

The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of a rock face with distinct, wavy, and layered geological patterns in shades of brown, tan, and grey. The text is overlaid on this background.

ARISTER

2018

**The Creative Arts Magazine
of Christian Brothers Academy**

A Letter from the Editors

The name “Arister” is derived from the Greek word “arista,” meaning “excellent.” Think of the Arister as the excellence produced by the CBA community in all forms of the arts.

This year, Arister boasted a team of four editors, who began working together in January. Our objective: to comb through a plethora of solicitations and contest entries in order to select the best short stories, artwork, poetry, and photography the CBA community had to offer. We would like to sincerely thank all those who participated in sharing their creativity. At last, after many hours of layouts, we proudly present to you the 2018 edition of THE ARISTER.

Your Editors

Editor in Chief-Matthew Vaccaro ‘19

**Staff - James Marchese ‘19, Matthew Bell ‘20,
Sebastian Marchese ‘21**

Moderator- Mrs. Viola

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Winner of the School Photography Contest
Michael DeMasi '18





Photographed by Matthew Bell '20



Photographed by Mrs. Young



Photographed by Brian Hill '18



*Ukulele and Case constructed
by Mr John Hanley*



Photographed by Joeseeph Gatti '19

POETRY PROBLEMS

"BECAUSE I COULD NOT STOP FOR DEATH-
HE KINDLY STOPPED FOR ME-"
I HEARD HIM MUTTER TO HIMSELF
AS HE STOLE HER
POETRY.
I LOOKED UP FROM MY BOOK,
RATHER CROSS
I ACCUSED HIM-
"HAVE YOU SEEN MY WORKS OF ROBERT FROST?"
HE SIMPLY SNICKERED-

"I TOOK THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED BY,
AND THAT HAS MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE"

WITH THIS REPLY SMOKE CAME OUT OF MY EARS-
I REALLY WAS QUITE STEAMED,
NOT ONLY DID HE MISQUOTE THE POEM,
BUT HE RUINED MY RHYME SCHEME!
WITH THIS I TOSSED DOWN
MY COPY OF FAUST,
SURE THAT HIS PROJECT
WAS EASY TO OUST.
I MARCHED STRAIGHT OVER
SOON I WAS AGAPE.
HIS FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER
OF A POEM TOOK SHAPE.

MANY LINES WERE SCATTERED,
MOST WERE CUT UP,
SEVERAL COMBINED-
SOON AFTER, "CLEANED UP"

WHITMAN AND DICKINSON
WERE HAVING AN AFFAIR.
POE AND WILDE'S VERSES WEREN'T
WILLING TO SHARE.
SHAKESPEARE AND HOMER
WERE FORCED TO SHARE A STANZA,
IT WAS TRULY A DEAD POETS CLUB EXTRAVAGANZA!
AND OF THESE, MANY SPOTLIGHT WRITINGS
WERE LEFT IN THE DUST.
MANY UNUSED LINES
WERE LEFT OVER TO RUST.
I YELLED AT THE OFFENDER-
"WHAT IS THIS HORRID CESSPOOL?!"
HE ONLY REPLIED "IT'S AN ASSIGNMENT FOR SCHOOL."

-MAXIMUS BEAN '20

~AMERICA-THEMED POETRY CONTEST WINNER~

The United States isn't what it used to be.

I will never believe that
America's future is bright.
You may not trust it, but
The United States is the best country on Earth
Is a lie.
America is dying
It's true.
Greatness still awaits for the nation
If somebody told me that I would laugh.
America decaying...
Crime not so much.
It's stronger than ever.
The American Dream:
It is impossible.
Giving up:
It is the norm.
What about helping your fellow neighbor?
We the people
More like
We the elite

By understanding this poem
This nightmare cannot exist

*Now, read the poem from the bottom to the top to see a new message, my
true perspective of America.*

-Gary Fletcher '20

“WHISPERS FROM THE OTHER PLACE”

LOST IN POOLS OF ENDLESS GRACE
YEARNING HERE TO SEE YOUR FACE.
YET NEVER WILL YOUR FACE I SEE
AS LONG AS I A MORTAL BE.

DEEPLY MOVING IN MY HEART
I RECEIVE AS YOU IMPART,
SWEETEST COMFORT, HEAVEN’S WINE
O LORD OF LIFE, O GUEST DIVINE.

THE SACRED HEART IS BEATING NOW
DEEP WITHIN I HEAR SOMEHOW:
“I AM YOURS AND YOU ARE MINE.
MY PEACE IN YOU, THE VICTORY SIGN.”

LOVING SAVIOR WELL I KNOW
I AM NOTHING THOUGH I GROW.
SMALL AND LOWLY SINNER ME,
A WASHED IN GRACE ON CALVARY.

COULD THERE BE A TIME IN STORE
WHEN I’VE RECEIVED SO MUCH MORE?
THAT IN ME A CLEAN HEART COULD STILL
THOSE THOUSAND VOICES DARK AND SHRILL?

FROM DEEP INSIDE A HOPE DOES SPRING,
I TASTE THE WATER THAT YOU BRING.
THOUGH ALL I SEE IS DESERT LAND,
I’LL FOLLOW AS YOU TAKE MY HAND.

THERE IS MERCY ENOUGH, THERE IS FREEDOM!

THERE IS THE SOUND OF THE WIND, GENTLY BLOWING
THROUGH THE BROKEN WINDOW PANES OF MY SOUL.

–SEAMUS M. DUNNE, FEBRUARY 23, 2018

America: A Hard Earned Gift of Freedom

This prideful land of liberty
Where freedom rings from sea to sea
Was not procured by just one man
But took a nation, I guarantee

Take not for granted, this hard-earned gift
For many fought to make a shift -
A shift from colony to democracy
Fighting emerged and solidified the rift

Our founding fathers made a choice
A choice to speak and have a voice
That their world, too, would work alone
All people present should rejoice

Rejoice not yet, my troubled friend
For, many died and met their end
While toiling on this hallowed ground
To fire, stop, oppose, and fend

Our enemies did not relent
For, on they pushed and on they went
Old George's men pushed to the end
Blood, sweat, and tears they all had spent

But soon enough, the troubles recede
And out goes the Armata stampede
So they made a pact, an old paper doc
The Declaration of Independence was decreed!

Forget not, that cent'ries ago,
The armies not only put on a show
But showed us all that if we work
Our treasured morals might always glow

-Aedan Moran '20

A Night at the Pub

By Anonymous

I was sitting with a “friend”
at the pub the other night,
He kept complaining to me
About his most previous barfight.
“He swung at me a right hook
aimed directly at my chin!
If I’d’ve only ducked,
I would have quickly claimed the win.”
I languished alongside him,
for reasons that were my own.
I replied “Wasn’t that the chap
who only wished to be left alone?”
“Yeah, but if I’d only struck first,
I would’ve made mum proud!”
Annoyed, I changed the subject.
“What happened to the crowd?”
Yet he still bolstered on,
He was clearly in a craze.
“If only I’d ducked his jab,
I could have put him in a daze!”
Having heard enough, I shouted
“I get it! I understand!”
My mind swirled around me
As I struggled to make a stand.
“Calm down!” Yelled the barkeep.
Mercifully, we obliged
Allowing silence to finally settle
In this place we both reside.
I was still standing rather awkwardly
Embarrassed, I plopped back into my seat.
I related to my friend silently:
What is worse than embarrassing defeat?

America Today

Beloved America
Land of the Faithful
Morality missing?
Confusion is conquering?
Nay!
Freedom and Liberty!
Hope in all hearts!
Love in all minds!
Specializing in technological wonders
Protection is vigilant
Endangering for safety of the masses
Seams split?
And yet we stand United
Against militant foreign foes
We are One and Whole
Paving cracks in our road
Even a city on a hill
Has an occasional earthquake
So then the buildings are made stronger
A lighthouse in a rainstorm
May sometimes go out
To replace the bulbs
These will last longer
Shine brighter
Brace the impact of the waves
Still it stands strong
Not a monument
Not a testimony
But an Idea
Which will forever last
The beacon of light shines brightly atop the mountain.

