



# ARISTER 2019

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



## *Editor's Letter*

*For the past four years, it's been my privilege to curate the finest short stories, artwork, photography, and poetry the bright minds of CBA have to offer. I truly believe that this magazine has fostered the Greek virtue of arista (creative excellence) from which the magazine draws its name. This year's offerings not only included a record number of entries for our Short Story contest, but also some of the most thought-provoking, humorous, and charming stories I've ever read during my time with the magazine.*

*I'd like to thank all the editors of Arister for tirelessly assembling this year's edition. I'd also like to personally thank all of the unique minds who submitted their works of creativity to the Arister. For those who might not have submitted this year, I challenge you to explore the creative reserves of your personality that may have previously gone untapped. I refuse to believe the myth some people are creative while others are not. Vincent van Gough once said, "If you hear a voice within you say 'you cannot paint,' then by all means paint, and that voice will be silenced."*

*I hope you take as much joy reading this magazine as it's brought me as I've assembled it these past four years.*

*Best Wishes,*

*Matt Vaccaro, Editor in Chief 2015-2019*

*Your Faithful Editors*

*Staff - James Marchese '19, Matthew Bell '20,*

*Maximus Bean '20, Sebastian Marchese '21*

*Moderator- Mrs. Viola*

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*\* Winner of the Arister Photography Contest*

*\*\*Winner of the Arister Short Story Contest*

## The Vanilla Bean Cafe

It was Friday the 13th, the eve of  
Valentine's Day,  
Stood in line, placed an order, found a table to  
await our entrees  
Then we saw her as she came from the back,  
Dark hair, dark eyes, an ark of a woman more wide  
than  
Tall, but much more than that  
She was quite graceful as she wove her way through  
the  
Maze of tables and headed toward the front counter  
For take out to see if today's special would tempt  
her  
Chili or chowder, which would she choose?  
Perhaps a salad, it all looked good  
Was there an ark of a man waiting at home some-  
where?  
Would they dine together, would he give her a rose  
Would her grace be appreciated and what would he  
say  
Tomorrow on Valentine's Day

-Mrs. Maria Young

## Rock Candy

Cubicles of sweet on a string or a stick  
Waiting to touch the tongue and teeth  
With sharpish edges or be stirred  
In a cup of coffee or tea  
Dissolving its saccharinity

Mrs. Maria Young

## **The Man in Black**

**The man in black stands atop the stage,  
Visible to all who look.  
The fear of many is to inflict his rage;  
They'd rather hide and stare.**

**The man in black fights for what  
He used to not possess.  
He saunters around with quite the strut  
As he protects what he has won.**

**The man in black fights and takes with might,  
Taking all in the way.  
He indeed causes quite the fright,  
To those who cannot defend.**

**The man in black is a killer,  
Although it is solely for what he loves.  
The story of his life is a thriller,  
Taking only the most perilous of turns.**

**The man in black's life is built upon,  
Protecting the aforementioned prize of war.  
Although he gets what he needs with brawn,  
He does not always get what he asked for.**

**The man in black steps always with grace,  
Standing with a stature of angelica.  
But once the man reveals his face,  
He is none other than America.**

**By Ryan Ragan**

## **UNIQUE**

**EVERY SINGLE PERSON IS UNIQUE AND DIFFERENT IN THEIR OWN SPECIAL  
WAY,  
THAT IS HOW GOD MADE THEM.**

**PEOPLE HAVE UNIQUE LOOKS AND PERSONALITIES,  
AND THERE ARE NO TWO EXACT FINGERPRINTS IN THE ENTIRE HUMAN RACE.**

**WE ALL ACT, TALK, PRAY, THINK, AND IT GOES ON AND ON,  
IN OUR PERSONAL AND UNIQUE WAY.**

**JUST THINK THAT THERE ARE NO TWO HUMANS THAT EVER LIVED THAT ARE  
EXACTLY ALIKE,  
THAT IS BECAUSE WE ARE ALL UNIQUE.**

**EVEN TWINS MAY LOOK THE SAME,  
BUT EACH HAVE THEIR OWN GIFTS TO OFFER.**

**WITH ALL THE UNIQUENESS,  
THERE IS ONE THING THAT IS THE SAME FOR ALL OF US.**

**WE ALL HAVE THE POWER TO HATE  
AND DISCRIMINATE AGAINST OUR OWN KIND.**

**THAT IS HUMAN NATURE,  
TO HATE AND DISCRIMINATE AGAINST THE ONES WE LOVE OR SHOULD LOVE.**

**IN THIS CASE WE ARE IN NO WAY UNIQUE,  
BUT THIS CAN STOP.**

**WE HAVE THE POWER TO LOVE OUR UNIQUENESS,  
AND REMEMBER THAT WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER.**

**BY ANDREW C. GIORDANO**

## *The Most Dangerous Game*

*I stalk by the stream 'miring it's flow.  
eyes dance around for lack of a gazelle.  
Let the Last go free, though I wish Her well.  
I may now hunt for another lovely doe.  
I shoot not for trophies on a plain wall;  
Nor do I wish capture then release.  
My gun set, I spot a bit of nice fleece.  
She is quick, agile, I may be enthralled.  
I set my sights, She sees but does not flee.  
Some separate shots; she falls not for me.  
My weapon empty, some caps unloaded.  
Dare I head home, with my will outmoded?  
I refuse and decide I must press on;  
True love unrequited, will come back strong.*

*-Maximus Bean '20*



Winner of the Arister Photography Contest  
Maximus Bean '20





Photo by Maximus Bean '20



Photo by Maximus Bean '20



Photographed by “John Laurens”





Photographed by “John Laurens”



Photographed by Eric Hawkins



Photographed by Mr. J. Speidel



Photographed by Joseph Arege





Photographed by Matt Bell

# TENOCHTITLAN

BY LIAM MAILLEY '19

“When I was sixteen years old, my father told me that booze was poison and that I should never drink it unless I wanted to see my life go down the drain. Later that night he died in a car crash near the teocalli. The tests showed that his blood-alcohol content was three times over the legal limit.

I didn't want to go to his funeral. Really didn't... I can't say I'm really sure why I didn't though. I guess at the time, not going seemed like the right thing to do. We'd never really gotten along. I mean, I barely saw him. Maybe in the morning if I was lucky. Or sometimes I needed a ride home from practice and was out of bus tokens and he'd have to take his lunch break and drive over and get me. And I remember that he always smelled like tar and soot and bad aftershave. I remember that smell better than I remember him.

He grew up in Tenochtitlan and never left, I suppose. Big basketball player in high school and this is the city of choice for rising stars. Almost became League Champion. Supposedly he was pretty good but I guess not good enough to avoid having to get a job and start a family. But he fit into the family man life well enough. He was never mean to me. Just needed better time management skills.

Um. So the shamans teach that you should take 80 days and mourn before the burial. A lot of people don't do that anymore but my mom wouldn't have it. She wanted us to do things traditionally, 'as Dad would have wanted it.' So she took me out of school for the waiting period. Those days went fast. I don't remember them much. Missed the autumn rain festival and my first few weeks of junior year. Before I knew it, the burial was in two days, and I realized with a start that I hadn't mourned one bit. I just really hadn't been doing much at all.

