

# SONAR 2011

## San Francisco Day School

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## *Dad*

by Alana Baer

It smelled like hot dogs and soda, the defining scents of a baseball game. This night could have been the last game of the World Series. The moon was just about as bright as the sun in the cold evening. I knew that I would remember this for my whole life, even without the pictures from that night.

I have always looked up to my dad as a role model. Ever since I can remember I have always wanted to be like my dad, and walk in his footsteps. Without him I would have never become the person I am today. He is the one individual who has always supported me and been there for me in every situation.

The Giants finally getting to the World Series has made me feel on top of the world. I had practically waited my whole life for this game with my dad. He has a very fascinating job, which is being the president of the Giants. Although on occasions it isn't as great as it might seem. This job requires my dad to go to some away games and usually work on weekends. In other words, my dad doesn't get very much time to spend with me. This is why I try to take advantage of those times that I do spend with him. I knew how exactly how excited he was about getting to the World Series and I just couldn't imagine my dad feeling so disappointed and let down if the Giants lost. Despite that fact, my dad is very optimistic; he is never that sad when the Giants lose a game. I was just so afraid of my dad being let down. This game was obviously unique compared to others. We have gone on so many journeys to watch the Giants; I didn't want the last one of this year to be disappointing.

It was the beginning of the ninth inning, and closer Brian Wilson was pitching. I got up from my dad's lap and my dad stood up as well. We were now standing side by side. My knees were locked, my teeth were grinding, and my hands were intertwined with one another as I fidgeted with my fingers. I was trying to imagine all of the emotions my dad was feeling. As

I was still standing next to my dad, I glanced over and took a step closer to him. My chin was lying on top of his shoulder. Looking deep into my dad's ocean blue eyes, I spotted fearfulness, nervousness, and excitement. I felt as tense and nervous as a bride on her wedding day. He slowly reached over with his enormous hand and took hold of mine, which was a portion of the size of his. I felt comforted as my dad gripped my hand tightly. He held my hand and then wrapped his pinkie finger around mine.

Clutching pinkies is a special movement between only my dad and me. As I like to think of it, whenever we hold each other's pinkie fingers it's similar to a snapshot memory. Even though I feel like me and my dad have a very close relationship, this is one of the very few things that just us two do together. This is one of the reasons why my dad always called me a daddy's girl.

Sometimes I get mad that he has this job and I wish that I could live a normal life and not have to go to all of the baseball games. However, I always try taking back these thoughts because it's never my dad's fault. Though dad and I have always had a great relationship, he is also harsh with me in certain situations, and I feel like I can't always confide in him even when I wish that I could. This is when I go to talk to my mom. My mom has always comforted me, but in a completely different way from my dad. Ever since I was little I have feared my dad not being there for me. At the same time, I must realize I am eventually going to be without him. My dad is the one person who has always been there for me when I need him, and I always try to be there for him. As I stood there wondering and contemplating about what kind of memory this would end up being for me and my dad, the Giants winning or losing, I didn't quite realize that there was a baseball game going on.

At that exact moment it was the ninth inning, with two outs left of the game that had lasted forever. The crowd of Giants fans went unusually silent, as if a class of fifth-graders had just received F's. I felt the sensational tension flowing quickly through my body. But this nervous emotion wasn't like the feeling of performing on stage with one hundred people's eyes staring at me. This feeling was me being nervous for someone I love, a feeling of

sympathy. I looked down at our pinkies. I felt scared not to remember that moment, but then I wondered why I was making it such a big deal.

All of a sudden the crowd burst into cheers. Meanwhile, I had been thinking about me and my dad's bond instead of paying attention to the game. I never thought I could be as confused as I had felt in that moment.

Next thing I knew, the Giants won. I was shocked; I couldn't move a muscle. A wave of accomplishment struck everyone in the baseball stadium. People were jumping up, screaming out of joy, and chanting "Go Giants!"

The baseball team poured out of the dugout and onto the field. But before I could say anything, I turned to my dad. It was my first instinct. I saw a salty droplet of water sliding happily down his cheek, like a delighted kid sledding down a snowy mountain. Unlike most, that tear falling down his face was a sign of pride and happiness. My dad is someone who is not extremely sensitive and doesn't cry often, even if he's crying out of happiness. That is exactly the reason why it meant so much to me to see that tear slip down his face.

"GO GIANTS, WORLD SERIES CHAMPS!" I hollered. As I remember, my dad smiled after I said those words, but somehow that joyful comment coming out of my mouth didn't feel as happy as I imagined. Instead, shouting out those words felt guilty and disappointing. My emotions shifted from happy to discouraged. I felt so unhappy, but was that really the emotion I wanted to look back on, and reflect on? I decided not to feel sad but I knew hiding feelings wouldn't work. I wished that I could go back to that moment and change it. I felt trapped.

Not long after, my family was on the field celebrating with the Giants. Over all of the craziness and noise, I tried to talk to my dad.

"Congrats, Dad." The heartfelt words that he was waiting for flowed out of my mouth.

“Thanks, sweetie. But my real highlight wasn’t the Giants winning the World Series. It was you being there beside me for the whole season,” he said.

That was the moment that I realized I would probably watch the final out of the championship game on TV at least one hundred more times, though I would feel disappointed that I missed the opportunity to watch it in person.

Now I am aware that what really mattered was that I was with my dad, although I had always imagined myself being so proud of witnessing that third out. I now know that he is more important than any events or significant memories and moments. Even though I might regret not seeing that third out when I am older, I will never regret not being with my dad and bonding with him. After the ninth inning that felt like a century, the celebration, and a talk with my dad, I finally decided that it’s more important to value someone that you love than what is going on around you. That was the only full game I had ever been to and not seen the last out, but now I am satisfied of being in that moment with my dad. Sometimes it’s the small moments that end up being the greatest memories.

*A Piece of Paper*

by Mia Blaine

A piece of paper  
can sit and wait  
for a drawing to come  
and crawl up onto it

When an artist  
meets a blank piece of paper  
there is a moment  
like a fork in the road  
when she has to decide  
if she is satisfied

There will always be  
a new piece of paper  
sitting and waiting  
for a drawing to come  
and crawl up onto it

*Tree Cathedral*

by Ben Schatz

The high ceiling of tightly knit branches lets a beam of light come through to the ground

But it is still ghostly

More light seeps through the leaves and creates a stain glass window constructed by nature

The fog hangs low

The wind scatters the leaves so each individual one can be lost in their own thoughts

And the tree cathedral waits in solitude

It waits until it can be no more

***Growing and Falling***

by Justin Yamamura

As the water shimmers,

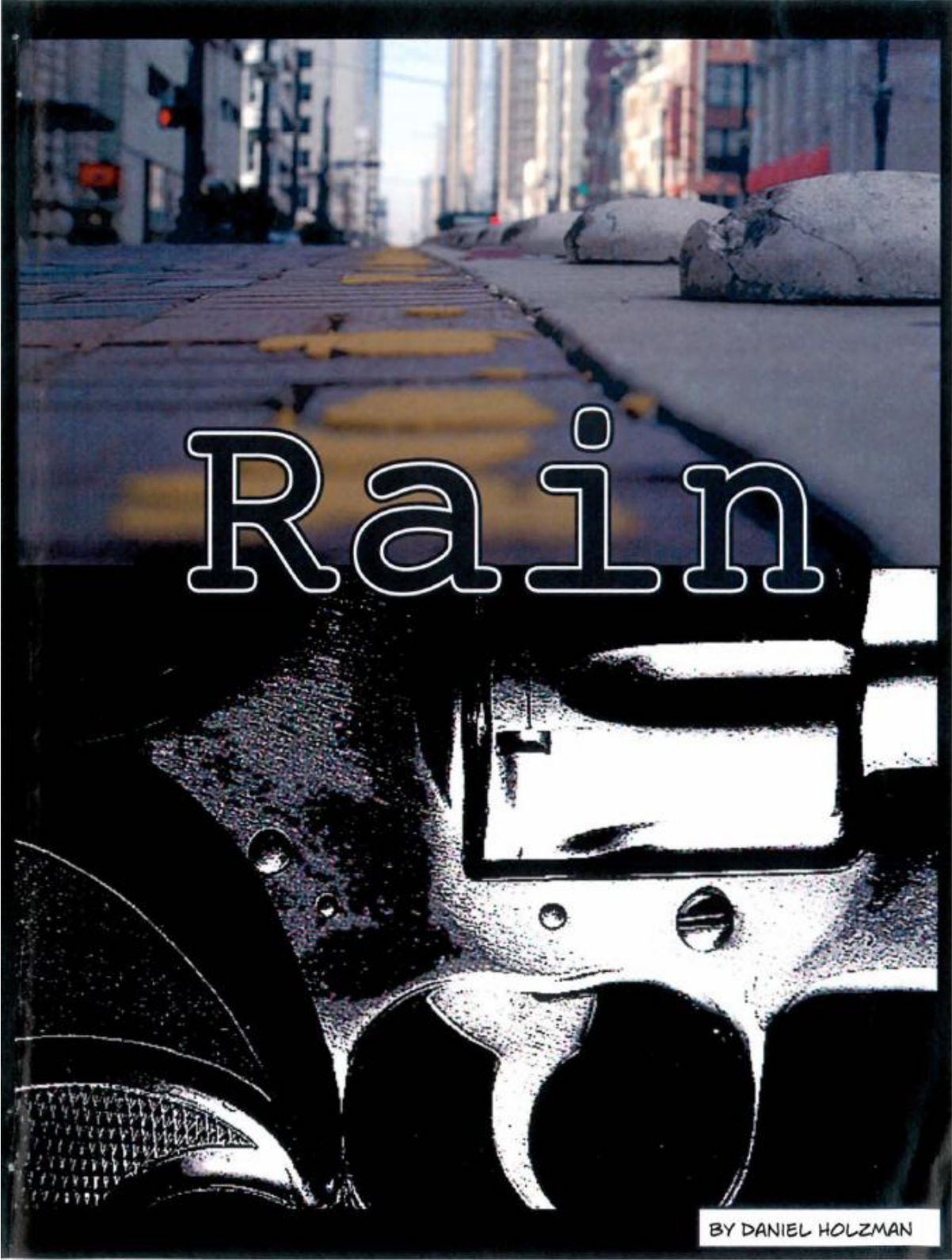
The shiny stone glimmers.

Then the water trickles down the waterfall.

The shiny stone grows abnormally tall.

Finally the water starts to die down,

The shiny stone becomes the only one in town.



# Rain

BY DANIEL HOLZMAN

## ***Rain***

by Daniel Holzman

### **Houston**

*A crown is merely a hat that lets the rain in.*

*Fredrick the Great*

The rain didn't stop. It came down in such quantity that even the neon sign at Bubba's Discount Liquors started to flicker violently. It rained so hard that the usual hustle and bustle of people in the sprawling city was quieted as if they were afraid to face what was outside. Even the police officers neglected walking a beat and the lieutenants let them; they were inside hiding their heads in an unknown shame. Even the churches were empty except for maybe a solitary shadowy figure that seemed to find religion a place of refuge. The city was holding its breath and slowly choking, as if a simple exhale would leave it breathless. The newspapers stopped coming and David Bowie stopped playing on the radio. The city was dead. People were non-existent and the rain didn't stop. Eventually people began to think that somewhere there had to be life but they couldn't get themselves outside. They never thought about why but they just couldn't. And like the slow death of an animal they started to become silhouettes. And the rain started to get thicker. Hope disintegrated into the air like dust and somewhere in that sprawling city a man walked out of a large apartment complex. He was the first man that had walked outside in a very long time. The rain shadowed his face and hid a grim smile. Crossing himself and saying a silent prayer, he walked out into the rain. And so it began.

### **Nowhere**

Joel Lynch opened his eyes. It was not a sudden thing but a slow subtle movement. The TV had long since lost power but that constant pounding of rain still smashed against the glass windows of the police station. It was the tenth day. The tenth murder. The tenth failure.

That sickening fact made Joel stir. It had to stop. He had to stop. After three smacks with his hand, the television sprang to life. The only channel was the news that all the others had fallen out. The solemn reporter spoke the words Joel had dreaded every moment for the past ten days. "The random murderer now known as Priest has struck again this time in a Midtown apartment complex no evidence has been found." The breath slowly fell out of Joel's mouth. He wanted the pain to stop; he could feel it as if there were spikes and weights in his heart slowly dragging him down.

### **Hope**

The phone rang in the station. This was strange because Joel thought that the power was out. "Detective Joel Lynch speaking," he said in a tired voice. "I have information on the killer they are calling Priest." Joel gagged as if on an invisible gulp of coffee. The voice spoke again, "He just killed someone but he's still here. The corner of West Road Drive and Main Street." Before Joel could say anything, the line went dead. He sprang up immediately, as if he was sitting on a nail, and ran through the station with a desperate cry for help. Only fifteen other officers were in the building. But they all ran frantically to the weapon racks. The place was pure havoc, papers flying in all directions and people not innocent to the thought of thinking. They had been untimely ripped from the trance that the rain had put over them. But slowly cars were readied and men loaded their respective instruments of death. The rain beat down on the car. Even the windshield wipers couldn't make a dent in the rain. The drive seemed endless. It was too good, too surreal to be true, that evidence would appear in front of him, but of course that wasn't what was really on his mind. He was too eager to know what to think. And for a man like Joel, not thinking brings ruin. The cars slowly died as they screeched to a halt. The solemn requiem of rubber on cement closed the deal. The men got out slowly with rifles in hand and then hastily fanned out onto the street. Joel was the first to see him; a small man hunched over near a wall. He quickly dispatched three men to look over the body. With a ghastly fit of spit and gagging, the man awoke. Fear was written deeply in the lines of his shadowy face. "What happened?" said an officer "I ... I ... I don't know he ...he was here! The killer...murdered a man in tr..." He stopped short to wheeze and gag. The officer looked worried. "What's your name sir?" "Eulogy, Eulogy

Bates." The officer helped him up and into the back of a car under guard. Then he returned to the other officers. Across the street Joel opened the door at a bar. He quickly surveyed the place. Empty. Like the streets around him. Murdered by rain. Then he saw something. It slowly drifted down from somewhere in the bar. And then another and another. They were sheets of paper. Joel grabbed one as the room started to fill with the papers, like rain. But suddenly it all came together. The sheets all read the same message.