-Maximus Bean '20

Event Horizon by Sebastian Marchese '21













REFLECTIONS ON ART AND SCIENCE

Most kids like to draw up until they are about four or five. For whatever reason, many just give it up and go on to other interests. I have remained interested in drawing, but more in building and crafts. Along with drawing, I found levers, pulleys and mechanical things interesting, as well. I just saw all of this as "stuff I like". As I got older, it seemed that artists and scientists were viewed as almost different species. Various people have tried to reconcile these supposedly different ways of viewing the world. When I was in middle-school, an album called "Hemispheres" dealt with this duality. In college, I read a book that encapsulated my view that art and science were far more entwined than different. The book was called "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance" by Robert Pirsig. I had just recently gotten both a motorcycle and a license to drive it. This seemed like a good time to read this book. I highly recommend it (even if you don't have a motorcycle).

I am now flipping through the pages of Pirsig's book wondering which, out of hundreds of great quotes, I should use to explain my view of science and art. I randomly opened a page and this one seems to work: "But technology is simply the making of things. Actually a root word of technology, techne, originally meant "art". The ancient Greeks never separated art from manufacturing, in their minds, and so never developed separate words for them." On another page: "Some-time look at a novice workman or a bad workman and compare his expression with that of a craftsman whose work you know is excellent and you'll see the difference. The craftsman isn't ever following a single line of instruction. He's making decisions as he goes along. For that reason he'll be absorbed and attentive to what he's doing even though he doesn't deliberately contrive this. His motions and the machine are in a kind of harmony. He isn't following any set of written instructions because the nature of the material at hand determines his thoughts and motions, which simultaneously change the nature of the material at hand. The material and his thoughts are changing together in a progression of changes until his mind's at rest at the same time the material's right.' 'Sounds like art,' the instructor says. 'Well, it is art,' I say. 'This divorce of art from technology is completely unnatural. It's just that it's gone on so long you have to be an archeologist to find out where the two separated. Rotisserie assembly is actually a long-lost branch of sculpture, so divorced from its roots by centuries of intellectual wrong turns that just to associate the two sounds ludicrous.'"

I like those quotes. Being completely absorbed in something you enjoy can be likened to a Zen-like experience. People have used various words to describe this state of mind such as being "in the zone" or experiencing a sort of "flow". I don't think you can obtain this state by passively watching a TV screen. To properly experience this you need to be creating something.

I went to a public high school which was less rigorously challenging academically than CBA. However, one thing my school used to have was great electives for kids that hated sitting in a classroom. We had wood shop, graphic arts, metal shop with a foundry, a dark room (obsolete), sculpture and a bunch of other classes- mostly gone to budget cuts and changing priorities. I loved all that stuff, but elected to make those things hobbies and go with my other interest, science, as a career choice.

When I paint, or do any of my projects, I am mostly thinking scientifically. When I make a ukulele, it incorporates knowledge of biology (steam bending the wood and carving it), chemistry (gluing pieces together), and physics (fret spacing, tuning, wiring it for an amplifier-things like that). When you paint a portrait, it helps to know a bit about anatomy, how light works, basic biology and color theory. There is generally more blood flow around your cheeks and nose. Here you might use more cadmium red or possibly alizarin crimson in the skin tone. Your chin and mouth area get less blood flow so there will be some colder colors mixed into the skin tone. Light itself is a factor. Outdoor mid-day light will have more cold colors than early morning or late in the day. Incandescent bulbs give a warm spectrum of light.

I could talk endlessly about the usefulness of scientific knowledge and how it can help in the creation of art.

- Mr. John Hanley

The Hanging Men

By Sebastian Marchese '21

“They’re saying it is a ghost doing it.”

“The public always says that about everything, it’s just some sick person as always.” I look up from my lunch as the two detectives talk about the recent incidents in the area. I tune them out and turn back to my lunch. I was assigned to the case today after the chief decided it wasn’t a suicide and a homicide. That happened when the second body was found.

The case was a strange one. A few days ago, a man was found hanging from a bridge. The time of death was late at night and there were no witnesses as to what happened. The man was Hector Turnvolt. Age twenty four, single, stable job and income. Time of death, estimated to be around 10:34 post meridiem. His parents said that he was at their house the day he died and was on the way home. They were adamant that he had no reason to commit suicide. Two days after Hector was found another man was found hanging from the same bridge. Terrence Matzich, age twenty four, single, stable job and income. Time of death, estimated to be around 10:34 post meridiem. Parents are deceased, but they died when he was young so I ruled out, for now, that that was the reason for his suicide. A witness said that they had seen him walking to the bridge from their apartment but lost view of him because of a building.

That was when the chief made it a homicide case, the two deaths were too similar to not be connected. Then the third body showed up. Stephen Westman. Twenty four, single, the rest is all the same. Word spread that it was a vengeful spirit, a ludicrous statement, and now the town avoids this bridge. No deaths have been reported but yesterday the detective on this case resigned after he went to investigate the bridge. He said that he saw a strange woman with a noose around her neck that tried to kill him. He was clearly hallucinating from the fear since he was twenty four.

I get up and throw the remains of my lunch out, putting my jacket on and walking out the door. My breath comes out in clouds as the cold air envelops me. It stayed warm nearly all November and only recently began to turn cold. I give a protester waving signs about global warming a sidelong glance before moving on. The sun is still high in the sky when I get to the bridge. Mackly Bridge. Two girls, around eighteen, run past the bridge, whispering about it being haunted. I sigh and take a few steps onto the bridge. The temperature of the air around me drops sharply and I shiver through my winter jacket. It’s just your nerves, I think.

I walk over to the middle of the bridge and lean over the side where the men were found hanging. I see something silver at the bottom of the shallow river, but kids throw coins into the river all the time so I dismiss it. As I turn away from the bridge, I think back to the silver item in the river, it had the shape of a bracelet, so it couldn’t be a weapon. The victims weren’t stabbed anyway, so even if there was a knife at the bottom of the river, as alarming as that is it wouldn’t help my case.

I wander around town until 10:30 post meridiem. I make it back to the bridge at 10:33, just in time to see a man, around twenty four, crossing the bridge. Once I take a step on the bridge I feel a sudden twinge in my chest. I stop in my tracks as my vision blurs suddenly. The man jogs over

to me asking if I'm okay. I go to push him off the bridge when something blurs in front of my eyes and the man is pulled backwards. I go to reach for him but find myself unable to move. A woman in a soaked white dress with a noose around her neck tightens a rope around the man's throat. I struggle against whatever force keeps me stuck in my position as the man reaches for me.

I feel as if a deep pressure on my body is lifted and I run towards the man, finding myself able to do so. The strange apparition pushes the man, who has now gone limp, against the railing of the bridge. I try to pull the woman away and find that my hands go right through her. I stop, temporarily stunned, just looking at my hands phase through her body. I think back to the detective that resigned from this case because he said that he saw a woman with a noose around her neck. I grab onto what I can actually touch, the man. I pull him away from the woman, the rope falling out of her hands, disappearing. The man collapses into my arms and I start dragging him away. The woman stares at me as I drag him away, not doing anything, just staring at me. I can't help but feel as if I am next on her list. I also can't help but feel that someone won't be around to help me.

~ ~ ~

I sit in my office looking at surveillance tapes from the past few weeks. If this... ghost... is haunting that bridge, it had to have been recently. Nothing of this caliber has ever happened on the bridge before, which means it must have been recently. I am about to move on when something catches my eye. The time stamp moves from 10:30 to 11:23. I go back to 10:30 and watch a woman walk across the bridge. Right before the timeskip happens I pause it. The woman is the same ghost on the bridge. I look at the date. It was the day before the first victim was found. I think back to the bracelet in the river. I look through the news several days before and after her death, up to last night, to see if any woman had gone missing. I turn up with nothing. It is as if this mysterious lady appeared out of nowhere. I focus my attention to the timeskip. Who would delete the time? The person who killed her, clearly, but how did they gain access to the video files? The only person that comes to mind is the detective who resigned because of this case. He is twenty four and single last I heard. I think long and hard about the things he had said from at least a week ago to now. I remember him mention that he had suspicions his girlfriend was cheating on him, but later said that he broke up with her and she moved out of his house. Could the bridge ghost be his girlfriend? Could he have killed her?