I was getting into my suit for the burial when suddenly I realized it was too small--go figure, I hadn't worn one in years. So I went and asked my mom where I could get one. She wouldn't look at me, she was adjusting something on the coffee table. Told me to just take one of Dad's old ones. Then she turned her head a bit and smiled. At the time I thought she was crying but thinking back there wasn't a single tear on her face.

I grabbed one of Dad's old suits and put it on. It fit fairly well--a little wrinkled, I guess, but I was never that much bigger than him. Then I headed downstairs. Everyone had already been gathered to the living room and I watched as they tore up the hardwood floor, dug a bit into the ground, placed the coffin in there, then covered it up and repaired the hole. Around when it ended and people were starting to disperse, I happened to reach my hand into the suit pocket and felt something. Pulled it out to see a small notebook. The whole thing seemed blank, and I was about to just toss it when I finally flipped through to the point where I saw the inside of the back cover. I saw my name, and a message--a message that's changed my life forever.”

Tochtli cleared his throat. He suddenly realized he hadn't looked up once during his speech and so his head shot up with an instinctive jerk. A sea of jerseys sat before him; green and gold and blue water bottles and orange basketballs and skin-colored faces. He gulped, briefly wondered what exactly set him apart from these people, then continued.

“The message,” he began. “The message...it's...well, it's nothing special. It just told me that if I ever found that notebook, my dad wanted me to become the Tenochtitlan high school League Champion.” He gulped. “And uh, that's why I play. Th-Thank you all for the honor of being appointed MVP and have a great night.”

There was silence, an uncomfortable period of it--then an anticlimax of polite, disinterested applause. Tochtli was instantly overcome with a wave of sadness. He had finally gotten his story off his chest and in front of a crowd of his teammates no less. But in the end it was just his life. Everyone in the crowd had one. So what had he expected? Wiping the quickly forming frown off of his face, Tochtli smiled, waved, and walked offstage, mentally slapping himself for making this out to be more than it was.

The rest of the MVP convocation lasted but a few more minutes. When it was finally over, there were snacks but Tochtli didn't have much of a reason to stick around any longer than needed. In fact the whole thing was making him depressed so he beelined to the nearest exit, supplying anyone who tried to congratulate him

with a quick, computerized ‘thank you so much.’

“Hey, great speech, man,” said a familiar voice as he neared the exit, which stopped him in his tracks. Tochtli turned to see Acatl, a good friend of his. They’d known each other since second grade. Acatl was much more extroverted than Tochtli and as such he was usually the instigator. If it weren’t for him Tochtli would probably have been alone and wouldn’t have cared enough to try and change that.

Tochtli waved awkwardly, then turned to leave. But Acatl persisted, following him. “Hey, Toch. What’s up, man? Why you leaving so early?” He smiled a toothy grin. “You know there’s an after party once this formal stuff gets done, right? Hello? Is Toch in there?”

His persistence was too much to bear so Tochtli turned and gave him the attention he desired. “Look, I’m just...kinda tired tonight, you know? And I don’t feel so good, like a stomachache or something. Just gonna duck out. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“You sure you ain’t just trying to avoid talking to people?” said Acatl, furrowing his brow. His tone was that of a suspecting father trying to find out secret information from a misbehaving son. “Because you do this a lot. And your excuse is always some sort of sickness. Maybe you should watch your diet.” He chuckled.

Tochtli started to back away. “Yeah, uh, no, 100% not feeling it tonight.” He turned around and muttered “E-Enjoy the party” to the door as he walked out.

\* \* \*

He didn’t go home. Getting in his car, Tochtli pulled out of the school’s parking lot and drove up to the nearby crossway. He let his instincts carry him, barely thinking about where he was going or what he was doing. When he began to think again Tochtli found himself exactly where he thought he would--a small, dark park in a quiet neighborhood. He smiled and turned his car off and as the headlights went dim the park became too dark to see.

Using his phone to see around his trunk, Tochtli grabbed a small, half-deflated basketball. He then locked the car up and walked into the park. It was late, almost eleven according to his phone and there was no one there. In the eerie silence, the distant sounds of the city echoed until he finally made it out of the parking lot and into the overgrown thicket of trees.

An old sign gave evidence that this place was once called “Parque Mexico,” but Tochtli didn’t really care. It was just “the park” to him, and the sign reflected this; it was worn down, eroded and the letters barely legible, aside from a light brown “p” and the outline of the letters “a”, “r”, and “k”. Tochtli remembered reading it when he had first found the place. That day, two years ago, impassioned by his father’s notice he had snuck out at night to look for a place to practice basketball. His family’s apartment building didn’t have a hoop so he took to the city. It was getting dark when he finally found the old park that would later become his favorite training spot.

He dribbled out to the court. The moonlight lit the area just a bit but Tochtli knew the best hoop was the one in the top right, near the old lake. The water always reflected a bit of light at this time of night, so there was a strange glow to the area. Like a spotlight but less harsh. He tossed from the 3-point. The ball hit the backboard and rebounded, scaling Tochtli’s figure. He heard the distinctive echo of its bounces, the time between each noise shortening as it lost its momentum. Then suddenly the bounces stopped.

Tochtli turned around quickly to see what had happened and was shocked to see someone holding his ball. In all of the nights he had come to this park, he had never seen another person step foot inside it. He walked forward curiously until the person came into view. With a start, he realized it was a girl about his height. She was wearing a black hoodie, but little wisps of brown hair came out of the sides of the hood. Nervously Tochtli called to her as he approached.

“What are you doing out here? It’s almost midnight.”

The girl had been looking at his ball, but now looked directly at him. He could see despite the lack of illumination that she was smiling.

“I could ask you the same thing.” She looked at where Tochtli was practicing. “Big game tomorrow?”

“Not, uh, not really,” he stammered. “I’m just practicing. To get better, you know. I-I’m actually trying to become the League Champion.” When she didn’t respond right away, Tochtli chuckled a bit, hoping that he could pass that off as a joke.



She raised her eyebrow a bit and cocked her head but still grinned. “What’s your name, kid?” she asked. Something about her sudden authoritative tone made him trip on his words before he was even able to speak. “Um, T-Tochtli.” He stood in silence for about two seconds before realizing that he should probably give some gesture to greet her, so he waved awkwardly. “People call me Toch.”

The girl laughed; it was heartier this time. “Chimalma.” She turned a bit, as if she was about to walk away. “Well, don’t let me stop you. You said you had to practice for something?”

He nodded a bit, and was about to try and convince her to stay when suddenly she lobbed the ball back at him. Tochtli was caught completely off guard and it hit him square in the chest. Stumbling backwards, he fell flat on his back.

Chimalma burst out into laughter. Stunned, Tochtli lay there staring at the moon. He listened to her laugh. It was childish and immature in many ways yet not mean-spirited; a strange cacophony that was not cacophonous at all. Tochtli loved it. He felt a strange wave of happiness rush over him, laying there on the basketball court. Eventually he sat up and seeing the confused mix of emotions on his face made Chimalma start laughing all over again.

