself

Especially because of my wrist

(which barely even hurts anymore)

And he wants to send me to one of those houses where old people live.

Gloria thinks I won’t be safe there

Because she reads articles with statistics and graphs and such

And she wants me to come to Seattle with her.

Absolutely not.

They can’t make me go anywhere.

Not to a nursing home,

Not to Seattle.

I won’t let them.

I wish you the best,

Lucy

Alice,

I’m sorry to hear that your manager is so frustrating.

I know what you mean.

My first job

I worked at a burger place

I was fifteen

And one day I caught the napkins on fire

I put them too close to the grill.

It was an accident but

I got in so much trouble.

My boss,

Walter,

Threw the ashen mess at me

And made me clean the whole kitchen

All by myself.

I went home in tears

But at the end of the week,

I walked home

With a fistful of cash.

I still despise Walter,

And you may never like your manager,

But at least you get paid.

Good luck,

Lucy

Alice,

Gloria kicked Charles out of my house.

Good for her.

She’s just as annoying as he is

But she doesn’t care about my writing so much.

She thinks it “stimulates my neurons.”

I don’t know what that means.

I don’t care, so long as I can write.

I went to Starbucks today with Mrs. Greenley

And I got a Mocha Mint Latte.

It was indescribably delicious.

I highly recommend it.

Though you probably already know that. You have

Insider information.

What other marvelous concoctions do you recommend?

With warmest regards,

Lucy

Alice,

I tried a “Frappuccino” today, like you suggested.

It was caramel flavored

With little crumbles on top

And a mountain of whipped cream.

The caramel dripped from the side onto my fingers,

Making them sticky.

The drink tasted more like candy

Than coffee.

I used to keep a lot of caramel hard candies in my house.

But my grandchildren would eat them all.

We all share a sweet tooth.

I didn’t think anything could be as good as the Mocha Mint Latte, but

I was wrong.

Gloria doesn’t want me to eat so much sugar,

So I threatened to write her out of the will

If she continues to comment on

My eating habits.

I’m sorry.

You must think I hate my children.

In truth, I love them dearly

And they love me

And because of this, they try to keep me safe.

But my definition of safe is very different from theirs.

When I was a young mother,

I treated them the same.

I think they hated me, when they were teenagers.

I always babied them.

Never let them go to parties,

Early curfews,

Demanding good grades,

I could go on.

Be respectful

Be responsible.

Being strict with them because my parents were strict with me,

And I thought I was a better parent than most.

And I regret that, somewhat.

Did you know that Charles has a family?

Three kids. They’re staying with their mother for the summer, but

Normally he raises them

All on his own.

I can’t imagine how hard that is.

I at least had my husband to help, and to play

“good cop”

Whenever we spoke to the kids.

They liked him better.

No parent will admit to having a favorite child, but

There is no such rule

For a favorite parent.

I’m quite tired.

I’ll be going to bed soon.

Lucy

Alice,

I understand that it’s been a while. I’ve been very busy.

Three days ago, I had a long talk with Gloria

And I told her what I told you

About my parenting

And all the things I regret.

We sat in silence for some time.

I could tell that she was thinking.

About what, I don’t know.

And then she pulled out her cell phone,

With a sparkly case

And called Charles.

She told me to repeat what I said

And so I did.

And he said “okay”

Then he hung up.

I’m not sure what to make of their reactions

But I don’t think I’ll be going to Seattle.

Lucy

Dear Alice,

Today is a beautiful day.

The leaves are changing

To yellow, red, and orange

And the entire world looks like a fiery sunset.

The days are getting cooler

And to celebrate the end of summer

We had a party.

Mr. and Mrs. Greenley grilled hot dogs and burgers

And I made my famous potato salad.

Charles brought his kids-

The eldest is nearly off to college, they grow up so fast.

Gloria bested nearly everyone in our cornhole tournament

(She has quite the throwing arm!)

And bragged about it for the entire night.

We had a wonderful time

And when it became dark and chilly

We ate smores under the stars.

I think fall is my favorite time of year.

Not too hot, not too cold,

And everything looks so pretty.

I don’t know if you remember this, but

In one of our letters,

You mentioned that your birthday was

September 19th.

I have the date marked on my calendar

With lots and lots of exclamation points

And a teeny tiny party hat.

I know it’s still a few weeks away,

But I’d like to wish you a happy early birthday.

So,

Happy early birthday!!!!!!!!!!!

Lucy

**“Make for yourself a teacher, acquire for yourself a friend and find in every person their merit.”**

**– Pirkei Avot**