I run down into the shallow river, leaving my shoes and socks by the side so they stay dry, and look around for the bracelet. A shine catches my eye and I wade over to it, picking it up. The bracelet is made from silver and shines in the sunlight. I wade back to shore and put my socks and shoes on. I ignore the water in my socks and rush back to the police building. I turn before leaving the bridge, looking at it one more time. I see a faint silhouette of a woman, waving to me, as if she knew that I had found it. I turn away, hurrying to the police chief.

"You're accusing one of our detectives of murder because of a ghost and a bracelet? Based on him complaining about his girlfriend? I think this is getting to your head. Why don't you take today off, clear your head." The chief looks back down at his papers, a document stating what the man had seen on the bridge two nights ago.

"There is a document right there proving there is a ghost. I saw it as well. If you look over the tapes you'll see a timeskip between 10:30 and 11:30." I try to hide my annoyance at the chief.

He was very dense, and it didn't help that the detective who resigned from the case was on very good terms with the chief.

"This is a serious charge, please let me think it over. Go back to your house, clear your head. I'll tell you my decision when you come back tomorrow." I stand up, frustrated beyond all belief, and walk out of the office, bumping into a detective on the way out. I turn quickly and look at him. He's the same one who resigned from the case. Was he listening in on our meeting? He walks into the chief's office and closes the door. I walk to my office and turn out the lights. I was heading out, but not to my house. I am taking a trip to Mackly Bridge.

I stand on the bridge, waiting for the ghost to appear. She must know that I am finding out who killed her and she might tell me who did it. I hear footsteps and turn to where they are coming from. I see the detective looking at me from the side of the bridge. I tense up and reach for my gun, holstered at my side. I see moonlight shine off something in his hands and quickly take out my pistol, pointing it at him. A shot is fired and I feel it pierce my stomach as I pull the trigger, the shot going wide as I fall to the ground. Warm blood pools around me, flowing from the bullet wound. The detective stands over me, shadows making his face look lean and monstrous.

"I didn't want to kill anyone else... but I heard you in the chief's office." His hands start shaking and I feel my vision blur slightly around the edges. "Nobody can know what I did, she... she cheated on me... you don't know what that is like!" He swings the gun around, it flashing in the moonlight. "I... I had to kill her... that was the only way she would learn a lesson! We met here on this bridge and it was just a slight push while putting the rope around her neck and boom! It was done!" I feel sick knowing that this man who is clearly unhinged did that to someone and can talk so nonchalantly about it.

"You see why I can't let you live..." He raises the pistol, it level with my face, when I see something out of the corner of my eyes. He jerks backward as darkness pools around the edges of my vision. I watch him flail around shooting madly at something I can't see. That's when I see the woman wrap the rope around his neck. He puts his hands to his neck trying to pry the rope away. He fires off a few more shots before it starts clicking, the magazine being empty. I hear sirens in the distance but everything sounds as if it is underwater. I watch as the detective, the murderer, struggle against the ghost. He starts to weaken from lack of oxygen and by the time I see the red and blue lights flashing by the end of the bridge he has passed out. I watch as the ghost leads the body, lifting him with ease, over to the edge of the bridge and letting him fall off. I watch as ghost slowly disappears, looking at where the detective is hanging off the bridge. Paramedics come and kneel beside me, asking me several questions I can't understand. I fall unconscious as they lift me up onto a stretcher.

~ ~ ~

I sit in the hospital, looking out the window. The city looks so peaceful, as if nothing happened. I hear the news drone on about how the detective had killed his girlfriend, hanged her, then hanged himself "because of guilt". I feel a sharp pain in my stomach and lean back into a more comfortable position. I take a deep breath and close my eyes, drifting off into sleep, vaguely aware of the detective looking at me through the window, his ghost pointing a pistol at my head.

Pawn of the Future

Or A Requiem for Kilgore Trout

By Matthew D. Vaccaro '19

“Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise;
when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.”

-Proverbs 17:28, ESB

Gideon Rook awoke to a violet light. At least, he was pretty sure it was violet; he was as color blind as a rat. He was surrounded by doctors and scientists he had only just met. “Is the pilot ready for treatment?” the overseer asked sternly, up from his perch. Gideon was fairly certain the overseer had never bothered to learn his name. He didn’t mind, though; he never learned the scientist’s name either. He was about to be blasted with enough electromagnetic radiation to switch the Earth’s poles. This energy would either disintegrate him into his component atoms or turn him into the world’s fourth time traveler. After the first time traveler arrived a week into the future, he was thrown a parade, and a national holiday was declared. Traveler number-two, the first woman to take a voyage through time, was just thrown the parade, but went on to write a series of best-selling novels. The last recipient of Project DeLorean got a handshake and retired as an audiologist.

The mission was fairly simple: Gideon would be plunged through time, forced to ping-pong between the past and future and collect data for the brainiacs back home using the dozens of complicated sensors planted under his skin. There was no skill involved; all Mr. Rook had to do was avoid dying, at least until they could pull him back to the present. No one was sure where Gideon would be sent, or when he’d return. That was why Gideon was specially selected for the mission; the algorithms predicted he made no significant contribution to history.

He prepared to step into the large MRI machine, which was shaped somewhat like a horseshoe with lamps hanging from every direction. Before anything had even started pelting him with electrons, he could feel the heat emanating beneath him, as if it were the heat of the Earth’s core. Gideon began to hum a song he couldn’t remember. He knew it was from the 1960’s, but the melody of the chorus always soothed him. As he saw one of the technicians, an attractive Chinese woman, walk towards what Gideon thought was the on-switch, he closed his eyes, as his world dissolved into the possibly purple light.

Mr. Rook woke up at the end of the world. He was sure of it, more or less. He found himself in the ruins of a great city, which was flooded with lava from a volcanic eruption. Ash was raining from the sky, which was beet red. There was a smell vaguely reminiscent of hot wax. He thought he was in Houston, from the remains of buildings he spotted, although the last time he checked, there were no active volcanoes in Texas. The short little astronaut was standing on the only solid ground for miles, a glacier of glistening obsidian, cooled from a melted remains of a semi- truck.

“When am I?” He thought, “ When does this happen?”

He looked down at his watch. The time read 5:28, which was about a minute and a half after he entered the lab back in the present.

“Didn’t expect that to be much help anyway,” he replied to himself aloud.

He saw a lone vulture flying low in the sky, seemingly about to pass out from exhaustion. Its leathery wings had nearly withered down to bone, and its beady eyes seemed from another world. Noticing Rook as the only thing moving for miles, the demonic bird swooped in to attack. The threat of starvation will turn any scavenger into a hunter. Right as Gideon

was about to mutter an expletive and duck for cover, he plunged out of time again.

In another moment he was nine years old, in the hallway of his elementary school in suburban New York. He was on 'bins duty,' carrying in the bins of sports equipment for recess, along with his second-grade classmate, Darah Bailey. 'Darah' is apparently a biblical name, but Gideon always thought it was a portmanteau of 'Deborah' and 'Sarah.'

The two of them had been partnered for about two weeks now, but they hadn't really spoken to each other any more than usual. That day though, Darah opened up.

"I've gotta tell you something, Giddy," she began, using a childhood nickname Rook would soon try to distance himself from.

"All the other girls have been teasing me," she continued, "I feel so alone." By that point, she was all but crying.

The little boy was shocked. He himself had never been bullied. He always seemed to slip under people's radar. The closest thing he had ever encountered was his friend Luke Heath, who at various points hit him with a toilet plunger, and convinced him that an upstairs bathroom had a eight-foot long spider living in the rafters. Those were just jokes between friends, though. He felt horrible for Darah. Their class only had fifteen kids, five boys and ten girls, in it. It was completely possible that all the girls in the class were picking on her, as she'd later admit to him. If so, there was no real way to avoid them.

Gideon didn't know what to tell her. All he could do was listen. It was a sad little moment. I know, I was there too.