The two of them stayed out on the court for almost two more hours. Chimalma offered to help Tochtli practice; to his surprise she was good, probably better than he was. Eventually Chimalma realized how late it had gotten and told Tochtli that she had to leave.

“Yeah, I really should head back too,” he said. “My mom’s gonna kill me.” He laughed a bit then waved. “I’ll see you around.”

“Wait,” she called after him. Tochtli stopped and turned, saying “What is it?”

“You gonna be here tomorrow?”

\* \* \*

They practiced almost every night from then on and Tochtli slowly got to know her. Apparently she was on some intramural team in a school across the city but hadn’t spent much time playing other than that. And yet in almost every way Chimalma trumped him at the game. She was faster, nimbler, and always jumped higher. The first few days they practiced, when she would beat him game after game she would tell him that it was just luck afterwards. Tochtli would nod, and smile, and not seem to care. Soon, she understood that he wasn’t the type to get jealous, and he understood that she wasn’t the type to patronize.

She had a brother and a sister, both older, the sister in college. She also had, curiously a pet rabbit. Tochtli remembered asking her what she had named it when she told him this. They were doing foul shots.

“Didn’t give it a name,” she said flatly. “I kinda forgot to.”

“How do you forget to name something?”

“Well, I got him at a fair,” she said. “I think it was the Feast of Xilonen.” Upon saying this, however, she shuddered, messing up the shot she was taking. The ball landed a ways away. Tochtli left to get it.

When he returned, Chimalma looked uncomfortable and had her hands in her pockets which he had never seen her do before. He was concerned that perhaps he had brought up a sensitive memory, and was about to change the subject when she suddenly started talking.

“Yeah, it was the Feast of Xilonen. One of the stands there was selling pets and I was watching as a man from behind the counter took one of the rabbits out of it’s cage and carried it in his arms. The animal was tiny, very frail-looking. Gave no resistance. When the man started walking towards the woods I asked what he was doing and he told me the rabbit was a runt and he was going to go put it down.”

“So you took it off his hands,” Tochtli said.

Chimalma nodded. She was frowning. He had never seen her frown before, either.

“I guess you could say I took that rabbit because I wanted to protect it. Because I thought it was weak. And it was, don’t get me wrong. But I saw a bigger weakness through the confusion in its eyes.” She took a breath. “That little thing didn’t know what the hell was going on or where the hell it was going. It didn’t know it was going to be killed in the woods. It probably wouldn’t have cared even if it knew. And in my mind something like that’s worse than being weak.”

She picked up the ball, dribbled and tossed it. It hit the rim and bounced away again.



The days passed quick and the nights even quicker. Tochtli had been watching his performance improving game after game as the season went on. His team was on a winning streak; they were undefeatable and Tochtli was at the center of it all. If you asked anyone they would have told you that there was no chance anyone but Tochtli would be elected League Champion.

About a week before the big game, Tochtli was eating dinner at home. Usually, he was out training but this day he had received a text from his mother asking him to show up at the apartment. She claimed she had a surprise.

Tochtli was washing dishes from a cluttered sink when his mother walked in. She shut the door behind her as quickly as possible, but not quick enough to avoid letting in a gust of warm autumn air. She took off her overcoat then looked up to see her son.

"Niltze, mother," he said respectfully, forcing a smile, and walking towards her to hug her.

"It's been a while," said his mother frankly, turning away from him and walking towards the table. Tochtli didn't see her regularly anymore; she worked mornings at the nearby diner and he was at the park with Chimalma every night. Watching his mother sit down slowly on the far end of the table made him picture her eating alone in a quiet house.

His mother beckoned towards the chair closest to her. "Sit," she said. Tochtli quickly walked over, and began to attempt an apology. "Look, Mom, I'm sorry I've--"

"Sit, for the gods' sake. Didn't you hear me?" She shook the chair. "What, are you that eager to get out of the house again?"

"It's not like that, Mom--"

"If it really isn't, then sit in the chair, and we'll have a little chat."

Nervously Tochtli followed his mother's orders.

She sighed. "Good." Turning her seat a little bit, she positioned herself so that she was head-to-head with her son. She drew a deep breath, a gesture indicating that they were both in for a long conversation. "Why are you still playing basketball?"

Tochtli was taken aback; he was expecting to be questioned about his nighttime activities, and found himself at a loss for words. "Uh... well, it's what Dad wanted me to do, wasn't it?"

"Your father." She frowned, and closed her eyes for a second. "Yes, he did have great aspirations in the field of basketball. And he truly was skilled--the same way you are, Tochtli. You too, have a knack for the game. I like to believe it is in our genes. A gift from the gods."

Tochtli's mother stared at the wall for a second wordlessly.

"But...your father is dead, Tochtli. And with him, his dreams. He is but a spirit now following the sun. He cannot tell you what to do or even influence you."

"He HAS influenced me, mom. He wrote me a note...in the coat pocket of the suit--"

"Ah, no. That is not Eztli's influence. It is yours. You are the one who is choosing to follow along the path he designated for you. An admirable goal; yet for all of your zeal and determination you do not seem happy to achieve it. I rarely see you smile...I rarely see you at all." She paused. "So I ask you, Tochtli, darling--why? Why do you follow his note? What drives you? What inspires you to fulfill your father's wishes?"

Tochtli sat wordlessly. His head slouched forward and away from eye contact.

"I am not mad at you," his mother continued. "I am simply confused. And above all, I am worried. I feel that you do not fully understand the path you wish to take. Becoming League Champion...well, you..." Her words trailed off.

"Mom, this is what I--"

"Don't go." Tochtli looked up at his mother and noticed that she had tears in her eyes. He suddenly remembered the day of his father's burial when he had asked his mom for a suit. Why was she was crying now but not at her own husband's death?

"Don't go," she repeated. "Let me tell you a story first. About your father." She wiped tears from her eyes then cleared her throat. "I met Eztli on the playground. He was eight and I was seven. We would meet there every day after school to play tag and hide-and-go-seek." She chuckled through the remnants of her tears. "The

same two games over and over. But we had fun. We were children. We were happy.

And then, around that time there was a religious reform and suddenly basketball was pushed into prevalence. Something about cultural appreciation, I think was their reasoning. Anyway the new laws made each and every boy play intramural basketball after school. Eztli, well, he wasn't happy. He was young after all. Could care less about culture and sports. But the games were mandatory, and he had no choice. Soon it was only the girls on the playground after school, and I made new friends and forgot about him.

I didn't see him again until I was seventeen. There had been a big basketball game--the Championship--at the school and me and a large group came to watch. During the game I kept getting the feeling that I recognized one of the boys playing but couldn't place him. Then I saw him smile after making a basket and immediately I knew who it was. Eztli.

After the game, I saw him standing dejectedly in the middle of the court trying not to cry. When I asked him what was wrong he told me he had lost and his dreams of being League Champion were ruined. That's when he looked at me and I could see in his eyes that he recognized me too. We started to talk again and before I knew it we were dating and before I knew that we were married. It all flew so fast--too fast.