*They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk, and not faint.*

*Isaiah 40:31*

#### **A eulogy.**

Across the street an officer took out a cigarette. He then took out a lighter. Suddenly Joel felt something. A sheet of paper had fallen into his arms. It simply read three words. "Burn in hell." Joel looked out the large window into the car across the street, and the man looked at him and smiled. The officer lit the cigarette and there was one instant of realization but it was soon erased as the ground around him and the others were engulfed in flames. Their screams were lost in the fire. It was biblical. Joel rushed outside. The cacophony of the fire and explosions knocked Joel down. He raised his hand to cover his eyes but his ears bled with the crackling sound of death by fire. He got back up slowly and threw off his coat, which had caught fire. And it slowly burned like a small man. He ran blindly through the smoke and finally reached an alley where after three retches he vomited on the wall. Suddenly a cold laugh echoed through the alley. Joel looked up. Before him stood the man. Joel stood up with dignity and drew his gun. The man just stood there. Joel's mind raced with questions, anger, frustration, fear, and sadness, but all of it came out one way or another through the movement of one finger. Joel didn't realize it had happened till it was over. The flash of the muzzle was like the dying cry of the fire in the street as the rain killed it. Priest fell onto his knees, and then as if it were a bow, he dropped with a resounding flourish. Joel dropped the gun in a moment of disbelief. Then as the rain and fire fought their final battle he walked out of the alley and into a new day.



*A*

*"A chain of chilling murders  
that will shake the foundations of London."*

*Series*

*Of*

*Mysterious*

*Happenings*

*By: Cole Palmer*

## *A Series of Mysterious Happenings*

by Cole Palmer

Mist swirled around the narrow empty streets that were usually thronged with many people. The lights went out in a law office and a tall figure in a dark coat stepped out and locked the door. He walked down the street at a fast pace, hurriedly looking left to right and brushed his pocket as if checking if his wallet was still there; the man was soon out of sight. This street held dangers at night when the portly bankers and sallow-faced beggars were gone, because the mist hid everything. An apartment above a bookstore on the corner went dark as the residents extinguished their fireplace. The street was absolutely empty, as if it was post-apocalypse. Suddenly, shouts were uttered into the mist from somewhere high up, and then a large thump resounded through the empty streets.

"Who goes there?!"

"Show yourself, I'm armed!"

A constable with ragged hair and a short squat build, who had been in a subconscious state leaning against the wall, was suddenly alert. He began walking toward the place where something had fallen with his 45-caliber pistol out, making it look as if he was trying to mug the night.

"Bloody hell, Mr. Brixton, is that you?"

"He hasn't got a pulse!"

The man pulled out his radio and said, "This is unit 5, calling for immediate ambulance and mi-6 backup, repeat: I need an ambulance and mi-6 backup, this is a code red situation!"

About two minutes later, a black van pulled up, followed by a red and white van with flashing lights. The black van's doors opened with a crash and men in riot gear hopped out with two fierce looking dogs and assault rifles pointing in all directions.

"What's the situation unit 5?"

"That." He pointed to the body. "Mr. Brixton, the owner of the Imperial Bank of London, is dead, you idiots!"

A collective gasp came from the crowd of men and a medic hopped out of the ambulance. In a jiffy there was a chalk line, the man was on a stretcher being lifted up, and caution tape surrounded the situation. The mi-6 unit charged the apartment complex, making as much noise as possible before they got to the roof. Lights went on level by level, as if you could track them floor by floor. A shout came down from the top, "There ain't nothing up here!"

"Where's his apartment then?"

"He doesn't live in an apartment you idiots, he's as rich as the queen, and even if he did live here, we can't go in without a search warrant!"

The arguing went on like this for some time until a window opened and the dark figure of an old man leaned out and yelled, "Cut it out, ya jack-wagons!"

They trumped down, all in a huff about not finding something. There were cameramen and news vans crowded around the scene by now, creating a great clamor. A microphone was shoved in the constable's face and a young reporter started to ask a question but was interrupted: "No comment on everything you're about to say, now get out of here."

In the confusion nobody noticed the hooded figure stalking away from the scene, holding a bottle of red spray paint. The foggy streets of London were awakened with the start of a

crisis that would shake the foundations of the city and put terror and confusion into the most calm and intelligent minds.

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Owner of Imperial Bank of London Murdered, IBL in state of crisis

*Craignez que ma vengeance pour l'extrémité soit prés, un ils disparaisse*

In English, the message means *Fear my revenge, for the end is near, one by one they will disappear.*

This eerie message was found scrawled on the side wall of the IBL on Monday night. Suicide is very unlikely, as Brixton was apparently knocked out before he was pushed off the building. The police arrested the previous owner of the rival bank in France, Joseph Belafonte; he used to run another one of Europe's largest banks, International Bank of Europe (IBE). Belafonte and Brixton had previously been friends until Brixton uncovered a massive Ponzi scheme that was pouring money into Belafonte's Swiss bank accounts. The stock of IBE had already hit rock bottom and everyone knew that nobody could pull it out of the ditch except for Brixton so he was elected CEO, but he was so bitter about the massive amounts of money he had lost in the scheme that he ran the bank, in which Belafonte had invested stock worth millions of dollars, into the ground. This caused a nationwide crisis, causing all of the companies that were taking loans to get started with money in the vaults, in which Belafonte also had vested millions of dollars in stocks, to go bankrupt. And right before the board ousted Brixton, he invested \$173,032,893 into rebuilding everything he had destroyed, which was soon made back by eager investors. Brixton had taken a country in and out of an economy crisis in three months, and Belafonte had quickly sold all his plummeting stock so he could lose no more, but he had been ruined. The bank and the country are doing better than ever, and Brixton had resigned as CEO of IBE, and left it Flourishing. When Belafonte was let out of prison, he disappeared into the Alps, but the police found he was living in the very apartment building that Brixton was

pushed off of. Belafonte admits he was planning to murder Brixton but insisted that someone else had killed him.

"Well, what do you make of it?" Anticleia Romano, the wife of a young investigative reporter, Claudio Romano, asked insistently.

Claudio put down the Times and looked at her over his cup of coffee.

"I don't think he did it."

"What?!" I tell you so many time, you crazy!"

The young lady spoke with a heavy Greek accent, English being her second language. She had grown up in poverty in Athens, and her father was killed in a fire caused by a riot when she was six. Claudio was from a wealthy Italian family but was disowned when he reported his brother to the police for kidnapping for ransom, which was one of the family businesses. He had come to London and got a job at the Times, doing investigative reporting.

"The man was so proud he would have bragged about murdering Brixton, a false alibi is not his style," he muttered, half to himself.

"Hmm... well guess this will be a good case for you then."

"Well, I had best go," he said, putting down his coffee.

He stood up, stretched, grabbed a worn leather briefcase and left, the door closing with a soft thud behind him.

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The next day, Claudio was early coming from work; his editor had given him the rest of the day off for his fantastic article questioning the motives of the unknown killer. He was back at home, eating a dinner with some friends they had over, when the lights flickered and went out. When they came back on Claudio was on the floor, knocked out with blood dripping down his face. On the big copy of the Last Supper they had on their wall, there was red spray paint scrawled in a terrible threat. *Lay off or you'll get defenestrated too, !@#\$.%*

*TO BE CONTINUED*

## **Poems**

*by Allison Rome*

### **I.**

All I have is my **Freewill.**

And the **Secret Letters.**

Left

In my closet

From someone.

**Home Is East,**

But it will take

Me **EightyEight**

**Steps**

**To September**

To get there.

And what lay

In front of

Me: **The Haunting,**

**On The Other Side**

**Of**

**Silence.**

### **II.**

Watch those flowers bloom

Red, orange, yellow

Oh, how they blossom.

### **III.**

As I walk through summer wind

Air, seeing a waving of cape.

No shame,

No certainty,

No promise.

## ***Best Frenemies Forever***

by Morgan Ruff

### **Chapter One**

I leaned back into my uncomfortable airplane seat and asked myself why I wasn't in first class being served breakfast. That was where I usually was - huge seats, with flight attendants bringing me cookies. That was my life, or my old life, anyways. I used to stay in five star hotels everywhere I went and go shopping every weekend with my friends. Now I couldn't even get a bad breakfast on a stupid plane.

I sighed; my life had gone downhill fast. Just a month ago my life was perfect. I was rich and popular, but then my mom lost her job and my dad left us, and now... well, my life is much less than perfect. I am no longer rich, so, because we had no money, my mom took me to her brother's house. No, house isn't the right word; it's more like a farm. A stupid, dirty, farm. With stupid, dirty animals. And a stupid cousin named Kim.

I sighed again. This wasn't fair! I understood that we needed money, really I did. But we were moving from awesome New York City to lame small town Adna, Washington in the middle of the school year! And on top of that I was in middle school. Did my mom get how hard it is to just walk in and make new friends during the second semester of seventh grade? Apparently not, because we were still moving.

I had been to Adna once, and I had hated it. Dirty animals and even chores are just not my thing, and that's about all there was in Adna! A third sigh escaped from my mouth. This time my mom looked at me with a worried expression on her face.

"Bianca, are you all right?" she asked. I was tempted to say that I so was not okay; my entire life was completely destroyed! But my mom had more than enough to deal with, so I decided not to say that.

"Yeah Mom I'm fine," I replied quietly. Total lie. I was the opposite of okay.

Suddenly I felt tears gathering in my eyes and I blinked a few times so they wouldn't overflow and start spilling down my cheeks. I did not cry. EVER! I hadn't cried once in the past five years, not when I broke my arm in second grade after I fell off the monkey bars, or when my dad left my mom and me. I sure wasn't going to break that record now, not in the middle of a crowded airplane, anyways. Pull yourself together!, I screamed at myself. And slowly my face became calm, or at least I hope it looked that way.

I was abruptly brought out of my thoughts by the plane landing roughly on the runway. I bounced up and down on my hard seat. The plane slowly stopped and I got up, my feelings in turmoil but my face a calm mask, or at least I hoped it looked that way. I may not have been happy about anything happening at that moment but it's not like I had a choice, so I might as well go into it the right way. So I flashed a very fake smile at my worried mother and walked head on into my new life.

## **Chapter Two**

"So..." I said slowly, stretching out that two-letter word in a hopeless attempt to start a conversation with my mute cousin Kim. "Do you play any sports?" I know it was a lame question but I had nothing better to say.

"Basketball," she said so quietly, that at first I thought I had imagined it. "I play basketball."

"Cool," I replied, "I play volleyball."

In reality I thought there was no way she could play basketball. We were both twelve but she looked like a five-year-old. Kim was about four and a half feet tall with wispy shoulder-length brown hair that really needed to be conditioned. Her hook-nose was enormous and covered in dark freckles. In fact, her whole face was covered in freckles. She had big bushy eyebrows and huge green eyes. But the worst part was that she was wearing overalls. Overalls! Last time I checked, they were so not in style. And I checked like yesterday! She

was pretty much the exact opposite of me. To start with, I was really tall. My wavy, rich chestnut colored hair fell to my waist, and it was always clean! My eyes were ice blue and I had naturally arched eyebrows that were so not bushy. And I actually wore cool clothes that were in style. People called me pretty but no offense to her, my cousin did not fit that same description. It's not that I have anything against people who look like Kim - on a lot of people, green eyes or freckles or whatever actually look good, just not on her.

"Yeah, I really like playing it, and I'm really good," she said quietly.

It took me a minute to process that thought - she was good at basketball? Well, I guess life is full of surprises, this being a big one, but I didn't want another awkward silence so I said:

"Awesome, I should come to one of your games sometime."

The look of horror that shot through Kim's eyes (they got even bigger!) only lasted for a second before her face returned to its normal, timid expression.

"What? Don't be scared," I said. "I'm sure you're really good."

That was the opposite of what I thought, but I'm not mean enough to crush my own cousin's hopes like that.

"Yeah, thanks," she said sincerely, giving me a small smile. And I smiled back at her.

"Okay, so um..." I was really bad at starting conversations with strangers, even if she was my cousin. But I guess that's kind of obvious. "So where am I going to sleep?" I asked after a few minutes of awkward silence.

"Here, I'll show you," she answered in a voice that I could actually hear this time. Then she got up from the kitchen stool and led me down the narrow hallway full of creepy pictures of her family.

In one of the pictures someone had decided it would be a good idea if the entire family dressed up as farm animals. Kim was a chicken, her dad was a cow and her mom was a pig. In the end it had turned out to be a very, very bad idea. They all looked like complete idiots, and I wanted to laugh but that would have been rude.

So instead of laughing, I said “Nice pictures,” and not even that sarcastically. Kim just looked at me, with a look of extreme satisfaction in her bright green eyes. All I could think about at that point was what a loser she was. Finally we got to the end of the hall and turned into a really dark room. Kim felt along the wall for a minute and then flipped a switch. A single light bulb flickered on the ceiling and I stared at it, eyebrows raised, as it fought to stay on. Finally it stopped flickering and I looked around me. The room was small and painted the most hideous shade of green I had ever seen, and to make it worse there were no windows.