Gideon then traveled to the Diet of Worms in 1521, the starting shot of the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther was defending his 95 Theses against Pope Leo X and Emperor Charles X. Gideon was expecting to hear one of the finest theological debates in history, and it was, for the first ten minutes. After that point, both sides had devolved into shouting at each other, and by the time they had finished, Gideon hadn't the slightest clue what the disagreement was over in the first place. It pained him to think about how the next five hundred years of strife between followers of the same man was all because two men could not sit down and talk to each other.

Just as Gideon was about to witness old Luther storm away to start a new denomination, he was tapped on the shoulder by a concerned Swiss guard, seemingly the only person to notice the 21st-century man wearing a blue cotton sweater and khaki pants looming in the back of the pavilion. In his nasally, upper crust accent, the guard questioned him:

"Egs-CUSE me, herr zhir, vat who are you?"

Thinking on his feet, Gideon instantly responded,

"Um....I'm ah...."

Then he took off running, as fast as his stumpy little legs could take him away from the deadly guard, who was dressed awfully similar to a Christmas nutcracker. Running out into the disgusting overpacked street, trailing with waste, he shouted with his high pitched voice to whoever could hear him.

"Help! Help! Some nutjob is trying to kill me!"

Everyone ignored him. That guard may have been the only person present who understood English. Looking behind him to see if the guard had followed, Gideon was completely ignorant that he was about to run into a stone wall. As Dame Fortune was in a cruel mood, he didn't leap forwards in time until after he collided with the wall and landed face first on the excrement-flooded road.

After that endeavor into the Middle Ages, he then traveled backwards to first century Jerusalem, during which he literally had an encounter with Jesus. It went down exactly as one might think, so there's no need to record it. However, this encounter would later be the one experience he would describe to convince people that history was not all atrocities.

Gideon subsequently plunged into the future, to the year 2349Ω, to humankind's first contact with an alien species. A surreal experience, the meeting was just like an episode of Star Trek. Two aliens stepped out of their flying saucer, which was decorated with racing stripes. The first alien, the taller of the two, had a body shape similar to a hammer resting on a blacksmith's anvil, and had three eyes but no eyebrows. Its shorter companion resembled a humanoid horse, but with the tail of a rat, fiery red colored fur, and had two bare patches of skin on the sides of his chest resembling stirrups. Both visitors gave off the scent of a York Peppermint Patty. The Horseheaded being spoke first, speaking, for some reason, in French.

"Greetings, Children of Gaia," she/he began, after someone had finally found a translator, which surprisingly ended up being Gideon, "Our species has been observing yours for many moons now. We had wanted to come and meet you sooner, but we believed we'd, in your own terms 'blow your minds.' If you are willing, we would like to extend our hands in friendship to you."

"Yes, well, on behalf of the human race I welcome to this planet. My name is John C. Shepherd, and I have been elected to represent this planet." This claim was a lie, he was only the President of the United States, "We look forward to seeing what your species have to offer."

Negotiations for a cultural exchange began swimmingly, until one of the President's aids got bored and took out a fidget spinner. The taller alien became deeply offended by this, and in an instant, a shooting match of lasers had erupted between the two parties. Eventually, the two visitors had been skewered, their bodies burned, and the ship destroyed by a drone strike.

The news would later report that it had only been a minor skirmish between the New American Republic and Russian navies, and it very well might have been.

That was the last time humanity would ever interact with an extraterrestrial life form. So it goes.

With a wink of an eye he was twenty-one, standing behind one of the musty cardboard target bales at his old archery club, during an all ages archery class. He was in the indoor range standing behind a bale, retrieving a new cardboard target. He took his time, for he was cautious to a fault. At the front of the shooting line, the coach in charge, "Commander" Bill Scott was instructing a younger student. The Commander had, to Gideon's knowledge, never held such a rank in the military, but was called that because he had served as a boy scout troop leader for over two decades. He was, in Gideon's opinion, one of the greatest men he'd ever meet, but age had brought a certain absent-mindedness, and he was in the early stages of going blind. Still, even at seventy-two, he had the attentiveness of a marksman, and there was never an incident on the range under his watch, with the lone exception of today.

The problem was that Gideon's foot had gotten stuck under one of the bales. Someone would later tell him he had the coordination of an intoxicated baby giraffe. Then he heard it.

"Archers to the line."

None of the spotters noticed him behind, and they called the line clear. Gideon was so paralyzed by fear that he could call out besides a faint whimper. He sheepishly tried in vain to pull his foot out from under the 300-pound bale. What he heard next reminded Gideon of an execution squad.

"The line is hot."

At once, twelve kids started flinging aluminum arrows towards the wall in an arrhyth-

mic series of thuds. Few hit their intended targets, but most hit the bales in front of Gideon, shielding him from their pointed fury. At that point, Gideon questioned the logic in teaching seven year olds how to fire compound bows. He tried screaming out again but received no answer. Finally, he belted at the top of his lungs, in a voice not unlike his little sister shooting before him.

“Hold the LINE please!”

By this point, however, it was too late. An arrow later speculated to have been fired by his friend Joel’s grandmother flew in between the bale and landed in Gideon’s right arm. The children finally ceased firing by then, but Gideon had swooned at the sight of his own blood, and needed to be resuscitated. He had been declared legally dead for nineteen seconds. So it goes.

He would eventually make a full recovery, but this event would be the end of his archery career, at least for a while. When Gideon made it home from his time travel voyage and retire (or at least in the timelines when he does return) he decides to return to his old hobby. In his fifties, he would spend hours at the archery club, regaling his life experiences to anyone who’d listen. The story he’d tell the most was this one, the one where he was almost declared dead. It used to scare the living daylights out of me.

On his next leap, Gideon landed eight and a half years into his own future. By this point, he was married with two kids, but they weren’t with him at this moment. They were upstate visiting the grandparents. Gideon thought his future self stayed behind because he was sick with migraines, on account of the fact he had a migraine right now. He sat on a bean bag chair on the second story of the two family house he shared with his sister’s family, also away. It occurred to Gideon that this was the first time he was truly alone. He had gone from his parents’ house to his college dorm to the air force barracks; he had never lived without another person. As a child, whenever he was asked what he was afraid of, Gideon would always answer: being alone- that, and giant man-eating spiders. Old fears die hard, he supposed. Still, he was a grown man, and a retired astronaut. Surely he could handle a weekend by himself in his own home. It was about this time the explosion happened.

BLAM! TA-POCKETA-POCKETA!

Strucken to the floor like a nervous puppy, Gideon hastened to ponder what could have made a sonic boom. His question was answered when the static aftershock was replaced by the gargling of heavy metal music coming from his brother-in law’s old fashioned boombox downstairs. “Of course,” he thought to himself, “Someone’s come to kill me. Probably an enemy I made in the air force. They’ve come to shoot me, and are using music to tune out their guns. Diabolical.” The front door/only door to the house was downstairs, coincidentally where the gunmen were. There was no escape. He was sweating buckets by now; it was as if the room were filling with lava. Rook decided that if he were to go down, he’d make a noble last stand. He scoured the kitchen area for potential weapons, but the best he could find was a serving spoon used for lasagna, and a Phillips-head screwdriver. He went with the screwdriver.

Carefully descending down the stairs, Gideon tried his best not to squeak in his plastic moccasins (‘cros’ as the kids called them). Before he had traversed the staircase, the grungy cacophony subsided and was replaced by a 1970s love ballad. *Oh! What a night, late December back in ‘63!*

“If they’re here to kill me, they’re sure taking their time,” Gideon thought. Finally, he reached the bottom of the steps and his doom. He kicked down the door, ready to take as many assassins down with him, only to find his sister’s living room empty. The lights were turned out, and the window still bolted shut; no one had entered. What Gideon would later

discover is that his son, Reagan, had tampered with his uncle's boombox and put it on a timer, a sort of prank for Daddy while they were away. Regardless, until his kids when away to college, Gideon, unembarrassed, kept nightlights strategically placed across the house in case of any subsequent emergency.