Within the first few years of our marriage I saw firsthand the problems that I would deal with for the next twenty years. First came the alcoholism--he would become inebriated whenever you weren't around or when you were asleep. No matter what I did I couldn't stop it. He just seemed to be able to pull booze out of thin air. Next came the nightmares. He'd wake up suddenly and tell me about visions of tzitzimime--great demons of the stars waiting beneath him with mouths agape, ready to devour him. In every nightmare he told me he'd willingly jump in.

But the worst problem your father had was his inability to look beyond his own losses." More tears appeared in Tochtli's mother's eyes. "He never forgot the fact that he lost the Championship. That thought never seemed to leave his mind. And one night two years ago, he took his car and...tried to get, in his own way what he thought he deserved."

Tochtli remembered the police officer talking to his mother about the crash at the teocalli being ruled a suicide. Yet he had never considered it. He barely knew his father but he had assumed that there was no way he could do such a thing.

Tochtli's mother choked back tears. "Eztli, he... he became obsessed with glory. Obsessed with victory. He wanted to be League Champion more than anything else in the world." She stood up in a quick motion that made Tochtli flinch then stared directly at him. "But thank Quetzalcoatl he didn't."

As she stormed off, Tochtli wanted to get up and follow her but found himself paralyzed. He sat and stared and thought of his dad. Eztli...he hadn't heard his father's name in a while but it suddenly opened doors in his head. It put a name to a face, a meaning to an image. For the first time in years Tochtli thought of his father as a person and not a memory.

Reluctantly, Tochtli got up, grabbed his keys, and headed out the front door, leaving his mother alone in the apartment once again.

\* \* \*

In what felt like an instant, the last day before the championship game was here. Tochtli headed out to the basketball court in the park where Chimalma was already waiting for him.

"It's tomorrow, isn't it?" she said as soon as he arrived.

Tochtli smiled a bit. "Yeah. Came outta nowhere."

"Well, then I've got an idea. Let's not practice today."

"What?" Tochtli was taken aback a bit. "But... the game--"

"Can wait." Chimalma grinned. "You're gonna psych yourself out thinking like that. The best way to prepare for something as huge and life-changing as a championship game is to take a break." She started walking away, then gestured for him to follow. "Come on."

Tochtli wasn't exactly sure what else to do so he followed her. Together they walked through the mostly unlit park with only the occasional streetlamp illuminating their path. Chimalma led the way and they both walked in silence until she stopped.

"Here," she said simply. Tochtli strained his eyes to see what he was looking at and soon he could make

it out--a small log on a hill, overlooking part of the city. The view cut through some of the other trees in the park and the hill was high enough that one could get a good view of the whole district. Bright neon lights shone in the distance, sharply contrasting the dimness that surrounded he and Chimalma. They both sat down on the log.

"Hey," Tochtli began. "I just, uh, wanted to thank you."

"For training with you?" she answered.

"Well, I suppose. But more for just always being there for me." He turned his head, looking out at the city. "I've got a few friends on the basketball team. Nothing serious. But they're more interested in joking around and wasting time. You on the other hand--Chimalma, you've listened to just about anything I've had to say for the past couple months. And you'd respond, and comment on it too. You legitimately cared." He looked back at her. "So, um, thanks."

Chimalma chuckled a bit. "You know what's funny? I brought you up here to say just about the same thing. You don't know how much of an impact you've made. You're, well, uh..." Her words trailed off. They were both facing each other now. Tochtli tensed up and couldn't find the right words, and was relieved when Chimalma started speaking first.

"Tochtli..." she said, "I need to ask you a favor."

"Okay," Tochtli responded nervously. "A-ask away."

"Tomorrow night, after your championship game, whether you win or lose, no matter what happens...come to the park. On the court same as always. I have to tell you something but I can't tell you yet." Chimalma smiled. "It's very important. Don't forget."

\* \* \*

The championship game was like a rollercoaster ride. The buildup and wait to it was long, drawn out, and torturous but the game itself was over in what felt like minutes. When the scoreboard displayed the final scores for everyone to see, no one was surprised to see Tochtli's team's overwhelming advantage. It was sudden but Tochtli realized with a start that he had done it. He had become League Champion.

The team swept him up and carried him along as they went. He could hear people in the stands calling his name and beneath him the complements and encouragements of his teammates. It was overwhelming, the attention. When the team made it out of the stadium and to the front doors, news outlets were poised and ready and Tochtli was announced to be League Champion on national television.

During these interviews, a familiar face approached Tochtli. "Hey, dude, Toch, incredible job!" came the voice of Acatl, his old friend. "Dude, you were INSANE out there. We gotta celebrate. Oh--they're having a party to celebrate our team winning. You've gotta be there. You're the Champ after all, man!"

Something in Tochtli was screaming at him to not go with Acatl and that he had something he needed to do. He couldn't remember what, however. Was it important? It had to be. His mind was foggy--the evening had been one thing after another...Maybe he was just imagining things. After all, the game was a pretty stressful ordeal. He needed to let loose a bit-- yeah, that was it. Let loose, and celebrate.

"Sure, let's go," he said to Acatl, whose face instantly lit up.

"Knew you'd come around, man. Now let's get going!" As they walked down the street towards a huge house where Tochtli could already hear music from blocks away, he felt a sinking feeling in his stomach and forced himself to ignore it.

\* \* \*

He woke up the next day on an old couch with a splitting headache. The house was pretty much abandoned aside from some sleeping people on the floor. Bottles of many different colors and opacities covered the floor creating noisy traps for Tochtli to avoid stepping on as he made his way to the door.

Walking outside, he noticed that a bunch of people were sitting on the front lawn, talking. One of them, a teammate of his noticed him. "Hey, there he is! The big man! Yo, are you gonna need a ride for the ceremony?"

The ceremony? There was a ceremony? Tochtli rubbed his temple and muttered out, "Yeah, a ride would be great."

\* \* \*

They arrived at a huge pyramid-shaped temple--a teocalli. These structures dotted the landscape of

Tenochtitlan separating themselves from the metropolitan areas with their unique architecture rather than their size.

By now his headache had died down a bit and Tochtli stepped out of his teammate's car, not knowing what to expect. He was surprised when he suddenly heard thousands of cheering voices upon his arrival. Looking up, he saw the steps of the temple covered with people, at least a thousand in number. They must have come to see the ceremony, he said to himself. Their chants were overwhelming; he could scarcely believe anything that had happened in the past twelve hours was real.

He began to ascend the temple and waved at the people surrounding his ascent. Men, women, children--all had come to see the newest League Champion of Tenochtitlan. This was it. This was what he had been waiting for all this time. He had finally fulfilled his father's wishes.

When he got to the top, he noticed several high priests of the city, and they invited him to come sit on a chair. He did so gladly, and the chair allowed him a view of the whole crowd. One of the high priests began reciting something but Tochtli wasn't paying much attention--he was too busy gawking at his adoring fans and thinking about the incredible life that awaited a League Champion!

And, of course he thought of his father. Eztli. The man he owed his future to. If it weren't for his letter, he would have never climbed this teocalli to receive the incredible prize he had worked-

Wait. A teocalli? Didn't his father-

Tochtli thought of a certain phrase his mother had said while telling Eztli's story. The reason behind his suicide. The driving force of his anger: "To get, in his own way what he thought he deserved."