There was a small bed in the corner with a really ugly dark green comforter and a desk that looked like it had come out of a movie from a hundred years ago. Everything was neat and tidy, no half-read magazines lying around on the floor, no dirty laundry scattered around hidden in corners. No sign of Kim’s personality at all. The smell of rotten eggs was so intense I wanted to gag. If I had to use one word to describe that room it would be terrible, disgusting, ugly, horrible, hideous...okay I guess I can’t narrow it down to one word, but whatever. Then I realized that all the furniture was pushed onto one side of the room and a horrible thought hit me. I was going to have to share this tiny, hideous room with my cousin. Could my life get any worse?

### **Chapter Three**

“WHAT?” I screamed at Kim. “We have to what?”

“We have to go feed the pigs now,” she replied calmly.

“What? Feed the pigs! WE! Oh no way! I am so not feeding the pigs with you!”

I was totally freaking out. I had never fed pigs before. To tell the truth I had never even seen a real pig in my life, and that was something I was completely okay with. So I guess the answer to my question was yes, my life was going to get worse, way worse.

“Don’t worry, they won’t bite you,” Kim assured me. I stared at her for a minute, willing her to get the message that I was not an idiot; I knew that. I was just terrified because they were filthy animals that I was so not going to touch or feed.

“Come on!” she said, exasperated now. “We have to do it quickly because we have to wash the goats when we finish with the pigs.”

“WHAT?” I shrieked.

“And milk the cows,” she continued.

“No way!” I yelled. “No freakin’ way! I’m so not going to do this! You are crazy! How can you like this stuff?”

“I don’t like it!” she exclaimed, an edge creeping into her voice.

“Mm hmm yeah right!” came my sarcastic reply.

“You think I like doing chores all day! Well you’re wrong. I HATE it.”

“Oh really,” I said sarcastically.

“YES! Just... just get out okay! Find somewhere else to sleep.”

“Oh thank God!” I yelled back, my face flushing red with anger. “This is the first good thing that has happened to me since I moved here: not having to share this ugly room with you!”

I knew I was being harsh, but I needed someone to take all of my anger out on.

“GET OUT!” she screamed.

“Gladly,” I replied.

“Fine,” she shrieked.

“Okay then,” I yelled back. Then I spun on my heel and stormed through the door, slamming it behind me.

#### **Chapter 4**

I stormed through the house/farm/disgusting shack/ whatever, stomping my feet and slamming doors behind me. Anger coursed through my body, making my heart pound and ears burn red. I passed through the dark hallway with super creepy pictures and ran into the run-down living room. I stood there for a moment, taking in my surroundings. What I saw wasn't exactly great.

The living room was almost as terrible as Kim's bedroom, except it smelled fine. The brown leather armchairs were obviously well used, in a bad way, and the small brown coffee table had a million stains on it. The peeling brown paint strongly resembled dirt, and the faded brown carpet was tracked with mud and looked like people hadn't even bothered cleaning it in the last thousand years. There was an ancient TV sitting on a dusty shelf, and ancient DVDs from like a billion years ago. The windows were covered in bright green curtains, which totally didn't go with the chairs or anything else in the room.

I collapsed into one of the disgusting chairs, which were surprisingly comfortable, and closed my eyes. Slowly my head cleared and my breathing calmed. I opened my eyes and found myself staring at pink tulips, my favorite kind of flower in my favorite color. For some reason this calmed me, something that reminded me of home. My mom used to love

gardening for some strange reason I never understood, and would always grow these flowers.

I smiled, which was stupid and made me look like a total idiot; I mean, who starts grinning about flowers when their lives are completely destroyed and probably about to get worse? Well me, apparently. But anyways, the flowers calmed me down and finally, for the first time in weeks I let myself relax. But sadly, for me that moment of peace lasted for about a second before I heard the shouting.

It was my mom and my uncle, and he was angry. Like really, really angry. Slowly I stood up and crept towards the sounds of their voices. It's not like I couldn't hear every single word they were saying, it's just a habit of mine to creep closer to a conversation I'm not supposed to hear. So I walked forward as quietly as I possibly could, which wasn't that quietly, and tiptoed (kinda) into the kitchen.

Well, kitchen would have been a more appropriate word about one hundred years ago. The room was a mirror image of every other room in the house, old and run down. And it was small. The brown chairs were clustered around a small table. The counter was littered with dirty dishes. And earlier when I had tried to use the sink, only cold water had come out.

I was suddenly brought back to reality when I heard my mother say my name. "I'll talk to her, Liam," said my mother. Apparently my uncle's name was Liam, something I had never known or cared about. I had always just called him Uncle or more often You, but whatever, totally not the point.

"Is talking to her really going to help anything, Mary?" replied Liam. And yes, I did know my mother's name was Mary.

"Please just let me try. You've got to understand, this is a huge change for her. Her dad left and she had to move in the middle of school. Just give her a chance, let me talk to her," begged my mom.

“Fine,” Liam/Uncle/You replied. “But you know Kim’s been through a lot too, Mary. It just makes everything worse when Bianca treats her like that.”

Anger coursed through my body, that little rat had told on me! Well I was going to show her! But before I could come up with a brilliant plan to destroy Kim, my uncle said something that shook me so bad that I almost didn’t want to kill her.

“You know Kim’s mom died, Mary, and in case you haven’t noticed, things haven’t been that great since then,” he said.

Her mom had died? Well there’s something I didn’t know. I guess that’s why their house was so run down; nobody knew how to take care of it and there was not enough money to do anything about it. For a minute I almost felt bad for the way I had yelled at her. We did have that one similarity at least; we had both lost a parent. I know my dad isn’t technically dead, but he was as good as dead to me. I’m not sure I’ll ever be able to forgive him for leaving my mom and me. But even though I kind of regretted screaming at Kim like that, I was not ready to apologize. Not just yet.

## **Chapter 5**

I don’t know why, but some strange instinct led me outside to the worn-down barn at the edge of the property. Just like everything else, it was old and disgusting. The peeling red paint hung stubbornly to the falling wooden beams and the wiry branches of the willow trees fell on to the broken barn roof. The wind whistled through the trees and I heard the far-off howl of a coyote. I inhaled and the sweet air filled my lungs calming me until my heartbeat returned to normal. I crept closer to the barn and suddenly I heard a noise; it sounded like...crying.

When I walked through the barn door (well, door might not be the best word...), I saw Kim sitting on a stack of hay, sobbing. I felt a rush of guilt - was she crying because of me? But then I heard words.

“I miss you so much, I-I’m,” she choked on her words.

I looked around, was there someone else in there? Was she holding a phone? I looked around; there was no one in there besides Kim and me. And she didn’t know I was in there. I checked her hands; there was no phone. Was she...crazy? I considered that possibility for a moment. Everyone talks to themselves sometimes, but she was talking like there was someone else in the room. But then I saw what she was holding. It was a small metal picture frame with a picture of a woman in it. At first I thought it was Kim in the picture, same dirt brown hair, green eyes and splatter of freckles across her cheeks, nose and every other exposed area of skin on her body. That would definitely mean she was crazy, I mean, who talks to a picture of themselves? But then I realized the woman was much older. It must be her mother. Her dead mother.

Suddenly a wave of strange emotions swept through my body. Sorrow, sadness, regret... for the first time in my life, I actually wanted to apologize. It was so weird, I had never felt that before, and I never wanted to ever again.

I felt like such a monster. A mean, evil monster. I no longer just wanted to apologize, I needed to apologize. I needed to get this off my conscience. I had been so mean to her, but what had she ever done to me? I had thought that what happened with my dad gave me an excuse to yell, but she had been through so much more than me.

Kim continued to sob while I continued to stand there with wide eyes and an apology on the tip of my tongue. I tried to choke out the simple words “I’m sorry,” but I couldn’t. “Sorry” was not part of my vocabulary. It had never been, and I was totally okay with that. I had always been happy to live as a mean, selfish... I guess the right word is bully. I was a bully.

I’m not the kind of person who suddenly realizes that they’ve been a terrible person all their life and vows to transform into a nice, caring, selfless person overnight. There was no

way I could do that. Only people in cheesy movies can do that. And unfortunately my life isn't a movie. I can't rewind into my old life in New York, when my family was whole and I was happy. But I could fix things between Kim and me; I could try to be nice to at least her. So with my totally cheesy plan in mind, I walked to the haystack where Kim was sitting and tried to be a nice, caring person, and let me tell you, it's hard.

## **Chapter 6**

I sat down on the haystack next to my crying cousin, which was hard not only because it was totally awkward, but also because hay is dirty. But with great effort, I managed to sit on the disgusting pile of horse food. Or cow food, or was it pig food? Whatever, I didn't really care.

Kim didn't even seem to realize I was there, which is very difficult to do because I'm not exactly a quiet person. But she just kept crying into her hands. I was completely lost. What the heck was I supposed to do? I considered hugging her and telling her everything was going to be okay, but decided against it; you couldn't get any cheesier than that. We just sat there for what felt like ever, her crying her eyes out, me trying to think of something comforting to say. I had absolutely no idea what to do.

Finally I just asked, "Are you okay?" I know, lamest question ever! Of course she wasn't okay. But the silence was just making this even more awkward.

Instead of answering me, Kim turned and started crying into my shoulder. Awkwardly I put my arms around her and after a few moments of consideration, I told her super cheesily that it was going to be okay. Well great, now I was doing the exact thing that only minutes ago I had declared was the cheesiest thing ever! But at least we were connecting (if you consider her crying into my shoulder, which by the way totally ruined my hundred dollar silk sweater, connecting). As she finally calmed down and the tears dried on her cheeks I grabbed her arm and looked her directly in the eye and choked out those two impossible words: "I'm sorry."

She just smiled and hugged me again. I found that just a little weird; I mean I wouldn't have forgiven the person who made fun of my life so easily. But I guess part of being a nice, caring, good person is learning to forgive people and give them a second chance. Maybe I could learn a thing or two from Kim. Maybe if I learned to be nice, we could be friends. We might even have something in common (although I highly doubt it). Then maybe this stupid move wouldn't be so bad. That would be nice.

At that point my biggest wish changed from my dad coming back and my life returning to normal, to making things work with Kim and making the best of my new life. It might not be easy to touch dirty animals (eww!), but maybe, just maybe I could get used to everything else.

To be continued...

## *A Tenderloin Memoir*

Mia Mostoufi

The streets of the tenderloin were coated in a layer of filth. Cigarette butts littered the floor, crunching under the residents' feet as they tromped through their neighborhood. The hotel signs hung askew and the burned-out neon lights halfheartedly displayed their names, while people filed in and out of the cramped doorways of these residential hotels. Not many looked friendly enough to strike a conversation with. Most of them looked grubby, unkempt, and beaten down by circumstance, making them seem suspicious, if not cruel. Though one may note that looks can be deceiving, as most of these people were most likely kind in the heart.

The majority of the buildings in the area were not residential. It seemed that only businesses could afford to keep shop in the area at the bottom of San Francisco's food chain. Though they were holding on to life by the skin of their teeth, or so it looked, as graffiti and deterioration had gotten the best of the curb appeal. The architecture only enhanced one's stereotypes of people in the Tenderloin. It reflected the shady and sketchy parts of the neighborhood, as opposed to the little good that one could see. The buildings seemed that they would crumble in the slightest of quakes, the chipped paint not adding to any charm the buildings could muster from their glory days. Despite their lack of appeal, the thrift stores and other stores were buzzing with life. All different colors of people filled the claustrophobic insides of the storefronts. All different in many ways, but all thrown into the same place, the Tenderloin. They all lived in the same frowned upon neighborhood that nobody had respect for.

Who am I?

At this point in my rather short life I am completely and utterly devoted to school. Not by choice, mind you, but devoted never the less. I wake up each morning, reluctantly, to the foggy skies of San Francisco, never wanting to get up from the haven of my comforter, and get ready for a day of cramming seemingly useless information into my head. I go home and am still in the work mindset, helping cook, clean, and maintain a household. When with

friends, I do nothing of the sort and become my boisterous self. One may think that 7th graders' problems are petty, but this is far from true in my case. I may be well off with a roof over my head and plenty of money, but money isn't everything. I am without a mother. I deal with every coming day without someone to turn to. As I said, money isn't everything. Though I know I am far from the worst off in San Francisco, recent trips to the Tenderloin have proved to me that having a roof over your head and a little extra money can go a long way. My experiences there never fail to leave an impression on me. The people of the Tenderloin show me just how lucky I am with or without a mother. I am well-fed and well-cared for. Yet I will always look at the world with a slightly gloomier perspective. I will always feel the cold truth, and I will never be in a bubble of happiness, where all my worries are gone. The Tenderloin has opened up my eyes to what people go through day in and day out, and has made me see the world just a bit differently.

Ms. Judy

When the door adorned with stickers opened wide, an older woman with long, scraggly, grey hair stood before us. She had dark, thick glasses on and a T-shirt with grey, baggy sweat pants.

"Ms. Judy, these people have brought you food. Didn't you say you were hungry?" a woman who worked in the building asked her.

Judy nodded and graciously took the food. Thanking us before closing the door of her tiny SRO, or single resident occupancy. Before she closed the door I peeked inside her apartment. It was quite dark inside, probably due to a dim or nonexistent light. There were books strewn on all the available surfaces. Some titles jumped out at me as I glanced in the room; Percy Jackson, Omnivores Dilemma and some Sophie Kinsella works. I realized then that not all people in the Tenderloin were there because of drugs, alcohol addiction, or lack of education. Some people were there purely because they ran out of money.

When I looked to the kitchen area of the SRO I noticed bare shelves, with visible dust accumulating on the surface of each piece of wood. I thought back to what the lady with the posters for bingo night had said. Judy had called 911 because she was so hungry. I thought

back to the bread, chips, and variety of cans in the bag I had just handed her. It would maybe last her a day at the most. But still, one less day of food to pay for. This woman had been so grateful for so little, just a bright yellow bag of groceries. To me it seemed like nothing, but it was evident on her face that it meant much more than I could ever imagine.