On his next leap, Gideon arrived at the church of Martin Luther King, Jr., on August 27th, 1963, the night before the March on Washington. For once, Gideon thought ahead and came up with an alias, introducing himself as Kevin Max Smith, although he could never explain where the name came from. Dr. King proved to be a fascinating host; Gideon would later describe him as 'very intense...good at darts.' Rook also found Dr. King to be quite the opposite of his namesake. Unlike the original Martin Luther, who didn't realize what he was getting into, Dr. King was wholly aware his actions would bring the start of a revolution. King was ready and willing to go through with the march, but was genuinely concerned that no one on either side got hurt. For some reason, King confessed this sliver of anxiety to Gideon, who once again had no words.

Because of his monochromacy, Gideon never truly grasped racism. He never could figure out why this specific group of people had been targeted and persecuted, other than the possibility that society needed something to hate, a thought he shuddered at. From what he understood of color, however, he thought it wasn't possible for human skin to be 'white' or 'black,' as it was claimed to him. In his imagination, everyone possessed slightly varying shades of brown. Still, he was in awe of Dr. King's unfathomable compassion for both his people, and his unshakable respect for human life. There are perhaps three men in history to create such a lasting legacy of ideology completely without any use of violence. Two of them, Mahatma Gandhi and the man sitting before him sipping earl grey, lived in the same century. One would struggle to find any human being closer to the third man as Dr. King.

Rook then leaped into his eight year old body. He presently was at a Halloween party, wearing a hand-me-down ninja turtle costume, wondering how in the world a turtle receives ninja training. He had been playing hide and seek with a few of his friends, and was selected to be 'it.' He had just spotted the Hello Kitty costume worn by Joel's little sister, when he felt a tingling sensation coming from above. He looked up; scalding brown liquid leaked from his mask. Someone had poured an entire mug of hot coffee over his head. He looked around; there was only one person holding a coffee cup (which was now empty), some older woman whom Gideon had never met.

Apparently, Gideon received first degree burns as a result of the incident, but he never felt it. His costume was ruined though, so the ninja turtle was now disguised as a boy reeking of hazelnut creamer. The old lady was the grandmother of a friend of a friend, but to this day, Gideon never got an apology from her. She never even admitted to the spill.

Subsequently, Gideon took a trip to our nation's capital, which is now Orlando, Florida, rather than Washington D.C., partly because it was the most important state in the election, and partly because the Walt Disney Company bought out the White House, which they use as a new resort. The year, according to a Hello Kitty Calendar he found in a dumpster, was 2037, and the Presidential Inauguration was to occur in a few hours. Exhausted from time travel, Gideon decided for once, to stop and smell the violets (or however the expression goes).

He decided to camp out on a park bench to get a good view of the ceremony. Before he did that, he scoured around town to find a decent bagel shop. Though it was garbage by com-

parison to a New York bagel, the bagel was not entirely terrible. It's the water one uses that determines the quality of the bagel. Fortunately, the one place that has dirtier water than Florida is Washington D.C.

Having purchased his subpar snack, he found a nice bench, paid for by Mickey Mouse, and picked up a science fiction novel to read while he waited, *The Zygon Inversion* by Steven Moffat. As he read, Gideon received odd looks from passersby. Apparently, by this point in the future, reading had gone out of style. At first, he thought society had turned into a Fahrenheit 451- style dystopia, but a quick conversation with the natives proved otherwise. No one had banned books, the common man just lost interest in them.

Gideon's book was intriguing. It was part of the Dr. Who series, and featuring the protagonist, Doctor Twelve, trying to prevent a war between humanity and a race of shape-shifting refugee aliens living on Earth. Gideon was up to the climax, where the Doctor makes a speech convincing both sides to lay down their arms. In other novels, self-righteous 'everything you're doing wrong' speeches can be wearing, but coming from this character, the speech strikes one as surprising, beautiful and deep.

"This is a scale model of war! Every war ever fought, right there in front of you! Because it's always the same! When you fire that first shot, no matter how right you feel, you have no idea who's going to die! You don't know whose children are going to scream and burn. How many hearts will be broken! How many lives shattered! How much blood will spill until everybody does what they were always going to have to do from the very beginning: SIT! DOWN! AND! TALK!"

The inauguration began exactly two hours and fifty-two minutes later (hurtling through the time vortex gives one a more keen awareness of the passing of time) and by that point Gideon had finished his book and began rereading it. The American people had taken a cue from the Reagan administration and elected another movie star to the seat of presidency. Gideon supposed if it worked out the first time, there was no reason it shouldn't work out again. The only difference with the new president-elect was that he was also a 6'5 former professional wrestler.

"No one will mess with the US with this guy in charge," Gideon thought aloud. He got an odd look from the Chinese woman standing next to him.

He didn't pay too much attention to the President's speech. He figured that he would catch it when he went back to the present. If he got back, that is; he didn't want to put any possibility behind him. The truth was, nothing about the ceremony really interested him. The speech seemed fairly generic, to be honest. The only line that wasn't an homage to a previous president was a promise by the POTUS to be 'The People's Champion,' which apparently was his campaign slogan. The newly elected vice president, strangely, could not attend the ceremony but was quoted saying, "I'll be back."

Now he found himself in rural Pennsylvania, at age 13, for summer camp. He felt nostalgic for this place; this was the night his counselor would be mauled by a rabid cat. His group had just finished dinner and was walking back to their cabin, when Cooper suggested taking a shortcut. The boy's cabin was at the top of the hill (the furthest point from the bathroom), almost a half mile from the main hall, so Cooper suggested cutting through the forest up the hill. It was nearly eleven o'clock, and he didn't think anyone wanted to walk that far. His co-counselor, Mike expressed the opinion that this course of action was foolhardy, and that they should simply follow the designated path. He didn't use as many words, but Gideon had grown accustomed to ignoring 'colorful metaphors.'

Still, he agreed with Mike; he under no circumstances wanted to go into the woods that night. It wasn't that Gideon feared animal attacks- he was actually convinced that wild animals stopped attacking people once electricity was invented- he just possessed an irrational

fear of poison ivy, something he'd never admit to, the after effect of a family camping trip gone awry when he was five. As a result of 'the Incident', Gideon refuses to walk through even tall grass without wearing long sleeved clothing and boots. He only narrowly avoided his fear being exposed when he began astronaut training. That day at the camp, however, he was clad in plaid cargo shorts, barely reaching his knees, and loose fitting tank top. He looked ridiculous, but the clothes were hand-me downs from a family friend, so his mother did not question the generosity when she packed them for Gideon. Needless to say, the young Rook was on the verge of a panic attack, but his objections were overruled by his counselor.

"Come on," Cooper urged, "It'll be an adventure."

Dismissing his friend, he led the squadron of preteens into the thicket. When they were about half ways through, the counselors realized they were missing a kid, twelve year old Jimmy Ventura, and had been missing him for some time now. Figuring they'd look really bad as counselors if they abandoned one of their charges in the middle of the woods, Cooper and Mike turned the entire group around to go back for him. As it turns out, Jimmy had twisted his ankle, and stopped walking about twenty minutes into their hike. He had probably said something about his injury to the group leaders, but no one had been paying attention. The group had at last found Jimmy and were discussing ideas to carrying him to the nurse's station when the fateful beast approached.

The cat's size matched that of a large guinea pig, but it had claws that would give Freddy Krueger a run for his money, as it would soon become clear. Cooper thought he recognized the cat as the house pet of the camp director, Ms. Taiyana. Gideon always thought that leading him into the poison ivy infested woods was Cooper's first mistake. His second mistake was when he approached the seemingly innocuous house cat.

"Hey, Felix. How 'ya doing, buddy-"

Those were the last words Gideon heard from Cooper before the cat pounced on him. Actually, the last thing Cooper said that night was, "Aaagh! Michael, get this cat off my face!" but Gideon couldn't hear that between Jimmy Ventura's screaming, and his friend Joel dragging him by the arm away from the chaos.

Gideon would eventually travel to every major moment on his time stream. At 24, he would sit through Hurricane Grace while parked at a gas station in his Green Volkswagen Beetle, after picking up his mother from the airport. When he was 31, he would slip on an ice cube playing volleyball, and shattered his spine. He met historical figures such as Winston Churchill and John Lennon; Anne Frank and Frank Sinatra. The event he returned to the most, however, was the day he considered to be the worst of his lifetime.