And the, after his night of broken promises and his morning of illusions of grandeur, Tochtli remembered Chimalma.

"Come to the park," she'd said. "On the court, same as always. I have to tell you something."

All of a sudden, Tochtli thought he knew what that 'something' was.

The high priest wasn't talking anymore. Quickly, instinctually, Tochtli threw himself forward off the chair as a gleaming silver axe just barely missed his neck.

From the ground, he turned and looked up, and saw all of the priests gazing in shock at him. The crowd's cheers had now become gasps and audible whispers. An executioner, recoiling from the shock of a missed swing, regained his balance and gripped his axe threateningly.

He couldn't run. Not legally. Not without refusing the greatest honor the city had to give--eternity, through sacrifice with the gods as well as a memorialization on the temple itself. If he ran, he would be a traitor against both the gods and his city. He would be on the run and given the brutal strength of the TPD, there was little chance he'd survive. Death awaited him whether he chose to be executed or to flee. And at that moment with but seconds to pick his fate, Tochtli decided he'd die for something of substance. So he ran.

\* \* \*

It was getting late and Tochtli had spent the entire day a fugitive. Every muscle hurt; he needed sleep but knew that was a forbidden luxury for a man on the run. All day sirens had blared through the city searching for the heathen who had resisted eternity with the gods. Tochtli was now a dangerous criminal and all law enforcement had been advised to shoot on sight.

When he first broke away from the high priests and ran from the teocalli he had but one place he was headed--Parque Mexico. THE Park. He had no idea where he was or where he was going but he stumbled from alley to alley desperately searching. He could feel his legs giving way as he walked out to the sidewalk when suddenly he saw it just across the street. Even in this state Tochtli could recognize that park anywhere.

Walking as quickly as he could, he dashed across the pavement and then ducked into a bush when he heard a cop car start down the road. It drove past him and he turned around and headed into the main green. His advance towards the courts was hindered by his fatigued muscles but he persevered with a renewed energy.

"Chimalma!" he called out towards the courts, despite the fact that there was evidently no one there. "CHIMALMA!"

His screams warranted no results, no response. Slowly he tripped and stumbled his way into the courts. He stopped to catch his breath and happened to see the moonlight reflecting off the pond, undeterred by his



misery. Suddenly the light drew his eye to something resting on the pavement. As he walked closer he could see what it was--a small piece of scrap paper with a handwritten note on it. Tochtli picked it up.

Tochtli,

I doubt you'll actually get to read this. And I'm fairly sure no one else goes to this crappy park anymore so I'll bet no one else will touch it. And it'll sit there deteriorating on the pavement never having been read, my message never having been delivered. But I can't think about that. I just need to put my feelings down. So, you know all of those things I told you about my family? How we live on the south side and I've got parents and siblings? Well, they're all lies. Here's the blunt of it: I'm a runaway slave.

Actually technically I'm also a criminal. Basically I was owned by this old rich man in the upper city. He was okay as far as slave masters go. And then that all changed when I was selected to be the one to play Xilonen.

The harvest goddess, you know? At the Feast of Xilonen? They choose a slave girl every year to play her. You get this embroidered dress and fancy feather headpiece and you get to lead all these celebrations and people cheer for you and praise you...it's great, until the last day of the festival where they slit your throat with an obsidian knife and leave your dead body in the town square.

I ran away from that fate, Toch. They gave me that embroidered dress and fancy feather headpiece and a few days to live and I tossed all of that garbage in the trash. And I ran. I've been running for two years now. Just living off of what I can find, sleeping in the bushes. That's why I'm always at the park, you know. I kinda live here. Oh and it was a pretty miserable life at first. Then I met you.

When I heard you tell me that you wanted to be League Champion that first night, I didn't take it seriously. I only wanted to train with you because I was lonely and I needed something to do desperately. But as time went on I realized just how much zeal you had for the game. You truly wanted to become League Champion and you were willing to sacrifice huge chunks of your time and energy for it. And I also realized that you had blissfully set aside the reality that when you become League Champion you're executed. So I came up with a plan for both of us.

I wanted to run away again. Just like I ran away before. Except this time I didn't want to do it alone. I wanted to run away with you. And I know you would have accepted. You're not playing basketball for the fame or for the glory or for the religious reasons. In fact I had a hard time figuring out what your motivation was for the longest time. Then finally last night you told me about your dad's dying wish. And I realized something. The way you described it, and talked about your dad...you didn't care about honoring his wishes. Not a bit. That's when I finally figured it out. Your motivation. In reality you wanted to become League Champion because you're confused and don't know what else to do and will gravitate towards any importance one can give to your life. You don't have any personal goals, any real reason to keep going. And so you cling on to what others tell you to do because you don't have any reason why not. If your dad tells you to become League Champion, you will because why not? If some random girl tells you to practice basketball with her every night in a dingy old park, you will because why not?

You remind me of that rabbit runt I took in. Oh--I never told you what happened to it, did I? Well he died within a few days. I took him with me when I ran from the Feast and for a while he stayed with me and I fed him and I gave him warmth and he had everything he could have ever wanted. Then one day he ran away. I found him later in the park forest. Something had torn him to shreds--a wild animal, probably. Something that would have never attacked him if he had just stuck with me.

And so when you didn't show up tonight I cried for hours. You were like another rabbit. Maybe more so. At the very least you were my last connection to anything living that would care about my existence and now you're probably dead at the top of some tower because you decided to ignore the only thing I've ever asked of you.

So I'm running away alone again. I don't want to stay here, certainly not in this park. In fact I'm going to try and escape the city. That's near impossible for a runaway slave you might know. Border patrol is impossible to get past. In all honesty I'm probably not going to survive. But that's OK. I'm fed up with this anyway.

I'm not just disappointed in you, Tochtli. I'm mad. We...had something. I don't know if I loved you.

Can't say for sure. But I know for a fact that I wasn't anything to you. I was just your tutor. I was good at the game, and I was willing to train you and that's all you wanted. Well I hope you enjoy getting your head chopped off with an axe in front of thousands of people. Maybe that's really what you've needed this whole time. And hey. If you somehow happen to read this I hope that whatever you chose to do the night of the big game was more important than your life--and for that matter, than mine.

Good riddance  
Chimalma

Tochtli put down the letter. He felt sick. Why hadn't he come the night before? His hangover throbbed and Tochtli thought of his mom. He hadn't spoken to her since she had stormed off two nights ago. The sirens in the distance became clearer. Voices booming through loudspeakers and the screeching of tires filled the air. They were here. He turned around and looked behind him just in time to see a man in uniform draw a gun and shoot him clean through the chest. Tochtli looked down, saw his own blood, stumbled backwards and fell on his back with a thud. Stunned, Tochtli lay there staring at the moon. He thought of her laugh. It was childish and immature in many ways yet not mean-spirited; a strange cacophony that was not cacophonous at all. Tochtli loved it. He felt a strange wave of happiness rush over him, laying there on the basketball court. He bled out, coating the place most important to him in a layer of thick red. Nearby in the woods of the park, a tiny bunny ate some of the grass that was illuminated by the moonlight.