### ***Snooki and Justin Bieber as President***

Nicole Borders and Jeannie Davis

I: Hello I'm Jessica Martin for DEF news. I have the presidential candidate for 2012, Nicole Palizzi here today.

S: Hiiii, call me Snooki, JERSEY SHORE IN THE HOUSE! SHOUT OUT TO THE SITUATION AND MY HOMEGIRL JWOWW!

J: (walking in with loud ipod) (can hear *Never say Never*) (*dancing*) Hey (hair flip, pose)

I: Ummm? (Looking around set confused) (music stops)

J: I'm running for vice president! (Hair flip, pose)

I: How does that work?

J: I know that I wasn't born here or whatever but it's time that there are some changes made around here. (Hair flip, pose)

I: Like what kind of... changes?

J: Well...cars wouldn't exist everyone would ride around on Segways. And you wouldn't get in trouble for throwing water balloons at cops, and we would make all of the tax money by taxing people for saying never. (hair flip, pose)

I: *Snooki* do you want to weigh in on this?

S: Well I think that there should be no tax on tanning, free pickles, and drinks, and. . . . . Oh!  
All firefighters have to be hot and are not allowed to wear shirts!

I: Do you two think that you have a good shot at winning this election?

J: Of course, all the kids in this country want a young leader so they will all vote for us!

I: Well...I would answer, but I'm never supposed to be... (cut off)

J: NEVER SAY NEVER (mad) (hair flip, pose) and who wouldn't vote for this (hair flip, pose)

S: Yeah and if people don't vote for us I will. . . . .

I: Kids are watching this show.

S: And. . .

I: Just keep it appropriate

S: Oh never mind then

I: What are your administration's plans for space exploration?

S: . . . . . umm. . . .

J: So let me start by being extremely clear: I am 100 percent committed to the mission of NASA and its future. Because broadening our capabilities in space will continue to serve our society in ways that we can scarcely imagine. Because exploration will once more

inspire wonder in a new generation -- sparking passions and launching careers. And because, ultimately, if we fail to press forward in the pursuit of discovery, we are ceding our future and we are ceding that essential element of the American character.

S: I know there have been a number of questions raised about our administration's plan for space exploration, especially in this part of Florida where so many rely on NASA as a source of income as well as a source of pride and community. And these questions come at a time of transition, as the space shuttle nears its scheduled retirement after almost 30 years of service. And understandably, this adds to the worries of folks concerned not only about their own futures but about the future of the space program to which they've devoted their lives. . . . . and we might be able to find some pickles on Mars...and also...(cut off)

*(Justin walks out)*

I: Excuse me hurry up... (to s) where are you going (to j)

J: I have a concert, bye everybody (hair flip, pose)

S: AND ALSO... (*Director starts counting down 5...*) (dirty look to Jessica Martin)

I: Cut!

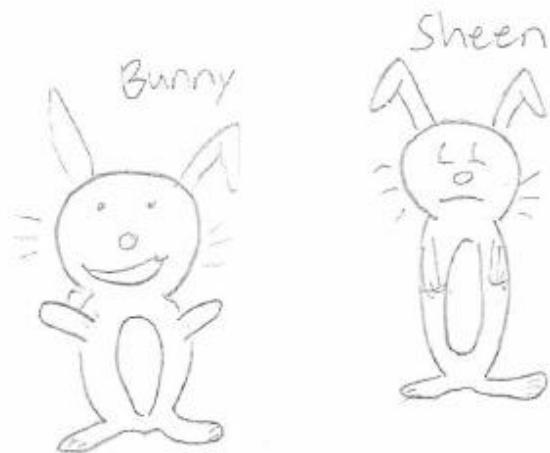
I: Thank you both, we will see you next week. I'm Jessica Martin with DEF news. (very rushed)

Blackout

# "Bunny You Can't Play!"



By: Colin Riley



Once upon a time there was a town  
Of animals that lived in a meadow with some girls, some guys,  
and a clown.  
In that meadow  
There was a very nice fellow,  
His name was not Phil  
Or Bill,  
His name wasn't very funny  
It was simply just Bunny.  
Now as you can guess, Bunny lived in a family of bunnies with a  
mom a dad and an older brother Sheen.  
He was a little mean,  
And tall too, but he always cried  
When he didn't get to play ball with his guys.



Now this Sheen animal was not a fool  
He was actually very cool  
With friends as far as the eye could see. He wasn't mean he was  
actually nice,  
Except for his bad case of head lice.  
One day Sheen decided to play baseball with his best  
Buds, Ted and Jess.  
Bunny had friends too, but he actually wanted to play with  
Sheen today  
Because he said that he would teach Bunny to do ballet.  
But when Bunny saw Sheen playing baseball he though it was  
the coolest thing ever.

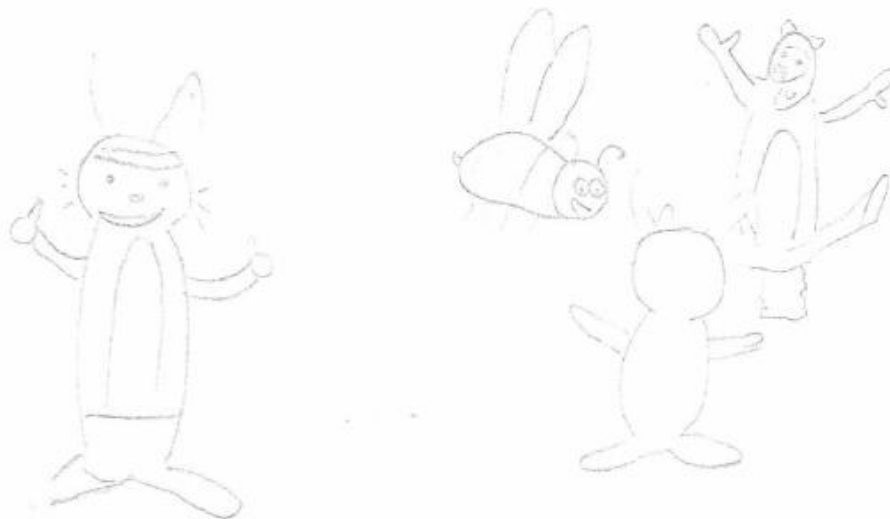


Bunny wanted to play but his brother said "No Way!"  
Sheen said it because only he wanted to play.  
Bunny insisted  
He should be able to play, but got kicked out by Sheen, who  
was very tight fisted.  
Bunny wailed and cried a lot, but it didn't seem to do much,  
Mainly because he was out of luck.  
He got angry and mad too, he even tried to kick a wall,  
But that made him drop his new baseball.  
Bunny decided he didn't need his brother because he could be  
just as cool and even better  
Because he wore sweaters.

He decided to play a game too with his own friends so he  
invited Bert the Bee and Leon the Liger. The game was rub-  
bee, an easy sport,  
Except for Bert the Bee, who got badly hurt. The game was fun  
it was super it even made the president Mellous  
The Mouse jealous.  
Sheen and his pal's wanted to play too because it was said that  
"all animals who play rug-bee  
Are cooler than people who are mean."  
They wanted to play  
And by their attire of sweats and headbands it looked as if they  
were a-o-k.

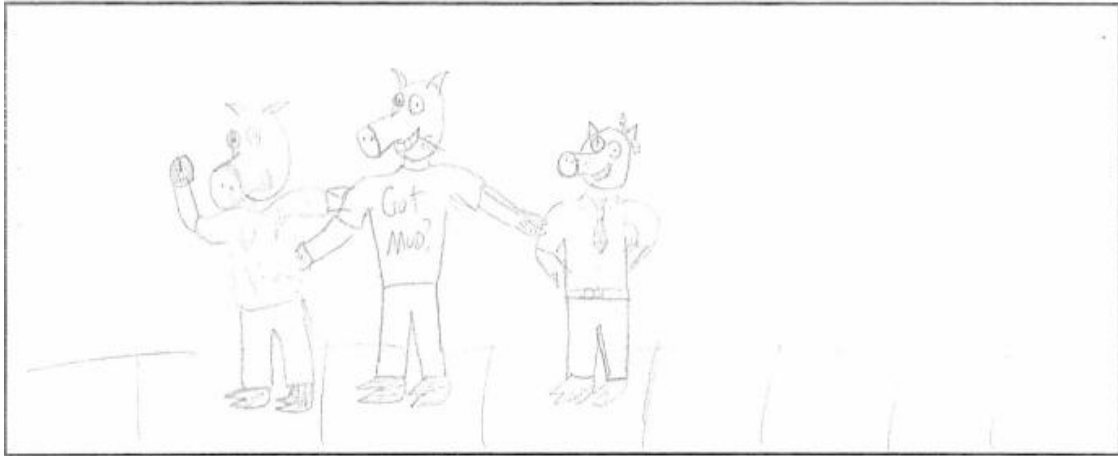


Sheen pleaded to Bunny, but Bunny could say no  
Because Sheen will never know  
What it is like to be excluded as so.  
Bert the Bee said, "I wouldn't let him play,"  
And Leon the Liger said, "He looks like a stray."  
But Bunny let Sheen and his friends play,  
Probably because he is a nice guy,  
This I say.

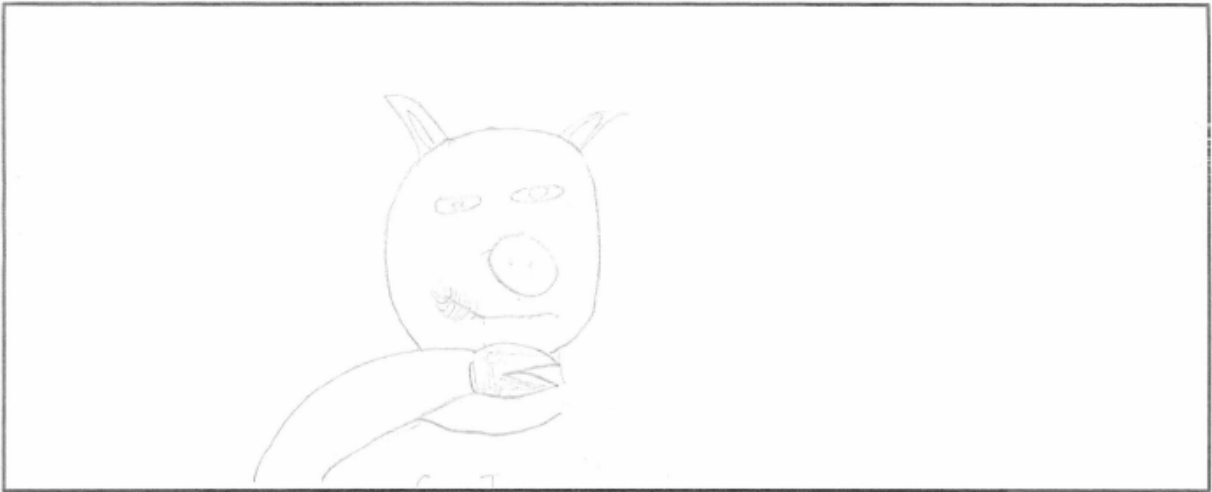


# Three Aspiring Pigs

BY COLE SAVAGEAUX



A long time ago in the suburbs of Porkville, there lived three pigs. They lived right next to one another, and were the best of friends. They went to the same school, played at the same playground, shopped at the same candy store, and liked the same games.

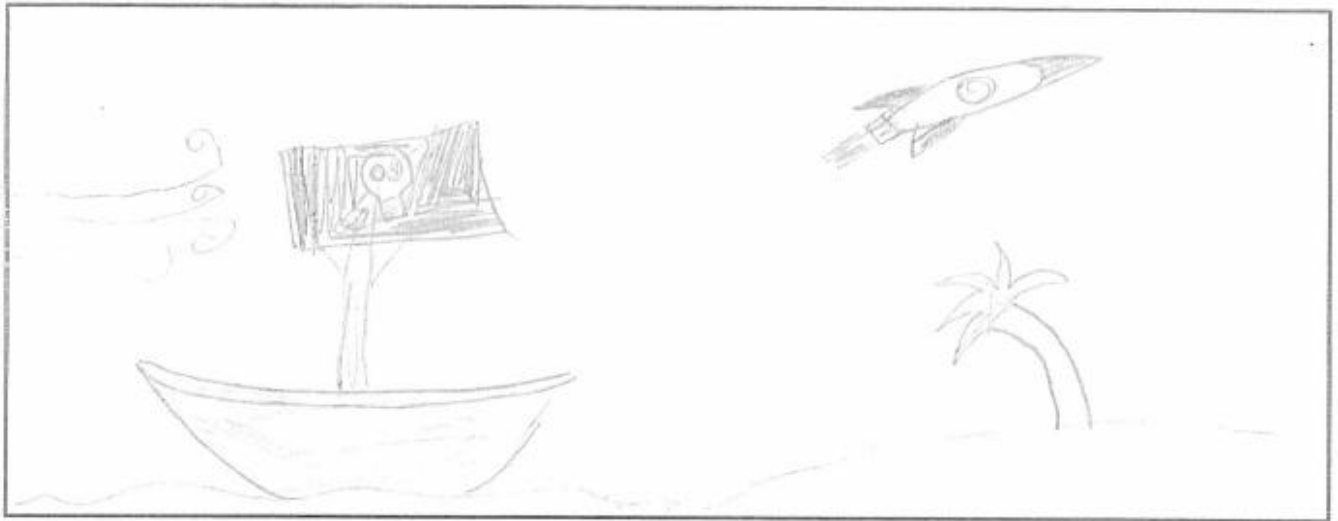


One-day, the three pigs, Bartholomew, Nicholas, and Jim, were sitting on the park bench.