The day was June 23rd, 2013; it was the day of his grandfather's wake. Gideon had seen him the day before, while he was on hospice care at his own home. He couldn't speak, but he was lowly humming worship hymns. When he died, he was surrounded by his entire family. He had waited until Gideon and his sisters left the room before he passed.

The day of the wake, his cousins Joel, Samson, and Ezra stayed with him. They weren't biologically his cousins, but their two families had been friends since decades before Gideon was born. They were also Gideon's best friends. They didn't talk, all the boys did was listen. Later on, they would play rock-paper-scissors in the lobby. Somehow, that made Gideon feel less alone. Then he traveled back to his birth.

Empty Heart, Empty Soul

By Michael LaGuardia '21

I hear the cars begin to beep outside on the driveway, and I automatically wake up and look out the window to see my lovely family walking towards the front door. I had almost forgotten that today she was officially gone. I rush to my closet throwing on whatever suit my daughter Laine had left out the night before. I rush to tie my tie and buckle my belt to go put on a happy face in front of all the grandchildren, half of whom are too young to even understand what is happening.

I open my door and greet my family, but get no response as they are in far too much sorrow. I continue around the house to see all my grandchildren playing despite what is happening today. Many of the older cousins are playing with the younger ones trying to hide them from finding out the truth.

"It's time to head to the church." Laine yells across the house. Tears start to pour from the eyes of Elizabeth's many siblings. As we enter the cars, we try to separate them by age group, allowing the elders to grieve without the children seeing. The first car leaves the driveway with Elizabeth's sister, and as they leave, you hear the yells of mourning from a mile away. I entered the car with the grandchildren, I felt I could contain my feelings as long as I was around them. The children just continue to fool around as if I am not even there.

As we pull up to the church, we see the casket on the roller. This sight brought more tears to the ones already crying, and I felt as though I can feel the sorrow in the air. Many now try to prepare themselves to be seen by everyone sitting in that church. The crowd had probably reached a number over 100. Elizabeth had been a very popular gal. As the doors open we see the vast amount of friends, coworkers, extended family, and even people as odd as Elizabeth's hairdresser.

I listened to the priests give a sermon talking about how valuable life is, and heard him talk about Elizabeth. Which I had never realised before how much her and I had in common, until the priests went on to describe her joyful personality and happy way of approaching life.

It became time to exit the church as the male cousins and grandchildren held the casket to go into the hearse. Everyone at this point was balling their eyes out. We headed back into the cars to make our way to the graveyard. Driving through the small gravel paths, surrounded by gravestones, would've given anyone the chills. They began to lower the body more and more into the ground, and as it got lower, I felt as if it was the one being buried.

The family went back to the reception taking place at Villa Russo in South Richmond Hill, NY. I sat at the end of table, in a way distancing myself from the others as I was in no mood to converse. I slowly stared around the room watching each course come out one by one, thinking about what life would be like when I went back to my empty home. Thinking of all the ways my life would be changed.

When I had entered my home, my immediate reaction was to get dressed into more comfortable clothing. I went to my closet where I put on my pajamas. My plans for tonight was to make some coffee, hit the couch, put on a movie, and hope I fall asleep easily. I had just made my coffee and entered the living room, when I saw Elizabeth sitting there.

“Elizabeth!” I cried. “You’re dead! I mean aren’t you? What is going on here? We had just buried you!” But I had gotten no response, not even a slight budge. I began to grab her in an attempt to shake her, but I wasn’t able to. It seems as if every time I tried to grab her, my hands had almost slipped through her body. “Elizabeth!” I continued to yell. But her eyes had not even left the television screen. “Elizabeth!” I started screaming and crying my eyes out like I have never before. “Elizabeth!” But no matter how loud I yelled, I was not able to get a response. I began to look down as my body seemed as if it were deteriorating. My skin particles had started disappearing through thin air. As I felt my soul leave my body. I realised that Elizabeth had not been the one who died, but me.

Heaven

by James Marchese

He looks around the theater, smiling brightly as he scans our faces. *Honestly, can we just start this?* I flip over my phone and check the time, groaning as the clock inches closer to three o'clock. Three more students walk into the theater, laughing loudly as they make their way to a random set of seats. *Why couldn't this have just been done over email? It's not like we're doing anything special in person...*

"I think this is everyone..." Mr. Rittenhouse nods to himself before walking to the podium positioned in the front of the house. *They should've put the podium on the stage, it would look cooler – especially for a picture.* I shake my head and try to reign my attention in to focus on the teacher. "Alright, as you know, it is now summer break." Some students clap from the back of the theater, shouting excitement. "Thank you... Anyway, you are all here because you applied for my Photography class that will begin in September. I wanted to meet with you all before you left for break because, and hold your groans until the end, I have an assignment for you." He waits a couple seconds before continuing, allowing someone to shout a rhetorical '*what?*' in the silence.

"You'd think this class is filled with kindergarteners." I smile small and glance over at Mia, her eyes narrowed in the direction of the student that shouted. I hold back a laugh as I recognize his face, the absurdity of his presence making this feel like a comedy movie.

"Is that Shane Linden? What the hell is he doing here?" Mia shrugs and leans back so our shoulders touch.

"Probably assumed this class would be 'artistic bs' as he likes to say."

"Well, now this artistic bs class just gave him a summer project..." Mia laughs and nods, quickly becoming quiet as Mr. Rittenhouse begins to speak again.

"I know, it's a tragedy that you have to use your minds over the summer." He sighs and shakes his head, reorganizing his stack of papers before looking up again. "I want you all to photograph your summer story." I lean forward in the seat, my smile growing at his words. "What I mean by this is that I want you to take pictures of what life is like for you – this can be you at the park, you on vacation, or anything like that that is *appropriate for school*. Of course, I want an honest representation of your summer. What I mean by this is that I don't want you to go to the park for the purpose of a picture, you should actually be doing something in the space where you take the picture." He picks up the stack of papers on the podium and moves to the closest group of students. "I want you all to email me any questions you may have while doing this assignment, I will check my email daily for you." I silently thank him as he hands Mia and I a paper, *Summer Project* written in cursive on the top.

"How many pictures do you want?" Mr. Rittenhouse sighs as he turns to address Shane.

"I would like a minimum of thirteen photos, you may submit as many as you'd like though. Of course, if you submit more there is more chance for the pictures to tell your story so you'll have a better chance of getting a higher grade." He begins to walk back to the front of the house, turning to face us again as he reaches the podium. "My email is in the small packet I gave you, there are also examples of other projects if you need inspiration." Mr. Rittenhouse takes one last glance at everyone in the theater before he gives a bright smile. "That's all, you can go home now. If you have any questions right now feel free to come up and ask me." I crack my neck and push myself up as everyone begins to leave the theater. I quickly count the amount of people in the class, smiling slightly at the small amount. *There seem to be only fifteen to twenty kids so it shouldn't be too unbearable – even with Shane in the class.*

"Do you wanna hang out at my house?" I shrug as we walk out of the theater, Mia pushing through a group of kids.

"I'd have to ask, but I'd love to." She smiles and nods as I unlock my phone. "I don't think we're doing anything at home tonight, and it's summer now so there's no time I have to go to bed."

Hey, just finished up the Photography Class meeting.

How was it?

"If you can, would you be willing to drive me home?" Mia smiles extra wide at me, holding her hands up in mock prayer.

"Fine." I roll my eyes as she pulls me into a tight hug, saying thank you over a thousand times. "Okay, okay, I get it. Let me text my Mom back so I can actually come over." Mia nods and lets go, quickly pulling out her phone.

"Let me ask my Dad so he knows you'll be over." I nod and return my attention to my text messages. *She always assumes I will be able to come over... Probably because my parents never say no anyway but, still. Something about how she tells people I am coming over instead of saying that I'm checking if I can actually come over annoys me a little bit.*

**It was good, we have a summer assignment. I'll fill
you in on the details at home.**

Lol! Homework already?

What time are you going to be home?

**Actually, could I go over to Mia's house tonight?
I wouldn't be out late.**

**That's fine, just keep me or Dad in the loop
so we know when you'll be back.**

Will do. Love you.

Love you!

“Okay, I can go.” I shove my phone into my back pocket before looking up at Mia, a wide smile on her face.