\* \* \*

When the Spanish conquistadors chose to leave the Aztec city-state of Tenochtitlan alone during their conquests, history irrevocably changed. Tenochtitlan would grow on to become a thriving modern metropolis, full of industry, quality of life and bustling streets. However this metropolitan aura was just a coat of paint. For while the rest of the world had moved on to a separation of church and state, Tenochtitlan chose to ignore these ideas.

Lower castes were constantly enslaved with little to no rights and forced to be used in any way their masters desired. All citizens were required to worship the Aztec gods namely Quetzalcoatl, a creator deity. But perhaps the most inhumane, archaic practice that the city gets away with to this very day is ritual human sacrifice, a practice dating back thousands of years. And it isn't just criminals and slaves who are killed. Sacrifice when done correctly is a form of the highest honor one can receive. It is the gift of direct connection to the gods through the most efficient way possible--death. Most people forget about that last word.

Yes, the city of Tenochtitlan is widely known as the worst place in the world to live in the 21st century. But strangely, none of its inhabitants seem to figure that out until it's too late.

# The Perfect Crime

By Chris de Gersdorff '19

The heist was in its final stages of preparation. Our gang of middle-aged suburban dads was about to conduct the finest swindle in American history. The elitist McKinley Bank was about to be taken down. The bank's grandiose Roman columns of pride and security were soon going to buckle under the weight of the loss that they would soon feel. The bank had garnered a reputation for catering to the State's financial elite, but for robbers it had become infamous. It was the only bank that had gone unscathed to any burglars for the past century. By this point the place had become shrouded in myth. Word on the street went that they knew everybody, and even read your name aloud for everyone to hear whilst you were taking your first steps through the door. My old friend told me that he didn't even get to do anything wrong before they knew what he was up to. They knew the kind of look that people like us possessed and told him to just turn around and keep walking.

We knew we were better though. We were faster, smarter, and knew how to improvise if things really went awry. We had mapped out the whole place through my ingenuity. I was an engineer when the new wing of the place was built, so I at least knew thirty percent of the building's layout by memory. I had constructed my part of the building based on the rest of the bank's layout, so it was not too hard to map out an accurate model of the place. With a bit of observation I was able to iron out my mistakes and create a perfect map of the entire building. I just had to share my knowledge with the crew and we'd be able to get in and out; just like any other heist. At this point we'd been running the business for a couple of years so we knew our way around. People used the same safes, same cameras, and so on. There was a pattern to follow during a heist. If you stuck to the plan things would turn out okay and you would have a large sum of cash in your pocket.

Mainstream work had been fitting me alright until I lost my job about five years back. I was finishing up a blueprint for a new building when my old boss shortened my allotted time to get the project done. Because of this I decided to add some vulgarity to my plans, which I had intended to delete right away. However, unbeknownst to me, these words made it through to the final draft. I ended up giving my boss the blueprints to present at his meeting and to his dismay, "Mr. Johnson = Satan" was the first thing that everyone saw. This led to my immediate exit from the company along with a few laughs from fellow coworkers. News got around about my blueprint incident and it became much harder for me to get a job. I have three children that I needed to support along with my stay-at-home wife. I couldn't find work anywhere so I ended up coming to the conclusion that I needed to start my life of crime. I contacted four of my more daring friends and asked if they wanted to become robbers as well. Next thing I knew, they were on board. Honestly I was surprised with how little it took to convince everyone. Does this mean I have bad friends? I have no idea, but I need to get back to the story. In short, we all agreed to form a robber's alliance. We were going to learn together, steal together, and never snitch, but now I'm breaking that last one, kind of (just don't tell anyone else and we're good). Hopefully it provides them some solace that I'm not sharing their names. Sorry guys. Moving on.

Flash forward to THE crime. We devised an airtight plan. I was the orchestrator, meaning I was the brains of our operation. I had to devise a way to get in and out in the most graceful manner possible. In order to achieve maximum stealth, we decided that Friend One was going to walk through the front door in makeup. This may sound like a horrendous idea at first, but it was Halloween and the town was full of festive trick or treaters. We were just parents making a last minute run to the bank. Candy was a must for Friend One, and if he didn't have it he would be at the whim of a very serious ten year old's wrath, at least that was what the teller had been told. Friend One walked in and asked for twenty bucks. However, before the teller could give him the money, he had to truly embrace his inner Leonardo DiCaprio. He told him that he suffered from an excruciating case of Crohn's disease and that if he didn't make it to a bathroom the bank would be filled with quite the acrid odor. Because of this, Friend One was promptly escorted to the men's room. At this point Friend One actually did go to the bathroom (he was nervous), but he was really there to place a pressure sensor and voice recording device that would livestream to my computer. This way I was able to tell if anyone was near our entrance point. While doing this he also hooked up a premade pulley system that I had devised months prior for the heist. It worked via a wireless motor that we created with a mix of parts from my son's old Xbox, my old car, and a lot

of rope. Friends Two and Three were able to become the janitorial staff for the bank. They had the most time-consuming jobs out of our group. In order for their part to seem legitimate, they had to actually work for the bank for a fairly long period of time. In total they worked around eight months. This was troubling for them because both had to manage their real day jobs on top of this. Luckily they both worked out of their houses, which is why they were both picked for the position. Their jobs entailed placing a series of small cameras in specific locations around the building. The first one was planted in the doorway that overlooked the main room of the bank. With a stroke of luck, at around three months into their jobs, Friends Two and Three came across a man with anger management issues who had recently lost all of his money through a divorce. They were able to coax him into feverous rage by conversing in an overexuberant, loud manner about how attractive his ex-wife looked when she came by the day prior. By teasing him, they were able to coax him into ripping the door off its hinges which the two “reluctantly” had to fix. The two went on to put in a door that they had specially made with the camera in mind. Both of them used their high school woodshop skills well in order to make quite a good door, I must say. The second camera was placed in the bathroom (facing away from the toilet). It was hidden in the overflow drain of the sink. To aid this camera, a small mirror was placed near the edge of the hole which was able to redirect the camera’s image to the door of the bathroom. This camera was placed during a routine bathroom cleaning before work started and was planned as a last resort if both the pressure sensor and recording device failed. The reasoning behind the sound recording device was that the cameras that had sound were bigger than the cameras without, and we believed secrecy was more important than being able to hear from the one source. The last camera was placed in a light fixture that was in the hallway nearest to the vault. Getting into the vault was above the janitorial staff’s pay grade, so going in there without permission would have been much too risky for the mission.

Everything was set into place. It was now the day of Halloween, and the heist was a go. This was where Friend Four came into play. Friend Four was going to be the decoy during the heist. He was a mechanic, and because of this we had the idea to stage a freak car accident. The car’s brake magically failed as Friend Four and a dummy approached the bank. Friend Four proceeded to drive the car into the bank as his breaks malfunctioned, placing the dummy in the driver’s seat before anyone noticed post-crash. Afterwards, he set the car alight which resulted in the scorching of the dummy and the subsequent arrival of the fire department. This is where Friends Two and Three come back into the picture.