"Y'know what?" said Bartholomew.

"What?" Answered the other two.

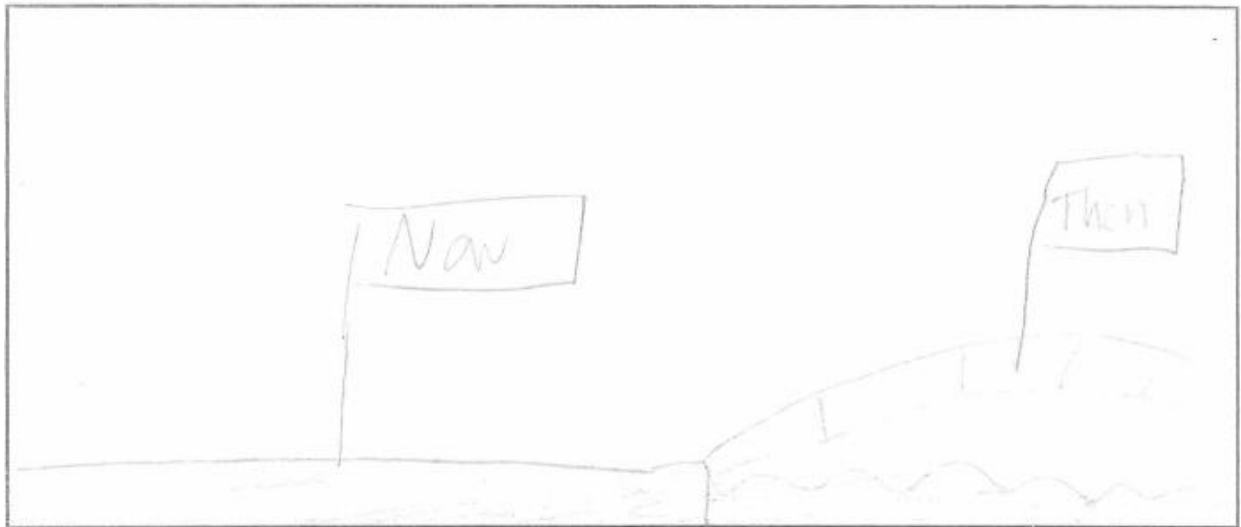
"Have we ever decided what to be when we grow up?"



This inspired a few minutes of quiet thinking, when finally Nicholas broke the silence by saying, "I'd like to be an astronaut, and shake hands with the cow that jumped over the moon." Bartholomew added, "Yes, and I want to be a pirate, sailing the blue ocean in search of adventure!"



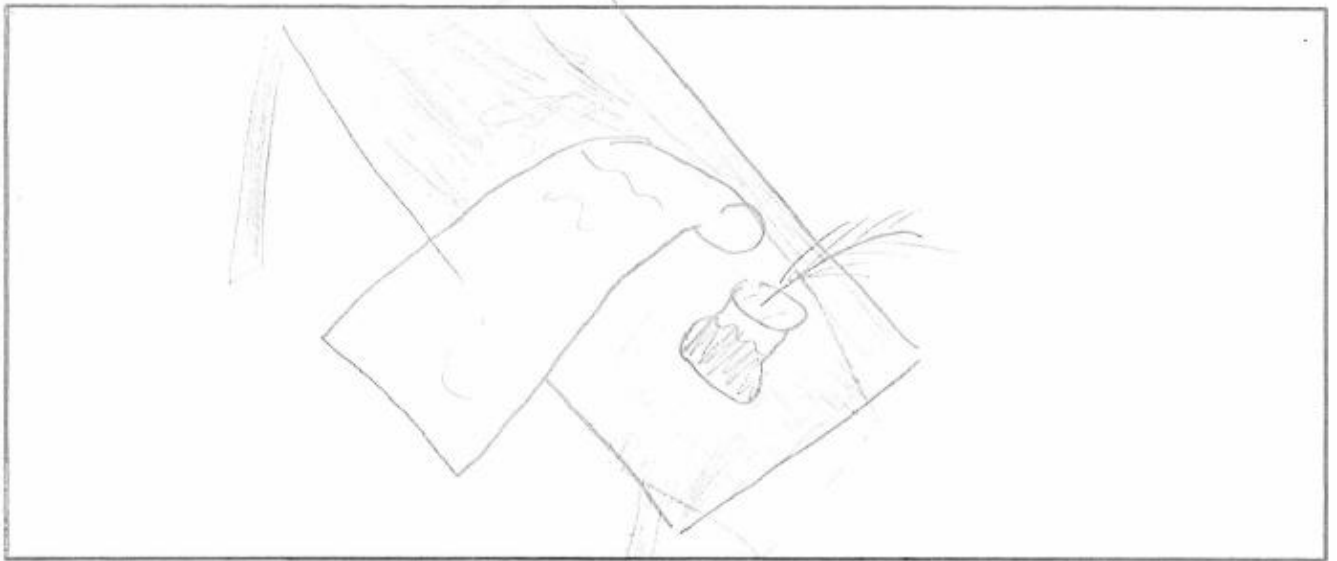
Finally, Jim scratched his head and said, "I... would like to be an accountant, and add up numbers in a nice cubicle." The other two looked at him strangely, and decided it was time to go get some candy. On the way there, Jim suddenly exclaimed, "Oh no! When we go to pirate, astronaut, and accounting college, how will we ever stay friends?"



"Don't worry," remarked the other two, "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it."



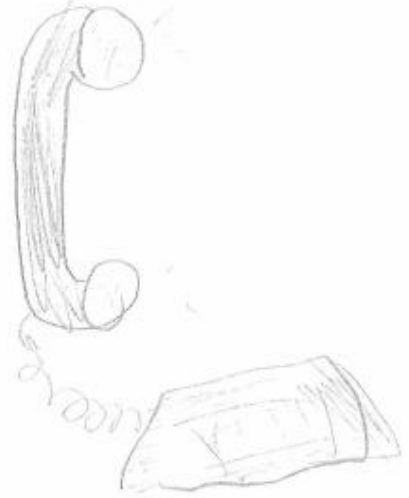
Years later, when they were out of high school and approaching college, the three pigs were sitting on the same park bench, Jim remarked, "Well, fellas, it seems like we have come to the bridge and now we must cross it." They all nodded sadly.



"That's it!" Exclaimed Bartholomew. "We could be pen pals and write letters to each other during college!" This excited the pigs, and by the same time the next year, they were sending heaps of mail to each other, things like: *How goes it? Or, Man, sailing a boat sure is harder than it seems!*



Many more years later, the three friends sat in Bartholomew's house, admiring an autographed poster of a cow in a space suit waving at the camera and thinking back to their days as children. Meanwhile, three little piglets sat in front of the fire, discussing their futures.



"I want to be a cowboy!"

"Me a Jet Pilot!" Finally, the third one thought for a moment and said,

"I would like to be a secretary."

*The End*

## *Nothing's Different, Everything's Changed*

by Marie Calhoun

### **Chapter 1**

The cream marble stairs were cold on her toes as Lilith ran up towards the great window; her heart thumped evenly to the beat of her feet as they hit each stair. Lilith's strawberry blonde hair smacked her face as she ran. Her body suddenly collapsed as she hit the edge of the stair. Lilith fumbled up cursing at herself for such a careless misplaced toe. Soon Lilith was following the strange girl once again.

"Darling, don't go too slow!" The sweet voice melted into her brain as Lilith's toe caught the edge of a stair once again.

The strange but familiar girl stopped and smiled that warm, cool smile, her golden luscious curls bouncing like they always did. Lilith squirmed up and began bounding up the stairs yet again, the girl almost in reach.

"Lilith! You stop this instant!" Helga's deep throaty voice echoed through the corridor. Helga was running over to Lilith, getting closer with each step. Her sandals clacked on the hard marble floor, smoothly gaining speed. Now Lilith's feet were faster, purposely being carried away from Helga running behind her. The girl with the curls looked behind and smiled, never slowing. Helga's voice sent a chilling vibration through Lilith's body as she heard her yell, "Lilith! You stop! Now now now!"

Helga made a lunge for Lilith and they both tumbled to the ground. The stone was relatively soft compared to the fall yesterday, and as Lilith looked up the walls, they seemed less intimidating. The girl was gone, curls and all, not even a footprint was left behind. "Lilith, Lilith, Lilith... Why do you keep this up!" Helga's tongue clicked in disapproval. "Do not look at me like that! It is not my fault you are still on the ground." Her tongue clicked again more

quietly than the first. "C'mon we must go see your mother again, she will not be happy, you were finally making some progress. Darling up up."

Lilith's haunted blue eyes were full of sadness and despair as she stood up and looked in the direction the girl had disappeared. There was nothing more to say. Lilith walked towards her mother's office like a kindergartener walking to the principal's office for the third time in one week. Helga opened the door without even bothering to knock. Lilith's mother sat there, her eyes full of dread.

"Thank you Helga, you may wait outside for us, I will let her out when we are finished."

Amarantha's tone was old and hazy; her voice cracked before she composed herself. "So my darling Lilith, where was she leading you this time?"

Amarantha's voice returned to its usual flowery sensation, but Lilith could feel its uncomfortable tone that hinted to Amarantha's true feelings.

"I don't know, she never tells me, but she knows! I know she does! She wants to show me!  
BUT YOU DON'T LET HER!"

The frail girl made a lunge for her mother, but Amarantha held her off, thrusting the thin arms behind Lilith's bony back. The room fell silent once again as her mother led her to the chair opposite the huge auburn desk. "Lilith, stop. You know you need to someday. Just..... stop....." Her mother's soft, calm eyes had changed to red, blazing rage without even a blink of an eye. The anger in her eyes soon relaxed into pleading. As Amarantha choked out the last few words, her eyes began to water. "Helga, please take her to her room now, and keep an eye on her."

"Yes, I don't know how she ever got past me! I promise, I promise!" Helga shut the door before her boss could say another word. Halfway down the hall, a cry broke out from behind the closed door. The ghostly scream tensed Helga as she placed her arm around

Lilith. Lilith was escorted to her room, with Helga's stiff hand on her arm all along. Helga watched her grab her Diary and lie down on her bed before locking the door.

## **Chapter 2**

After about an hour passed, I saw Helga come waddling in, wearing her light blue acid washed jeans. She came over and gave me a small peck on the forehead, just like usual. My heart rushed with joy for I knew my father was home. Immediately I was up and out of the room running down those cream marble stairs Oriana often led me to.

I could never run down the stairs fast enough, but as I hit the bottom of the staircase, it didn't matter. All that consumed my mind was my father. His crisp brown hair and his familiar smile were the only things that comforted me these days.

As I rounded the corner to the dining room I quickened my pace and bolted into my father's expecting arms. When he pulled away I only held on tighter, not wanting to ever let go. It was only when I felt my mother's hand touch my shoulder that I let go. As I turned I saw her soft smile that sickened me every time. I hated Amarantha for everything she did. She was the reason I couldn't find Oriana. She was the reason for it all. I eventually sauntered to my chair at the head of the table where I sat every time Dr. Manu came over. He was my therapist. I told my parents I was fine and didn't need a therapist, but they insisted it was healthy for me to see him, or at least for us all to see him in a group.

"So shall we move to the living room today?" questioned Dr. Manu. "I thought it would be a good idea to meet in a more casual setting today."

Amarantha nodded towards Dr. Manu. She always seemed to treat him as though he were a god or something. I watched her as she stood up; her slim pencil skirt clung to her skin, accentuating her perfect feminine curves. Her matching grey blazer added to modelesque features, with her hair to top it all off. Its blonde strands cascaded down her back, glinting as they caught the light in just the right places. My father Buemont stood to follow. His tall muscular figure moved gracefully toward our living room. I noticed his hair was not

combed back like usual. It was strange for him to look the least bit unprepared, but things had been very strange lately. My father turned his head in my direction and winked, extending his big hand toward me. I grasped it and clung to his arm as he continued toward the living room. We finally sat down on the soft cream-colored couch. Amarantha was already seated in a blue armchair.

“So, Lilith,” Dr. Manu questioned. “Have you seen Oriana lately?”

“Yes,” I answered.

“Where was she leading you?” asked Dr. Manu.

“I don’t know!” I exclaimed. I was sick and tired of answering these questions. Dr. Manu was unfazed by my sudden outburst, but Amarantha had immediately stiffened. “I don’t want to talk today.” It was the first time I had ever said more than a yes or a no in one of our meetings. For a brief second Dr. Manu looked slightly pleased, but his face returned to its normal dreary complexions soon after.

“Well then, you can leave if you want, but I strongly suggest you stay,” Dr. Manu said.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw my mother’s face full of confusion. Before Dr. Manu could say anything more, I ran out of the archway and slumped against the wall. I could still hear every word they said, but they couldn’t see me.

“I don’t see why you would let her leave!” Amarantha exclaimed. I could only imagine how confused her face looked.

“She will talk when she is ready,” Dr. Manu said finally, so that Amarantha didn’t dare say a word. “I was thinking,” Dr. Manu continued, “that we should medicate Lilith. The problem has gotten out of hand, and the hallucinations are beginning to become a danger. Her bruises are much worse than last week and as we were discussing last week, she is not

aware when she is following Oriana. The hallucination consumes her mind for those few minutes.”

“If I may,” commented Buemont. “I think we should bring her back to school.”

“Buemont!” exclaimed Amarantha! “The home schooling has been working fine! Mr. Meghinard and Lilith have been working quite well together!”

“Yes...but I feel that treating her differently will just magnify the problem at hand. If we treat her like we always have, maybe she will stop hallucinating. And I have made my opinion on medication quite clear. I will only medicate Lilith if it’s our only option.”

“What if medication is our only option Buemont! We don’t want her to end up in the same damn place as Oriana!” Amarantha retaliated.