“Awesome! Lead the way to your car, friend of mine!” I roll my eyes and walk past her, pushing open the doors to the ‘Student Lot.’ “God, I love the summertime.” Warmth hits against my skin as we walk to the car, the sun illuminating the lot.

“It’s definitely one of the better seasons.” I shift my backpack onto one of my arms, pulling my keys out of one of the pockets before slinging it back on fully. Mia opens the passenger door as I unlock the car, throwing her backpack into the backseat before sliding into the seat. “You’d think this is your car.” She smiles as I get into the car, not answering me.

“Can I have control over the music?” A laugh escapes my lips as I turn the car on, cold air blasting my face.

“No chance, you mistreat my car, you don’t get control over the music.” Mia rolls her eyes and leans back in the seat.

“You don’t even like cars, why does it matter how I treat it?” I glance around as I drive down the road leading towards the exit of the school, checking for anyone who will run onto the road like the idiots most people are. *Honestly, I wouldn’t be surprised if I almost hit someone today. Summer makes people extra dumb.*

“Just because I am not obsessed with cars doesn’t mean that you can destroy my car. My dad would quite literally kill me.”

“I guess, he really does love cars... It’s so weird how he is obsessed with cars yet you’re – take a right.” I roll my eyes as I begin to make a right at the light.

“Mia, I have driven to your house over a million times, I know the way.” She holds up her hands in defense, laughing a little.

“Sorry, it’s a habit... Speaking of habits...” Oh god, where is she going with this? “Are you going to Danny’s opening show tomorrow?” *Crap, I forgot about Danny’s show...*

“Obviously, I wouldn’t miss my friend’s opening show.” Mia smiles proudly, nodding to herself as I pull into her driveway.

“I’m so excited for her, can you believe she got lead vocalist?” I shut the car off and turn to face her, a smile spreading across my face.

“I, honestly, can. She’s amazing so it was no surprise when she told us she was the lead singer.” A sigh leaves my lips as we step outside into the warm summer air. *This is honestly the best day to have had our last day of school on.* “Do you think she’d punch me if I said that I told her so?” Mia laughs as she types in her garage code.

“Oh, she’d definitely punch you.” I duck under the garage door and follow Mia

inside, my eyes going over the boxes that threaten to overflow the whole space. “They’re still trying to sell a bunch of stuff, sorry...”

“You don’t have to apologize for your parents hording boxes in the garage.” She laughs and nods, stepping aside to let me in. “Besides, maybe you’ll get super rich off of all this stuff.”

“Honestly, I wouldn’t be complaining if that happened but most of it is literal junk so I doubt we’ll get anything from it.” The house stays silent as we walk through the kitchen, Mia pouring herself a glass of milk before continuing upstairs. “I don’t know about you, but I am looking forward to staying up until five am to sleep until whenever now that school is over.” I laugh a little and nod, skipping every second step as we reach the stairs.

I turn around as I reach the top, Mia only halfway up. “Jeez, you are so slow.” She smiles up at me and flips me off as she continues. “And flipping me off now? You’re really a bad egg.”

“Oh, yes, I am the worst egg ever – that’s why I have almost straight A’s in all of my classes and why you never hear me say that I’ve been grounded, ever.” I shrug and step to the side as she reaches the top, curtsying slightly to me before continuing down the hall. “So, what do you wanna do?”

“Why’re you asking me? I always want to take photographs and do other ‘boring’ things like read or whatever.” I jump slightly as Mia kicks her door open, the bang reverberating throughout the house as the door slams into the wall. “Well, for one, I’d rather not be around when you destroy your own house.”

“I’d get in trouble for that, you have nothing to worry about.” She turns around to look at me as she drops her backpack onto the floor, sitting down on the side of her bed.

“Still, I’d have to hear about how much you’re in trouble every day from your parents and mine.” She laughs and nods, letting out a small sigh before putting the glass down on her nightstand. *I’ve been in this room over a million times yet I can never get used to the pinkness of everything. I get her parents wanted a ‘girly-girl,’ whatever that means, but Mia is the complete opposite of that persona.* I frown slightly as more thoughts begin to come into my mind, as my situation begins to become more real, tangible.

I am pulled from my thoughts as a bang comes from downstairs, Mia sighing from the bed as she leans back. *Looks like Danny is home... Time for things to get very loud.* I hold back laughter at the thought of what she’s going to do this time to greet us. *She’ll probably have another insane story to tell us from school, or some dumb drama that no one cares about but that she ‘needs’ to know.* This time, a laugh escapes from me as I begin to remember her last batch of high school drama that needed to be told to us ‘before it was too late.’

“Thank the Lord you’re here, Conor, because I have had a *day*.” She drops her backpack down onto the floor and walks over to the bed, pushing Mia over before collapsing.

"I don't know how you have survived three years of this hell." Mia rolls her eyes and stands up to give Danny more space.

"At least it's summer vacation now, you officially survived your first year of high school." She lets out a small laugh and shakes her head, sitting up slightly.

"Yeah, barely. I have come to the conclusion that my life is quite literally a TV show." I smile as Danny sits up slightly, leaning back on her elbows. "Seriously, the amount of drama that an all-girl school goes through is insane."

"As evidenced from your many other stories, like –"

"Like the time that Abby wrote on that girl's locker." Mia turns around as she speaks, leaning against the wall.

"I can't stand her..." Mia and I share a look as Danny frowns at the floor. "She thinks she is entitled to the world just because she has money, I thought people like that only existed for the purpose of making an antagonist in a story."

"Well, if your life is truly a TV show then you're not wrong. What if Abby is specifically in your life so that you have something to talk about to your side characters." I motion to myself and Mia, Mia rolling her eyes and sighing in annoyance.

"Honestly, you guys are ridiculous."

"But you love us." Mia smiles and stands up fully before beginning to walk out of the room.

"I can neither confirm nor deny that statement." I watch as she leaves the room, continuing to walk down the hallway before going down the stairs.

"Was she expecting us to follow her?" Danny looks from the doorway to me, confusion filling her face. I shrug and pull my phone out of my pocket as it begins to vibrate. "Gotta go?" I look up at Danny and nod, a small frown forming.

"Yeah, that was my Mom. She wants to have a family dinner tonight so I gotta get home." She nods and waves to me as I walk out of the room. I send a text back as I walk down the hallway, a yawn coming up my throat.

"Where ya going?" I look up from my phone as Mia's voice cuts through the silence.

"Gotta head home, family dinner." She frowns but doesn't say anything else as she walks with me to the front door. "I'll text you later."

"Yeah, drive safe." I turn and smile to her as I walk out the door.

"Always do." I wave bye to her before getting into the car and turning it on, cold air blasting out of the vents. *Was it just me or does everything feel... off? It's almost like I'm trapped in a bubble.* I turn the air down and pull out of the driveway, Mia closing the front door as I begin to drive down the road. *It was as if I needed to use more energy to interact with everyone and I simply don't have it.* Music floats in the air around me as I come to a stop at a red light, my foot tapping the ground to the beat. I glance around my car to make sure I am truly alone before beginning to dance to the music and sing along, a wide smile filling my face.

I laugh to myself at the thought of what I look like to anyone other than me. The

world seems to fall away as I sing to myself, my car pulling into the driveway in what seems like a couple of seconds. Inside, Mom walks into the living room and throws a glance outside the window before continuing to move. I turn the car off and step outside, frowning slightly at the empty space where Dad's car usually is parked. *Still working I guess.* The leaves shake in the wind as I begin to walk to the door.

"Ready for dinner?" I shut the front door behind me as Mom calls out from the kitchen.

"I'm gonna put my stuff in my room first though."

"Wash your hands too!" I sigh as I run up the stairs, a small smile on my face. *It does not matter how old I get, she is always going to remind me to wash my hands.* "And can you get your brother out of his room?"

I turn and look down the steps, calling back down to her. "Yeah, I'll go get him." I turn on my heels and continue down the hallway. Cole's door is shut as I walk past, pushing my door open and dropping my backpack down onto my bed. I stretch a little before walking into the bathroom and turning on the sink, letting the cold water wash over my hands. *Wonder if it's bad that I want to skip dinner tonight and just listen to music too loudly from my earbuds.* I grab the towel off of the rack and dry my hands before moving towards Cole's room. *Seriously, sometimes it is way too exhausting being a person.*

"What?" I stay silent and knock again on his door, footsteps bounding towards me from the other side of the door. Cole's face stares back at me with irritation as he opens the door fully. "Yes?"