Friends Two and Three were able to buy firemen uniforms off of Ebay. This allowed them to masquerade into the scene of the crash and then into the vault. This sequence of events, though simple on paper, was one of the most difficult and important to pull off for the success of the heist. All of us had to do our research on current firemen uniforms. If we bought a Halloween costume or an outdated uniform, the mission would be foiled. We would’ve stuck out like sore thumbs, and we also had to make sure that Friends Two and Three acted in a professional manner. Even though they weren’t there to put out the fire that we had started, they had to be able to move like legitimate firemen. In order to accomplish this, we watched countless training videos and practiced for hours on end. It nearly drove everyone mad as we had to go over such mundane tasks as correctly opening a door in a time of crisis, but it had to be done. If it were not, our plan would have been doomed before the start and we all would probably have been in jail today.

With training under our belts, Friends Two and Three were ready to infiltrate the building. They wore their uniforms, followed correct firefighting protocol, and entered the bank. They had a drill to break the safe with them, and proceeded to the back of the bank. Friends Two and Three told me that while everything went according to plan they almost froze when they entered the building, as they had no idea what to say to the civilians inside. Instead of overcomplicating things they ended up just not saying anything at all and ran to the back to the bathroom. Once almost to the bathroom, an inquisitive worker felt that it was the right time to ask a question. He was the type of person who you would not want to see on a normal day let alone a bank robbery. He was the “assistant manager” type, looking as if his body had become plagued by stress while he tried to make a futile ascent into a high ranking position at the bank. “Why are you going to the bathroom?” the person asked. At that moment Two and Three jumped in their skin. Three almost said they were stealing everyone’s money, but Two was able to react before him saying that they were afraid fumes from the car explosion were going to enter the air ducts. Sadly, the excuse didn’t budge the peculiar worker and again he asked a question. “So do



you know who crashed the car?” he said. At this point Three was ready to knock him out, but like any man who wasn’t trying to rob a bank he responded with a respectful, “I am not 100% sure at the moment.” The worker almost asked a third question, but Two and Three ran past him before he could get his words out. They told him to go back to the main area of the bank as he mumbled back in defiance.

I witnessed the two enter the bathroom and watched in a cold, anxious sweat as they pulled away the cover of the air duct to reveal the pulley system. With great relief I was able to see them successfully control my wireless DIY pulley project and travel to the air duct with fine finesse. It was up to Two and Three to secure the money. They were able to remember to go to the fourth opening of the air duct, but not before Friend Two almost chose to go to vent three. The room that was under vent three was the break room for the bank employees. Three said he was feeling pretty hungry, but I’m happy that he was able to choose the safe over eating someone’s sandwich.

The two were able to transfer the pulley system to the fourth opening and repel down through the use of my son’s old Xbox controller. Once the safe was in arms reach, Two decided to trip over his own feet and fall to the ground. According to them, “It was the longest ten seconds of our lives.” When I heard this, I told them that ten seconds wasn’t a very long time, and they almost killed me. They told me that it was, by far, the scariest part of the heist. Once the two regained their composure they began to drill. Two and Three were able to successfully drill through the safe and find what we had been searching for. In total, it was around ten million dollars! Now the two needed to get it out of the bank and into our pockets in the fastest manner possible. They put as much money in each of their pockets as they could. Once they ran out of space, they moved to putting money in their boots, then their helmets, and then under their clothes and in their waistbands. Once sufficiently stuffed with money, the two went back up into the duct. Climbing back as quietly as could possibly be they made it to the bathroom. This is when I knew it was time for me to get back into action and step away from my post.

My last job was to be the getaway driver. To stay undiscovered, we pooled our money together to purchase an old RV and converted it into a makeshift ambulance. I believe that the car was our best work. We were able to paint the van with a completely authentic paint job, and even found the correct siren. The only problem was the inside of the van. At first glance, it looked enough like any other ambulance, but on closer inspection anyone would realize that it was a fraud. There was a stretcher inside the van, but besides that there was nothing that related to medical equipment in any way. All of the features that screamed RV were just covered in bedsheets, so I needed to make sure that I parked in a spot close enough to the crash to look legitimate, but far enough away to not draw any attention from any real first responders and EMT personnel. I decided to park next to the Krispy Kreme across the street, and even in the heat of the moment I really craved one of their glazed donuts. I truly believed after that moment that Krispy Kreme donuts hold magical powers that us laymen aren’t aware of. As I was mid-salivation, dreaming of those beautiful donuts, I saw Two and Three walk out the bank doors. As soon as they got to the street they briskly jogged to the car. At that moment we were home free. We drove away full of swagger and confidence as the first responders continued to examine the “death” of a fake human being. Four slipped away after the crash and actually walked to the Krispy Kreme to get us all some donuts (we had discussed this prior to the crash). It was a bold move, but totally worth it. Post-robbery Krispy Kreme donuts are as close as someone can get to pure bliss. Those donuts sure were when I knew we were in the clear. Nothing tastes that good if you’re gonna get caught.

After the robbery I drove to Massachusetts and buried the money under my grandpa’s house. I stared off into the beautiful landscape and began to think to myself, “This is the perfect place to contemplate the morality of my recent actions,” but then I remembered that I was rich and didn’t really care that my moral compass was pointing west.

About ten months later after all news of the heist had settled, we went to pick up our money. After driving the speed limit on the highway for five hours, saying it was a relief to have the money was an understatement. It was the worst, most nerve-racking drive of my life. Friends One up to Four are all now traveling the world with their families. Their wives and children think that they all ran and sold off successful tech firms which, if it is okay in their books, it’s okay in mine. On the other hand, I proposed the ordeal to my wife before this all started, so my conscience is clean and I have all the money in the world. I can now send all of my children to college, buy fantastic old musical instruments that only increase in value, and buy more Krispy Kreme.

# Aboard the U.S.S. Calypso

By Maximus Bean '20

## LOG 01

Well. Here it is. Mission Control says that we have to record ourselves on these things once in a while for everyone back home. Here's hoping the ship'll get to Tycho, wherever that is, in a few months and that's that. Done. I get a paycheck. It's the three of us: me (John Everett: Class B Technician), an officer named Jen Tremain, and Captain William Lancaster. For a while before launch, I was nervous about all the precautions and danger, but we seem to be alright for now. We have enough fuel to last us there and back and then some--Hold on a sec, the Captain wants me, talk soon.

END TRANSMISSION

## LOG 02

Jen keeps turning the artificial gravity off and it's really getting on my nerves. Here I am, trying to sleep, and then I hit my head on the [\*] ceiling. I miss Earth. Sometimes I just lie here and think of everybody I met before we cast off. It may be infinity out there, but it sure feels like eternity in here. I can't wait until I get back. I can picture the praise now. Rookie John Everett, galiant steward of the stars on the U.S.S. Calypso. Man, I can't believe--Oh God, not again. TURN THE GRAVITY BACK ON!