Dr. Manu cut in, “Okay, okay... why don’t we compromise? We will put her back in school, but if the hallucinations don’t stop we will begin to medicate her. Remember, hallucinations can be dangerous.”

“Okay,” Buemont replied. Amarantha only nodded.

“Now,” Dr. Manu continued, “How has her attitude been? I remember last time we talked Mrs. Larconson, and you were convinced she *hated* you. Is that still true?”

Dr. Manu was right. Ever since Oriana disappeared, my mother and I had never quite got along. I don’t think of her as my mother anymore; now she’s just Amarantha. My father talked to me about calling her mom or even mother, but I explained to him it just didn’t feel right anymore.

“She has still been treating me like an outsider,” Amarantha answered. “I just don’t know what to do... or even how to deal with it.” Amarantha broke down into tears again. There

wasn't a day that went by that I didn't hear or see her crying. It was a ghostly cry that sent chills down my back every time.

"I was wondering," Dr. Manu continued, "if you would allow me to have a word with Lilith alone..." No one said a word. Last time Dr. Manu tried to talk with me alone, I threw a glass cup at him. I will admit it was a moment of weakness, but I just don't like people asking about Oriana. I decided it was time to leave but not before I heard both my mother and father agree to Dr. Manu's idea.

### **Chapter 3**

It was 9:00 am when Helga woke me up. She brought me crepes, which was odd because special breakfasts like crepes were usually only for special occasions. Breakfast in bed was also for special occasions. I gave Helga one of those puzzled looks, but she only avoided eye contact.

"Hello sweetie!" Amarantha said in flowery voice. I couldn't see any tearstains as she peeked her head around my door. She walked around my door and into my room displaying her dress. My heart skipped a beat as I noticed which dress it was. It had a V-neck that was framed by a collar. There were four buttons that went down to the sash at the waistline. The dress poofed out below the sash and stopped right at Amarantha's knee. It was the most glorious shade of blue with sunset-colored flowers that seemed to fall down the dress. It was the dress I had picked out for her. The dress Oriana and I had picked out for Amarantha a week before Oriana had disappeared.

"So I made you those crepes!" she said gleefully. It sickened me to see her acting so normal and happy. "I was just thinking... maybe... you... would like to start this new medication."

Her voice grew timid as she said the last few words. She thought I didn't know about the medication. About the Abilify. About how my dad didn't want me to take it. I looked her straight in the eye, disgusted. A glint of confusion crossed her face. "OH! I forgot to tell you what it is for! Of course you're confused! Well, its so you can go back to school. This will

help take your mind off of Oriana.” At Oriana, her voice got so quiet I could barely make out what she said. By this point she was sitting at the foot of my bed.

“No.” I said plainly; but then an idea crossed my mind. What if I made her think I was taking it...

“Well if that’s what *you* want...” Amarantha trailed off. “I was just thinking...”

“Well... I guess if it’s for the better...” I knew I had tricked her now.

“YES!” Amarantha practically exploded! “Yes, that is fantastic! I can just go get you a glass of water if you want?”

“No, I’ll be fine,” I replied. “Helga brought me some water.”

“Well, let me go get the pill!” Her face was full of joy and I almost felt bad about tricking her. I didn’t need to be medicated and I didn’t want to be medicated, but if I proved the medication didn’t make a difference and that I wasn’t actually hallucinating, everyone might finally leave me alone. They might even fire Dr. Manu for his terrible advice! Things could only go up. I finished my crepe, thanking Helga for her trouble.

I began wondering what had taken my mother so long. It had been at least 15 minutes and still... I got up from my bed still in my pajamas. They were my favorite P.J.’s, with the striped pants and pink tank top. I sauntered down towards Buemont and Amarantha’s room when I heard them arguing.

“She said she wanted to!” Amarantha whisper-screamed.

“She shouldn’t! I told you how I felt about the medication and you *STILL* go behind my back and try to give it to her!” my father retaliated. They went on like this for about five minutes before I decided to intervene. I walked in putting my most innocent face on.

“What medicine?” I asked as kindly as humanly possible.

“The one I told you about earlier.” Amarantha responded.

“You never asked me about any medication... all you said was that you wanted me to take that stuff to help my immune system because I said I felt like I was getting a cold.” My mother’s face was full of confusion when she realized what my motives were. And then as if I had planned it my father stormed out. It was the right thing to do. Amarantha deserved to get in trouble if she wanted to go behind my father’s back.

#### **Chapter 4**

It was late afternoon and Amarantha and I hadn’t talked since the incident. My father had finally come back and talked to Helga. Helga had of course told him *everything*, so he and Amarantha talked it all out and decided to hold off on the medication. In addition, I am now on house arrest and cannot begin regular school for a month. I respect my father too much to argue, but I still think it is my mother’s fault that I got in so much trouble.

The image of her standing in that stupid dress drives me insane. I think she only wore it to remind me of how much I used to love her. How the good times were, but the only thing that dress reminds me of is how Oriana wanted to leave. How Oriana didn’t care. And how amazing Oriana was. I remember her blonde curls that fell down her face like water. I remember her deep blue eyes that were always filled with joy. I remember how amazing Oriana was, and how horrible she became. I remember when she threw that party when my parents were gone. How she yelled at me when she got drunk. How she came home high twice a week. How my parents seemed to ignore that there was a problem. How my so-called mother convinced my father that Oriana was okay. Oriana was not okay, and it was Amarantha’s fault for believing the lies Oriana fed her. How Oriana said she was sorry. How Oriana said she was okay. Oriana was not okay, and Amarantha was the reason Oriana ran away. It was my mother’s fault.

I sauntered over to my bed and curled up in my covers. Listening to the sound of the trees brushing against my window in the cool breeze. I looked straight out of my window at the leaves as they pushed against my window. Past the trees I saw the blue of the river we lived by. It rushed in rough patterns as the rain beat down hard. I listened to the whistle of the wind through the trees, and then I fell into a dreamless sleep.

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I woke up curled in the same position as when I fell asleep. The rain had picked up and it was now pounding against the roof of my room. I stretched out on my bed, letting my pointed toes push against the wooden footboard. My body slowly turned towards the door as I shut my eyes once more. As I opened my eyes I saw a flash of golden hair. It was like I had been dumped in a pool of ice water. My senses were suddenly alert. I dashed out of my bedroom door, and into the white narrow hallway. Sure enough, the golden hair disappeared as it rounded a corner. I sprinted, desperately hoping to catch up. Oriana had always been fast, and I found it odd I hadn't lost her already. I was determined to follow her today. Helga couldn't stop me at night. I wonder why Oriana didn't stop. She knew how hard it was for me to follow her, especially with Amarantha looking after me like I was some sort of preschooler.

As I began down the familiar cream marble stairs, my toe caught the edge of my striped pajama pants. I tumbled for what felt like hours, wondering when I would stop. As I reached the bottom with a smash, I tucked my head into my chest, willing the aches and pains to go away. I scrambled up, desperately wanting to find Oriana. All of the falling I had gone through while trying to find Oriana had put a toll on my body. I wasn't as fast when I was covered in all of these bruises, but I didn't have a choice. I needed to find Oriana. I looked up to see Oriana. The windows around Oriana let in dazzling rays that tinted her pale skin blue. The moonlight danced on her skin as the rain fell outside. She was wearing a pair of grey high top Converse with a casual flower print dress. The dress had a sash that held it in at the waist, but otherwise was so free and flowing. Her usual soft and playful face was replaced with a look of utter concern that made me smile. I knew she was worried about me. She stepped forward as if to see if I was alright. As I

stepped to walk forward she turned and began running. She tossed her hand back, beckoning me to follow.

As we neared the kitchen, I felt my lungs get heavier. I had been running for quite a while without a break, and I was afraid I was going to collapse. When I noticed she was circling back towards the stairs I willed myself to go further. I saw as she easily climbed up, making no effort to look back to see if I was following. It bugged me how self-centered she was being, but I needed to find her. I just needed to. I ran up the steps one at a time. As my legs began to surge with pain I wondered when it would end. Would she ever stop? Or was I stuck in this maze forever? I ascended the next flight of steps, and before I knew it I was at the third floor. I spotted Oriana sprinting down the hall.

Anger began to fill my veins as I saw her running. A drop of ice-cold sweat trickled down the side of my face as I picked up speed. My whole body was focused on Oriana. I felt myself running past doors and closets and walls, but I saw none of it.

All I saw was Oriana.

In one small second I felt a smash as my body colliding with glass. Blood gushed everywhere as I fell. Then nothing...

## **Chapter 5**

The frosty grass felt wet on my skin as I awoke. I could feel the pang of the rain on my bare arms as I moved to stand up. As I brought my arms in front of me to steady myself I collapsed. A sudden rush of fear was sent zinging through my body. I could not feel my feet. I turned my head towards them, afraid to see what had happened.

As I looked towards my feet they began to tingle. They were just asleep. My fall had thrown me into such an odd position that I had cut off the circulation to my feet. I bent my hands over my body and began to massage my feet, trying to wake them up. After about thirty seconds of massaging I could feel my feet again.

My injuries were surprisingly minimal, considering I fell two stories out of a window. My pajamas were soaked in blood and I was covered in cuts that were sure to turn into scars. Most of the cuts had stopped bleeding by this point but there were a few that were still trickling. I suddenly felt woozy and as I looked to my side I realized why. I was lying in a pool of blood, my blood. I knew I had to get to a hospital, but I could feel my body go limp. I was too weak to move. I suddenly felt my eyelids close. I was in that phase where I was almost asleep, but still conscious. My body lifted and I felt like I was floating in river. Somewhere along the way I heard voices but I couldn't make out a word.

## *Grandma's Place*

by Jackson Dickstein

The rustic perfume fills my dry and crusty nostrils, my eardrums shattered by barking and sweet decaying memories gathered inside my jet-lagged mind. Grandma's place. No question.

I immediately sprint in to the barren kitchen and manage to find the hidden Milanos lurking in the depths of the empty cabinets. I take a single bite into the half-eaten, stale cookie and the clock in my mind begins to wind backwards. After I devour the treat, I take a slow stroll around the apartment, observing and analyzing everything I walk pass. I slither by the old film canisters, where my grandfather stored and documented his cherished but plagued life. It is hard to believe two years had passed since his death. I reached for his favorite Nikon and slipped off its slick black lens cover. I stare down the large beam under the dusty lens. "Hmmm," I utter nostalgically. I rotate the camera a few times before setting it down in its final resting place. I begin to drift towards the bowl of cashews that always sit on the fragile Japanese table. I take more than my hand can manage, and they fall from my hand like baby birds free falling from their overcrowded nest. A well-groomed, white scavenger appeared to help me clean up my mess. A large tongue slides across my dry face. Ttillllyyyy. Still panting, she eats most of the cashews I left on the carpet. As long as she isn't barking, my eardrums and sanity stay intact.

From across the room I glare at the setting sun that lights up the East River. As I approach the precariously perched, outdoor balcony, I place my hand on the rusty door handle and then carefully back off. My mom calls, "Honey! We're going to Petaluma on 1st Avenue." I picture devouring plates of fried olives that melt in my mouth. Chocolate mousse being separated from its pack and entering the large, pink void that is my throat. I run to my weathered suitcase, grab my jacket and a large amount of M&Ms from the fridge. If only my grandpa could still tag along. I take one last breath of the perfume and rush out the door leaving a trail of the unwanted M & M colors.

## *The SF Flavor.*

by Elias B. Domingo

San Francisco, California. 4:56 PM. I'm on highway 101 heading south to the foggy hills of Crocker-Amazon. To the left of the car are the tall buildings of the civic center, towering over the passing cars, so high up above the ground it is like they are in separate worlds, but this being San Francisco, the difference of a few hundred feet CAN feel like a different world. The massive skyline that I know and love is slowly being emptied of businessmen and women who will soon join me in the commute back to our homes. To my right, I see layers upon layers of residential neighborhoods, each neighborhood with its own individual ingredient that makes up the SF flavor.

The diversity of San Francisco is not just the racial diversity of the neighborhoods, but also the many characteristics of the neighborhoods themselves. From the grid of paved roads in the Richmond to the curving alleys that make up Twin Peaks, there are no two neighborhoods that are much alike. Most Mid-Atlantic city neighborhoods are made up of brownstone upon brownstone and repetitive design, as opposed to the array of architecture that you can find on one block in San Francisco.

As in most San Francisco residents, there are a lot of characteristics of San Francisco that can be seen in myself. At a glance, certain parts of who I am may stick out right away. But once you get to know me better, you see the many different kinds of people I can be.

As I look out the window driving down Folsom street from the Civic Center to Bernal Heights, on each block the different characteristics of the restaurants, the architecture, and the faces of the people illustrate a perfect model of how all that goes on in one area of the city cannot be expressed in a simple neighborhood name. In a seven-by-seven mile city we have 11 governmental districts averaging six neighborhoods per district; 49 square miles and according to Wikipedia and San Francisco magazine, we have 115 recognized neighborhoods. The average San Francisco block running east to west is about 250 feet long; the average north to south block is about 450 feet. Considering all of these statistics,

for every one and a quarter blocks you travel north to south in the city, you enter a new neighborhood.

Now it makes sense to me, all those times being corrected. As opposed San Franciscans to living in Cole Valley or Ashbury Heights they live in “Fredrick Knob.” When reading the Wikipedia page of a neighborhood called Sherwood Forest, its description sure enough was the block between “Dalewood way to the north and east and Lansdale Avenue.” One block nestled on the side of Mt. Davidson that has gotten enough dignity to call itself a neighborhood.