"Dinner time, Mom wants you downstairs." He sighs and runs his hand through his hair before nodding, throwing a glance back at his cluttered desk.

"Tell her I'll be down in a minute, I'm finishing a project." The door slams shut before I can answer, my hand searching through my pockets before I pull out my earbuds. *Honestly, if it wasn't for music I'd punch a lot of people in the face.* I put them in my ears and plug the cord into my phone before playing music. My nerves quickly calm down as I walk downstairs, the world seeming much more bearable with someone singing in my ears. I pull one of them out of my ear as I walk into the kitchen, Mom pulling out five plates for everyone.

"Cole said he'd be down here in a minute, he's finishing up some project." I pick up the stack of plates and move to the kitchen table, setting each down.

"That boy and his projects... I swear, you guys need to get out more and do sports or something." I smile and nod, walking over to the cabinets and grabbing forks.

"Do we need knives as well?" Mom shakes her head as she pulls meatloaf out from the oven.

"We shouldn't, it is not hard to cut at all." My mouth stays together as I set each fork down, the next song coming on in my ear. "Cole! Arthur! Dinner!" She sets her hands on her sides before looking over at me. "I am going to kick their butts, you told Cole to be down and I told Arthur before he went to play on that stupid video game." The ceiling

shakes slightly as a door slams shut, feet running towards the steps. I can't help but laugh a little at the expression Arthur has on when he runs into the kitchen. "You're off those stupid computers for the rest of the night." He opens his mouth to protest but stops as Mom holds up her hand. "Grab some cups and finish setting the table, Conor you can just sit and relax since no one helped you."

Arthur narrows his eyes at me as I pull out a chair and sit down, Cole walking into the kitchen like he has no cares in the world. Mom doesn't seem to notice as she brings the meatloaf over to the table, Cole setting down cups with Arthur in silence. *They should really start realizing how to not get yelled at... Arthur may be ten and all but, by God, he has to have some common sense by now.*

"Can you get a pitcher from the cabinet and put water in it?" Cole nods at me and walks over to the sink, pulling out a pitcher before filling it with ice and water. Arthur runs to the pantry and pulls out a stack of napkins, humming the theme of a TV show while setting one down at each plate. Mom lets out a small sigh as she sits down and pulls out her phone, her brows furrowing as she types something in. I pull the other earbud out of my ear and shove it into my pocket after pausing my music. Cole and Arthur quickly sit down after looking everything over one more time.

"Mom, how late can I stay up tonight?" Mom doesn't speak as Arthur watches her intensely, smiling in anticipation. *He also has to learn when the right time to ask a question is...* I sit up a little in the chair and pull the tray of meatloaf closer to me. I motion for Arthur to hold up his plate and place a piece on his plate before putting some on Cole's plate.

"Do you want a lot or a little, Mom?" She looks up from her phone, slightly dazed as she forces a smile.

"Just a little, thanks." I pull her plate closer to the tray and put a smaller piece of meatloaf down before putting her plate back and setting a piece down on my own. Cole pours water into his cup before moving onto Arthur's glass and then mine. Mom's phone goes off in her hands as someone calls her, Mom's eyes narrowing as she answers and puts the phone to her ears. "Where are you?" Dad's voice is muffled through the phone, his words lost by the time they reach my ears. "We're all sitting down for dinner, you were supposed to be home by now." No one else talks as irritation grows on her face. "Fine, whatever – just get here and I'll see you when you get home." She hangs up and shoves the phone into her pocket before looking up at us. "Ready to eat?"

No one answers as she begins to cut into the meatloaf on her plate, everyone else joining in. The tension in her body seems to slowly leave as silence stretches out between us. *Why can't he just be home by now? If he wasn't late being home then things wouldn't be so awkward right now.* I continue to eat in silence, everything I think of saying getting stuck in my throat. *It may just be better if no one says anything for the rest of dinner, maybe it'll make it so Mom will be better for when Dad gets home and not add onto the tension.* I place another piece of meatloaf onto my plate and look around to see if anyone

else finished. *Things are already tense so why don't I just come out and say what is on my mind?* I smile a little at the absurdity of the thought. *Yeah, it'll be the best way for me to do it – make sure Mom and Dad are in bad moods when they find out their son...*

"Hey, buddy." I am pulled out of my thoughts as I turn to see Arthur hugging Dad, a smile on both of their faces. I stand up to say hi, hugging him before sitting back down at the table. Mom forces a smile and kisses Dad but doesn't get up, Dad sitting down after saying hi to Cole. "Sorry, it has been a crazy day at work." *Are you saying that to Mom or so that we know your excuse too?*

"Did something bad happen?" Dad shakes his head and smiles at Arthur.

"No, nothing bad. People at work don't know how to function without me standing over their backs so it gets... frustrating." I nod and look up at him.

"Are you behind for the month or are you going to reach the amount you wanted?" Dad shrugs and cuts himself a piece of meatloaf.

"I don't think we're too far behind but Lauren messed up a loan so now I have to be the one to fix it, naturally."

"So because one girl can't do her job right you aren't able to be home on time for dinner with your family?" Cole glances at me as Dad opens his mouth to respond, my heart rate picking up.

"Can we not do this, honey? I just got home and it has been a rough day at work – you know that." *Please just drop it. Please. Just apologize or something and be done with it so a fight doesn't happen.*

"So because it was 'rough' for you today, that means you have an excuse to not want to be with your family?" Dad's body becomes tense as he puts his fork down slowly.

"Please do not be rude, I work all day and barely can get home before nine o'clock so–"

"Don't talk to me like I'm one of the people you work with, I am your wife. If you think you can talk to me like that then you have another thing coming moron." I try to stand up as quietly as possible, stacking my plate on top of Arthur's before walking towards the sink. Cole and Arthur quickly begin to clear the table while Dad and Mom sit in silence. "Leave my plate, honey. Thanks." She smiles at Arthur as he lets go of her plate and begins to collect the napkins off of the table.

"I am not talking to you like the people I work with, I am just asking you not to be rude to me in front of my children." I turn the sink on and let the water run over the plates as I open up the dishwasher.

"I'll bring Arthur upstairs and play on the X-box with him or something." I nod and begin to load the dishwasher as Arthur and Cole walk out of the room.

"All you ever are is rude to me, Joseph. I take care of the kids and drive them wherever they want to go while you are in the office but you don't hear me complain ever." Music blocks their voices out as I press play on my phone, stuffing it back into my pocket before continuing to do the dishes. *I wish they'd realize that they're equally stressed out*

by what they do all day and stop fighting about who 'deserves' to complain about what. I dry my hands off after running the dishwasher, Mom and Dad still saying things to each other at the table. I don't say anything to them as I turn back around and walk out of the room.

"I believe, we're the ones who had it all..." I softly sing to the music as I climb the stairs and walk towards my room. Cole waves to me as I walk past the 'playroom,' him and Arthur playing something together. I wave back and go into my room, turning on the light after shutting the door behind me. The sun is long gone outside, the moon dominating the sky in the distance. My phone buzzes in my pocket, a text from Mia popping up on the screen as I pull it out.

You're still able to go to Danny's show tomorrow, right?

Yeah, what time should I meet up with you?

Come over around 4ish so we have time to relax before heading over.

Okay, that works. Do you want to meet up at the park tonight?

Sure! Meet there or are you going to pick me up?

I'll pick you up, just gotta wait until my parents go to sleep.

See ya then.

The music grows louder as the song changes, my stomach clenching tightly. I think I'll talk to Mia about it tonight... She's my best friend so I don't see her not being understanding but at the same time I can't help but wonder what will happen. I cough and lay back on my bed, my head aching as I stare up at the ceiling. I wish I knew what the future would be like before I make a decision like I could tell exactly what the outcome of stuff is. Especially for what I want to talk to her about... How am I supposed to casually bring up the fact that I am gay?