Visitors may complain about all the pride each neighborhood has. Natives are always discussing the constant sounds and sights of the mission. Some people HATE each other in this city just because they come from a certain neighborhood. But despite the differences in where we live in the city, we all have a soft spot in our hearts for our unorthodox weather patterns with the cold, grey mornings when this city becomes engulfed in a layer of fog. We all love those perfect summer days when the evening sun covers the streets of the city with this sort of golden light that only lasts till sunset. We all share a love for those SF Giants. And I think all those things love us. There’s got to be a reason that the fog always returns every few mornings.

You can almost tell that the Sun is happy when it shines over San Francisco. There’s a little something of everything I love here. The San Francisco menu is endless. Whether I take a bite out of the Mission on Saturday, I’m always ready to appreciate a bite of West Portal the next day. I’m always eager when going to bed in the city, so anxious to see what part of the SF flavor I’ll get a taste of the next day.

## ***Running to Stand Still***

by Stephanie Elliott

In baseball, you have three strikes until you're out.

The shiny gold wall's beauty faded away into a dark gloom. I stopped to take a breath. I leaned my back against the wall and rested my hands on my hips. I took another breath and looked around. The lights flickered, making my headache all the worse. I slid my back down the wall and leaned my head back. My shoulders dropped. I was running around the maze for hours. I'd gotten far, but it felt as though I was just running around in circles. I almost wanted to give up, but I knew I wasn't far. My dark-blue jeans were torn up all around the hem, my arms were beat up, it looked as though my legs were attacked by thousands of rocks, and as much as I wanted to keep going to save him, I couldn't. I tried to stand up, but my legs wobbled back down to the floor. I took another breath and forced myself up. I had to save him; he would do the exact same for me. I started wandering around the maze again, wondering which way I should go to get to the end. I could go seven different ways, but I had no idea which I should take. This was no ordinary maze; someone ruthless was trying to kill me, and they knew just how. There was one thing that I would sacrifice anything for, even my life. The cut on my leg was getting deeper, my hair was still soaking wet from when I fell. I knew she was after me, but there was no stopping her, no matter what. In a blink, my legs lost control and I fell to the ground. My eyes slowly closed but there was no one to help me, and the only person anywhere near me was trying to kill me. The marble floor was covered with an inch or so of water. I took another breath and tried to stay in control. I shut my eyes tight, forcing the tears to go away. When I opened my eyes everything was a blur, I wiped them and noticed a strange sign on the wall across from me. It wasn't there before. I must have been unconscious for a moment... which means that she was here. But that's not the part that scared me the most, it was the message. It was written in red duct tape.

*If you're going to hit the ball, be sure it's a home run, or someone on your on your own team could get you out!*

I stood up, all the pain was numbed by all of my fear. Terrified of her finding me, I started sprinting. I tripped and fell, scraping my knee, but I couldn't stop. All of a sudden, I could hear someone else, *following me*. I could hear them splashing as they ran but I couldn't tell where they were coming from. I pressed my back against the wall and felt myself breathing faster. The splashing stopped. I looked around, but there was no one. I carefully started walking again, letting my feet quietly drift through the water, which was now at least three inches above the marble flooring. I suddenly realized that this was all a game, and I had to advance myself to her level. Darkness flustered through my body as I started looking around, using Ramon's teaching to help me. So far, I was failing dismally.

I remember him saying to *free your mind* and to *stay calm*, but that wasn't really working out. The water level rose even more so it was now a little above my ankles, and my irritation was rising. I cupped my hands over my eyes and fought the tears that were waiting to storm out of my eyes. The lights dimmed. I could hear the footsteps approaching me again. All of a sudden, I started sprinting forward and I didn't even bother to see where I was going. The footsteps were getting louder. When I ran into a dead-end, there was another sign on the wall. Only this time, it wasn't red duct tape; I wasn't sure what it was. It was red, and smelled like raw fish.

*If you hit the ball, remember, there are four bases, can you run all of them?*

I turned around, breathless. I slowly started walking, speeding up as I went along the long hallway. "HELLO!" I turned around, wondering if she could hear me. I was going to end this right now. "I KNOW YOU CAN HEAR ME!" There was no response. My breathing got louder as I ran faster, stopping every now and then to see if I could see anyone. I came to another hallway, the lights started to flicker some more. "ELAINA! PLEASE, STOP THIS NOW!" I stopped and fell to the floor, hiding my face in my knees. Tears burst out of my eyes, but this time I didn't bother trying to stop them. There was nothing more that I could do; I was exhausted, in pain, distressed. I couldn't handle all the millions of emotions fluttering through my body. I heard a cry from somewhere in the maze. I stood up and started yelling

for help. I was probably running around in circles but I didn't care, I only cared about getting out of here and getting help.

"HELLO? HELLO? PLEASE HELP ME!" I yelled for several minutes, but there was no answer. I looked down, hopeless. There was no way out. Suddenly, the lights turned off. I started yelling again. I slowly started walking with my hand against the wall. I felt a new hallway as my hands worked their way down the wall. Chills started parading through my body. I heard a voice chanting. I was smart enough to realize that she was here. I was considering stepping forward, but all of a sudden, torches on a room's walls lit up. There she was. Directly in front of me, her back was facing the wall. She wore a gray hat with her hair up. She had a long, brown coat that went down to her the middle of her calf. She was chanting something, but it was too quiet for me to understand her. She was wearing thin, black gloves and long, loose, cream pants. I wanted to run up to her and kill her for putting me through all of this torture, but I knew that there was no use.

She was stronger than me in every way. I was beat up, and my mind was filled with emotions. As my eyes were drifting around the beautifully lit room, I noticed something that caught my eye immediately. My mind was fixed on it. Hatred. Sadness. Millions of emotions clouded my body when I saw his body on the ground. Words began to float out of her mouth but I didn't even bother to listen. I ran over to him and fell to my scratched-up knees. I looked him deeply into the eye and he looked right back at me in despair. I wanted to speak to him. Tell him that he would be okay. But that would just be a lie. We both knew that he wouldn't make it. He was just as beat up and scratched up as I was. I put my hand on his head and gently stroked his hair. He wanted to get up to say good-bye but he was too weak. Grief swarmed through my body.

"Don't go. We can make it through this. Please!" Tears clouded my eyes. His eyes slowly started to close and I let out a deep breath. I shut his eyes and felt an army of hatred. My scratched up legs stood up and I fell back down. She was still talking, but I blocked out her words. She was still facing the wall. I dragged myself to her, tears flying out of my eyes every second. When I got across the room to where she was standing, I grabbed her foot

and tried to pull her down to the ground. I pulled her down as hard as I could, but she wouldn't budge. She looked down and let out a malicious laugh. She laughed and laughed, and I didn't want to look her in the eye. She spoke more spiritual words that I couldn't understand, then crouched down to my level. We made eye contact, and when we did, my head spun. I was so stupid. *He* wasn't who I thought *she* was.

## **Chapter 1**

I sat in the middle of the street, my legs crossed, and my dark blonde hair drooping over my chubby, round face. I had no idea where I was, but there was foggy smoke in the purple night sky.

It was only 12 hours ago that my mommy and daddy introduced me to my official new best friend, a baby red wolf. Only the problem was that I had no idea what to name him. I had never named anything before in my entire life, which was really only four years. He sat on my lap and shivered along with me. My hands wrapped around his cream-colored coat. His fur hadn't fully grown in, so he must have been just as freezing as I. He had soft, olive green eyes ears nearly the size of his head, but they were nearly two times softer than the rest of his body. He wasn't even one day old, but I could already tell that we were going to be together till the world ends. He let out a loud cry of desperation, waiting for help. I pulled him closer to me, trying to keep him warm. He buried his small head into my crossed legs, finding a way to keep warm. I tried to be like my mommy, imagine what she would do in this situation. I began to caress the top of his fuzzy head and sing to him. I wasn't sure what I was singing to him, I was just singing. My mommy did that sometimes. Depending on the situation, she would make up words and find a pretty way to make them sound.

I clasped my teensy weensy hands over my knees, still waiting for my mommy to come and get me.

My two front teeth bit my bottom lip as the night grew colder. I could feel that the temperature dropped at least five degrees. By this time, my best friend had already fallen into a deep sleep. Mommy always told me that if I got lost that I should never talk to strangers and I should stay exactly where I am, so I did. I sat in the middle of the gray,

rugged street. Its cold, rough surface sent chills rocketing up my body. I'd been there for a while, not quite sure how long, but long enough to make my bare arms and legs as cold as they'd ever been. My cheeks reddened as the wind blew harder on them. I cuddled my head into my arms to keep it warm, letting my hair be blown by the wind. A man with large hands gently touched my back. I peered through my arms to see who it could be. The man was crouching on the floor, balancing his weight on the tips of his toes. His firm hands felt soft and soothing pressed up against my back. When I took a closer look at him, I immediately recognized him. It was Darren, my mom's best childhood friend. I tugged on my best friend's large ears to awaken him. "Little friend, we've been rescued!" I whispered in his ear. I lifted him off of my lap as Darren put out both of his hands to help me up off the cold road. My frosty hands looked like a grain of sand against his large hands.

"Can we go home now?" I asked. Darren looked at me and smiled.

"Does Little Friend have a name?" Darren chuckled.

"What is a name that means strong warrior?" I asked Darren as I tugged on his sleeve.

"Ajax" he replied.

"Darren, am I allowed to name my little friend Ajax?" He grabbed my hand and nodded as the three of us were on our way.

\* \* \*

My eyes sprang open as my alarm rang at 8:00 a.m. The sunlight shown through my blue-creased window shades, filling my cream-colored room with an oceanic feel as it did every morning. I had the same dream that I had every night, I was only four years old, sitting in the middle of the street waiting for my mom to come and get me. The only problem, I don't remember what happened before or after. Darren does, only he refuses to ever tell me, he thinks it's in my best interest. But I don't. Never have, and never will. Darren doesn't think I'm old enough to handle it, but Cheryl does. She thinks that he should have told me when I was 12, four years ago. I thought about this nearly every morning when I woke up,

imagining different things that could have happened. I took myself into a whole other world of magic.

“Lia, are you up?” I could hear Cheryl outside of my door, knocking. I turned on my side and watched the doorknob turning slowly. Cheryl walked in, fully dressed and prepared for the day. She had a tray with breakfast on it. “Good morning birthday girl!” Cheryl exclaimed, with my brother Teddy and sister Lucy right by her side. Lucy immediately ran over to me and sat on my bed. Cheryl lifted my head off of my pillow and pushed it against the wall. Once I was more awake, she set the tray with the food on my lap. Teddy and Lucy stared, their eyes filled with desire for the food. There were two pancakes, a cup with hot chocolate and whipped cream, and a large bowl with fruit.

“Thanks Cheryl,” I said as she leaned in to give me a big birthday hug.

As I was just about to take a sip of the hot chocolate, Teddy exclaimed, “Can I have it?”

“Teddy!” Cheryl snapped, giving him an evil eye. “Why don’t the two of you go to the kitchen and help your father finish making *your* breakfast.” Teddy and Lucy glanced at each other.

“NO!” they replied together, almost in sync.

“We want to stay right here with Malia!” Teddy complained.

Cheryl took a deep breath and scratched the back of her head, she straightened her apron and in a calm, yet rather sharp tone, she began, “If the two of you do not leave this room right this instant!”

They immediately hopped off of the bed and stormed out of the room. “And some say they would die for twins.” We both giggled.

"I had *the dream*, again," I began as I got out of bed and pulled my sleeve up to smooth the bumps on my left forearm. Cheryl looked at me in apprehension. "Malia, I thought I told you to stop!" she hissed rather quickly as she grabbed my arm and pulled down my sleeve. She straightened herself out, realizing she'd gone a little far. In the same tone that she used with Teddy and Lucy, she said, "It's not healthy Malia, the doctor's tell you over and over again, if you continue you're only going to harm yourself!"

"I can take care of myself. We don't even know what they mean, they could be anything."

"I think that we both know what they mean. You're trying to go down a path that isn't right, you'll just end up getting hurt." She gently tucked my hair behind my ears. "I know that you want to find out everything, know about your past, who you are. But please, just let us tell you when the time is right, when you will be mature enough to handle it. Don't try to go down a path that is dangerous."

"I don't see how it's dangerous. I want to know about my past, when I try to, I get little bumps on my arms. It's fine." There was a short pause and I knew it wasn't fine, but I didn't know why. I could tell that there was definitely something that they were hiding from me. Cheryl looked down and straightened her apron. "Cheryl," I said as I walked over and put my hand on her arm. "Everything will be o.k." I continued and tried to make eye contact with her, only she refused to make eye contact with me. She took a deep breath and smiled, "Hurry on to the kitchen, your father and I have a surprise for you," she said, using that voice that she uses when she is trying to avoid a subject. She scurried out of the bedroom and slowly shut the door behind her.

I finished getting dressed and glanced over to Ajax. He was only about a foot tall, probably because he was the runt of his pack. At first, Darren and Cheryl didn't want me to keep him, but I continued to hide him under my bed and act like I had gotten rid of him. We were pretty similar; we both always got our ways and fought for what we believed in, but we were both pretty quiet, didn't have that many friends, and we kept to ourselves most often.

But the biggest thing that made us most alike was that we were both impatient and were determined to get what we wanted, even if that meant going to the extremes.

When I was finally ready for breakfast, I slowly made my way through the hall into the kitchen. It was always freezing during the winter in Burke, New York, which is where we lived. It was almost the last day of winter, on most days it would start getting warmer, but today it was so much colder. It seemed like it was a little below 40 degrees. I was wearing my warm, fuzzy slippers, yet it still felt like I was digging my toes into snow that just became colder and colder. I stopped just before I reached the kitchen. I could hear Darren and Cheryl talking but I couldn't make out the words they were saying. I saw Lucy and Teddy at the kitchen table; they seemed to be confused and talking about something, as well. I wanted to continue listening but Ajax ran in as he saw his birthday bowl. He immediately dug his face in and scarfed it down.

"Lia! Happy birthday, Sweetie," Darren said as he approached me to give me a warming birthday hug.

"Thanks Darren," I uttered quietly.

Instantaneously, Cheryl barged in, "Lia we have much to talk about right now. I think you might want to sit down." Darren pulled up a chair for me to sit in. Lucy and Teddy were still at the table feasting on the pancakes, awkwardly watching the conversation. Cheryl and Darren glanced at each other, neither wanting to take any initiative in the conversation. Cheryl took a deep breath and huffed as Darren slowly slipped away to *get water*.

"Lia, something has just come up. This might be hard for you, but just hear me out. Your mom has contacted us and she wants you to come live with her up in Lakeside, Connecticut." My mouth dropped open. "But before we discuss this further and you make up your mind, we want you to hear what we think first." But it was too late for that, I had already made up my mind.

“Look Malia, your mother and I were best friends, and we haven’t even spoken in 16 years. That’s more than a decade. You don’t know what she’s like now, how she is. She’s wealthy, far more wealthy than we’ll ever be, but we don’t know anything about her.”

“Your father and I have decided that we don’t want you to go, it’s not safe.”

But I was going to go. She was my mom. I’ve never had a *mom*. Only Cheryl, but she didn’t count as a real mom.

“I’m going. I have to!” I barked. We all looked at each other, my mouth shut closed. Darren and Cheryl looked at each other, and then back at me.

“Malia—it’s-” Darren started.

“Darren, I love you both so much, but,” I paused to take a breath, “this is my mother. My real mother.” I looked at them once more, and then out of complete shame, I darted out of the room with Ajax close behind me. I ran down the shaggy hall and into my bedroom. I didn’t want to face them; the look on their faces was too awful to bear.

I shut the door behind me and pressed my back up against the wall. My feet slowly slid forward, pulling my body down with them. Ajax’s nails scratched the floor as he approached me. He hunched his head down and sat next to me.

“Do you want to go?” I asked him, but he stared blankly at me, confused. I got up and shuffled through my small 2 by 4 ft. closet, hoping to find a suitcase, of some sort. You see, Cheryl and Darren aren’t very rich. We live in a small town with a population of barely 200 people, a house that could collapse any second because its so old, and go to a school with about 10 kids per grade, not because it’s a private school, which it’s not, but because there are so few kids in the town. I sat on my bed with the small duffle bag. I wanted to pack everything in my room up at that moment, but I was also hesitant. I would be leaving everyone and everything I knew and loved behind.

I stuck my hand up the sleeve of my arm, feeling to see if the bumps were getting worse. I remembered what the doctors had told me about it being all in my mind, it wasn't a rash or even any other sort of skin condition. They discovered that it all started when I started to think about my past and that night when I was four years old, sitting helplessly on the street. Cheryl always told me that it was going to become dangerous if I didn't stop, but I always wondered that if I just knew everything and was surrounded by my past, that I wouldn't need to think about it. If that was true, then the bumps would be gone forever. I explained this all to Ajax, and even though I knew that he couldn't understand me, he still listened with his large ears. When I finished ranting to him, we both sat still for a couple of minutes. Out of nowhere, I stood up and through myself at my drawer.

"We have to do this. We have to!"

## **Chapter 2**

I lugged my ripped-up duffle bag down the thin hallway. I remembered always wanting to fix the peeling wallpaper. I always got so embarrassed when my mega-millionaire best friend Val came over. Her house was at least six times larger than mine was. That's probably why whenever she asked if she could come to my house I told her I was sick, or gave her some other excuse. Before I entered the kitchen, I thought about what I was going to say to Darren and Cheryl. I hadn't even told them I decided, after they told me the news, I ran straight to my room. I dragged my feet through the open-door way, trying as best I could not to look at either of them in the eyes. I sat my bag on the floor, clearing my throat louder than usual to get everyone's attention.

"Darren," I said in a rather small voice. "Cheryl," I said in an even smaller voice, "I've decided that I am going to go live with my mom."

Darren looked down, chewing ferociously on his pancake. I could clearly see that he was going to try to find a way to guilt trip me out of it. My tense shoulders dropped and I clenched my teeth, Darren had loved me and cared for me since the day I was born, and

when I was four, he took me in as his own daughter. He probably never wanted to see or hear from me again. But it wasn't until I saw the look on Cheryl's face that I really wanted to beat myself up for this. Her left fist was clenched tightly, sitting firmly on her hip. Her mouth was hanging open, but only about one or two inches, and her eyes. There was no possible way to describe her eyes. They were flaming with anger, they looked like they did when she went anywhere near grass with her allergies. They were melting away with the water that quickly began to fill them up. But there was a sparkle in them too. Just in the corner of her eye. She snapped her head, breaking herself out of whatever trance she had put herself in and slammed her hand on the table.

"I'm sorry, I don't believe I heard you correctly." There was something different about how she said that. It wasn't crisp and fine as it normally was. Her words blurred together, I could hardly even understand her. Darren was even so surprised that he stared at her, shocked.

"Cheryl, I'm sorry!" I pleaded. "You need to understand, this is my real mother. I've been thinking about her for so many years, and finally all of my questions will be answered." I whined hopelessly. I could feel tears begin to float to my eyes.

"I thought that we raised you to make better decisions than this." It pained me to hear those words come out of her mouth, especially when they were directed toward me. She held her head upright; the fire, the water, and the sparkle had all cancelled each other out, so it was back to her fierce green eyes. "Well you are certainly not going today. We have to talk about this, call your mother, buy you a plane ticket to Lakeside, Connecticut, so for now you can go unpack your bag, it will be at least two days."

Teddy and Lucy stared at the three of us in disbelief. No one had ever seen Cheryl so angry and upset. I grabbed my bag and walked out of the room. The room was so silent that you could hear probably hear a leaf gently blowing around in the wind. As I picked up my duffle bag and I could feel everyone's eyes fixed tightly on my back. Ajax could feel the

awkwardness as well and attempted to bury himself in the bag. Neither of us really liked being the center of attention.

“I’m sorry. I love you guys but--” I started.

“Go to your room,” Cheryl demanded, fuming and wrathful. Ajax tugged on the bottom of my raggy, unhemmed jeans. I realized that there was absolutely nothing that I could do or say that would change anything about how they felt.

\* \* \*

Two days passed, yesterday was terrible and lonely. When I came down for breakfast, everyone was at the table talking, but when I arrived they all fell silent. After that, I pretty much stayed in my room the entire day with Ajax, who was completely bored out of his mind. All day he would squirm around the room, trying to find something to do. He jumped up to my wood window-sill and tried to climb out. When I woke up this morning I was considering just staying in my room the entire day again. But I couldn’t bare it, I was starving. I didn’t have anything to eat yesterday. I slowly got up out of my bed, only to find Ajax missing. All of my drawers were opened and emptied and my duffel bag was missing. My eyebrows narrowed with bewilderment. I rubbed my tired eyes and glanced over at my alarm clock. I must have slept through my alarm because it was 10:36 a.m. and my alarm was set for 8 a.m. I slipped my feet into my soft slippers and headed into the kitchen.

I pulled open the hard wooden door that led into the kitchen. Darren, Cheryl, Teddy, and Lucy were all sitting at the kitchen table eating breakfast, Ajax was in his usual spot eating his regular dog food, and my duffel bag was sitting next to the front door, prim and proper.

“Malia,” Cheryl said in a rather soothing voice, “why don’t you come and join us.” Slightly confused, I walked over to the table and sat in my usual spot across from the twins. I stretched my hand out to the middle of the small table to grab an apple.

“Malia, we talked to your mother last night,” Darren began in his low, scratchy voice, “and we have decided that you are going to leave today. We are going to drive you to the airport at 4 o’clock this afternoon, so we have almost all day to do whatever you would like.”

“Malia, we want you to know that none of us are mad at you for making this decision. We are all going to miss you and none of us want our relationship to end this way.” I loved when Cheryl spoke that way. There was something about her voice that made everything seem o.k., even in the worst possible situations. She delicately perched her hand upon my shoulder and leaned down to kiss my head. Cheryl never liked to cry, especially not in public, but when I looked her in the eye, I saw a little tear begin to form. I loved seeing this side of Cheryl, everything was always so perfect, so gentle, so safe.

### **Chapter 3**

The car’s window wipers swished the snow back and forth on the front of Cheryl’s car. The only time I’d ever been away from her was that time that Val took me skiing at the Catamount Ski Area. We were going to be gone for three days, but on the second day I called her and asked her to come pick me up because I was so home sick. I’d promised myself that I would never go away from home again because I knew that I wouldn’t make it more than 48 hours. Its kind of ironic how I said that I’d never leave home and now I can’t wait to be gone. Part of me felt a little regret and confusion about leaving. Even though these people weren’t my real family, they loved and cared for me for 16 years, and I’m leaving them for someone that I have never even met, I didn’t even know anything about Veronica, my birth mother.

“Promise me that you will come visit us, Lia,” Cheryl finally said after a long silence.

“Of course,” I assured her. Other than that one simple conversation, the rest of the ride was fairly mute. I could see the planes departing the ground, so I knew we were near. For a moment, I almost wanted to yell STOP! I wanted the car to come to a halt so that I could sling open the car door and run back home. I clenched my fists and closed my eyes.

The car came to an abrupt stop, I jerked my body forward, feeling my seat belt hold me back. I sat in the car, holding my knees up to my chest, thinking about everything and everyone that I knew here. I didn't want to get out yet, "Cheryl, can we just stay in here for a few minutes?" I could tell she wanted to. She didn't want to let me go yet.

"You're going to miss your flight. We should hurry." She murmured as she flew her legs out of the car to get my baggage out of the trunk. I pulled the door handle and my fingers pushed the door open. I stepped out to help her, but when I put my hand on the luggage she looked at me differently. There was a disheartened look in her eye. We made eye contact for a few seconds until I broke it, feeling ashamed.

"Whatever happened to leaving on a good note?" I pointed out.

"I tried to let it go, understand how you feel, but I can't. I don't know how you could even just think about leaving. We took you in when you were all alone, we loved and cared for you. But here you are, getting ready to leave, and never come back."

"Cheryl, you will never understand how I feel. You were always loved and cared for as a child. But me? I was abandoned on the street when I was only four, and now I have the chance to make up for all of that." She pushed her arm on the trunk of the car and slammed it down.

She looked at me once more and said, "You were loved and cared for as a child. One night, you were all alone, but before and after that, you were always adored. That is why I will never understand how you feel."

She stormed through the electric airport doors. Her walk was strong and heavy. I let out a deep and long breath and dropped my shoulders, then followed her into the crowded airport, speechless. I grabbed one of the dirty, gray buckets in the security line. I began to take off my shoes and my jacket.

“Lia,” she spoke, as she grabbed my hand and reassured me that she wasn’t going to forget me.

“Before you leave, you should know a thing or two about your mother and father.”

She stopped, straightening out her jacket and her hat. “Your parents were never married,” she slowly began, clearing her throat. “...and you should know that, your father doesn’t even know that you exist.” She looked at me in the eye to try and read my response. My eyebrows narrowed. Why wouldn’t my mom tell my dad about me? I wondered.

“Look, your family history is very complicated. I don’t know if its my place to tell you about it, but,” she sighed, “be careful.”

She looked back over at me, as if she had just seen a ghost.

“I will, don’t worry.” We both smiled and said our goodbyes. She waited for me until I got through the security line. Her body appeared stiff, her shoulders were tightly locked, she was squeezing her hands together, and her eyes were fixed on the floor. When Ajax and I got through, I noticed she was on the phone with a guilty look on her face. She was biting her bottom lip, and shutting her eyes, forcing herself to hold in her tears. She was probably calling my mom to let her know that I was on my way. When I saw her hang up the phone and make her way out of the airport, I wanted to chase after her. Ajax started growling in his cage. A sales lady’s cat was agitating and teasing him. Ajax always hated cages. He and I always loved freedom - whenever mom locked us in my room, we would always leave through the window and head to Valerie’s house. Ajax growled some more and started scratching at the cage. The sales woman stared at him and stroked her long, thin fingers through the cage’s holes.

She had straight, long, black hair. It reached all the way down to the bottom of her back. Her hair was perfectly parted in the middle and she wore a gold head necklace with an oval symbol. In the middle of the symbol that drooped over her forehead was a small, bright,

white dot. Around it were blue and red lines, all with black lining around them. She had exotic cat-like eyes that curved up; her eyeballs were a deep blue, deeper than I'd ever seen. Her eyeliner perfectly outlined her eyes and made them look ten times bigger than they actually were. Her lips were a perfect thinness, pale, but had a deep tan tint. There were two or three rings on each of her fingers, and on her hand was a wooden bracelet with some form of tribal engravings. She had a beautiful Persian cat with silky, long, white fur and its collar was similar looking to the woman's bracelet. The woman looked at Ajax and frowned. "You do not have a bright future ahead of you," she said in a strange accent. I couldn't quite tell what it was.

"Excuse me?" I asked, confused and startled.

"Give me your hands, child. I can determine your future."

My mouth dropped open. I had no idea who this person was. She closed her eyes and tilted her head slightly back. She took my hands and began singing strange tribal chants. Whenever she got another vision, she would tilt her head awkwardly, and either loosen or tighten her eyes.

"Child, you must be careful of the future."

She was still getting visions and 'determining my future'. She slashed my hands away from hers. "Child!" she yelled, widening her eyes. She ripped the amulet off of her head and through it into my shaken hands. "Take this necklace. But never tell anyone about it. It will be our little secret. Your future is dark and evil. You must be careful of what you are told and who you encounter." Her accent grew thicker, almost impossible for me to understand her. I looked at the amulet she gave me and tucked it into my bag. When I looked back up, she was gone. Almost like she disappeared into thin air.