END TRANSMISSION

## LOG 03

Lancaster creeps me out. He's the Captain. I call him Cappy just to tee him off. He's practically everywhere. He caught me talking into the audio logs more than once. I always notice him skulking around the halls. Something about the guy is just off. I asked him what kind of cargo we were carrying and he just stared at me. Zero response. Nil. Nothing. After a few seconds he walked past me altogether, mumbling something about the chain of command. Does he even know? I'm pretty sure Jen agrees with me on this. I overheard her flirting with him a few days ago. She asked him if he liked her dress and he simply told her that she was breaking the the dress code. Completely monotone. He's basically a robot. I don't feel safe with--HE'S HERE-

END TRANSMISSION

## LOG 04

Turns out Jen confiscated my last log while Cappy chewed me out. He basically said that the cargo isn't important. "We're all a team here, no man is an island," yada yada you get the point. So after that talking to, I got a warning from Jen that if I ever spoke about her atrocious flirting again I'd get thrown out the airlock. Superior officer my bottom. She's as much a fool as I am. On the bright side, I did some investigating. While I was mopping up in the cargo bay, I took a look at the container we were transporting. Something in there is being shipped via NORACO, a cryogenic-transport company. I was going to get a closer look but Jen yelled at me from the intercom to get back to work. I got another chewing-out after that. I'm pretty sure they're thinking of replacing me with some advanced AI.

END TRANSMISSION

## LOG 05

We're finally out of the Milky Way Galaxy now. Based on what I could gleam from Cappy's console, We're headed towards the Andromeda Galaxy. In other news, it's Valentine's Day back home. Cappy asked Jen to be his. I asked the roomba who's now assigned to clean the cargo bay to be mine. I was told to vacate the premises or else be reported to a higher command. I miss my friends. Maybe I should just ditch them all on an escape pod and book it back to Earth.

END TRANSMISSION

#### LOG 06

Cappy and Jen are hanging out exclusively in the command center now. This leaves yours truly to do more sleuthing. Experience taught me most of the rooms in the ship could be unlocked through a bit of tinkering. I took a minor in robotics at the University. The only thing I learned in that class was with the right wire connections, you can open anything. It's like hotwiring a car. Take the outer casing off, cause a few wires to spark, and you're in. That's only the simple version, though. So anyway I broke into Cappy's room and stole some files. I know I'll get fired or demoted when I get back, but still I found something really interesting. Listen to this: "Subjects who undergo the procedure must be healthy, fit and tough enough to endure the treatment. Cryostasis is delicate process and is not fit for most mammalian life. Most cold-blooded creatures are safe to be transported given the correct conditions, which most pods are capable of. However, your latest update with the cargo the Calypso is carrying presents an interesting experiment." That would rule out most people in cryogenic stasis, right? So what's really in that pod? Hold up. I heard some doors open outside.

END TRANSMISSION

#### LOG 07

Jen's changed. She seems a lot happier. I say "seems" because she's berating me a lot less than she used to. Maybe it's that she's getting used to life onboard the ship. Good for her. I still don't like it, but who cares about me? It's just the three of us and I spend most of my time mopping up after the other two. These past few weeks have been rough. I mostly talked to the roomba. I named it Pip.

END TRANSMISSION

#### LOG 08

I finally managed to peel Jen away from Cappy to talk to her. We had a pleasant conversation. She invited me to lunch. I ate in the officer's lounge for once. Turns out they eat the same freeze dried food as I do. Cappy asked me about a few papers that went missing. I lied to his face and said something along the lines of "I don't know anything, I just clean up after everyone." He believed me. He told me that I should "try relaxing, my blood pressure seemed a bit high." He's more friendly, but I still don't trust the guy.

END TRANSMISSION

#### LOG 09

Jen is checking up on me more often. I almost got caught reading one of the pages I swiped. I have to be more careful. I should really talk to her about getting some music on or something though. It's boring cleaning to the sound of the ship's engine every day. I might also rewire Pip a bit. Make a few modifications. It seems we're all settling into a little routine. Cappy sits in his chair watching everything and makes sure things are running smoothly. If they aren't, I have to fix it. Don't tell Jen I said this, but I figure all she's doing onboard is parroting Cappy's orders.

END TRANSMISSION

#### LOG 10

Here I go with Pip's rewiring. I'm pretty sure Jen and Cappy are on the other side of the ship, so they won't hear me.

END TRANSMISSION

#### LOG 11

It's ALIVE! IT'S ALIVE!!!

END TRANSMISSION

#### LOG 12

Pip is acting more like a pet now. He's circling around everyone and making noises like a dog and that's good and all, but I can't help feeling guilty for some reason. Maybe it's that I rerouted his old lack of personality. Maybe it's the Frankenstein-esque manner in which I rewired his lack of personality. Either way, Cappy and Jen noticed Pip's modification. Results are mixed. On the bright side though, Pip can play fetch with ANYTHING. I had him retrieve some loose parts of the ship that I couldn't reach. It turned out there was more I needed to fix than I had thought. It wasn't anything special. A cracked pipe here. A few frayed wires there. No big deal. Cappy is sitting at his console more often. Jen is reading some book about Warren Pace. I'm just sitting here on my cot, recording when I should be resting up for another eight-hour shift. That's all for now.  
END TRANSMISSION

#### LOG 13

The gravity is off again. I can hear Cappy yelling from the command center. I'm considering floating my way to the cargo bay while they fight; look around a bit more. I'm making Pip my honorary partner-in-crime, though roombas are not very versatile in zero-g.  
END TRANSMISSION

#### LOG 14

I'm in. just gotta figure out how to open these things--OH MAN WHAT IS THAT?!  
END TRANSMISSION

#### ***CAPTAIN'S LOG***

Day 211. Time is 1530. Nothing much to report. We are on course to Tycho-631, Perimeter Xerxes-Rose. The Specimen is secure as of 1300. Officer Tremain turned off the gravity again despite several past reprimandings. Technician Everett once again spends most of his time with that roomba he tampered with. I am considering reporting him to the Council when I return to Earth. His behavior continues to worry me. I suspect he is planning to mutiny. I will try keeping a closer eye on him after I speak to Miss Tremain about her behavior. She too, has demonstrated an "unprofessional attitude". I will not go in-depth in this report, but I suspect she is tampering with the artificial gravity to interfere with my duties or perhaps to spite me--especially after that fiasco of a dinner last week--Excuse me, I heard something from the cargo bay. I'll be right back. Lancaster out.  
END TRANSMISSION

#### LOG 15

Oh my god...Holy [\*] that thing is...that thing--Everett get away from there! What do you think you're doing?! GET AWAY FROM ME, LANCASTER! What is that thing?! Get the heck away from me! Explain to me why that--that creature is rooming with a headless guy?! Huh?! CLOSE IT! NOW!-JEN, GO AWAY! THIS IS NONE OF YOUR CONCERN! EVERETT, CLOSE THE POD! JEN GRAB HIM! We're transporting some alien in this thing!  
END TRANSMISSION

#### LOG 16

ALright, Say hi to the audio log Jen.  
Hello. Why are you recording this anyhow?  
That's not important. Okay so we managed to knock out Cappy and-Cappy?  
Yeah. Cappy. So we shoved him in the airlock and we're trying to figure out what to do. Jen searched his room and we found the passcode for the Captain's console. The ship is on autopilot at the moment and We're trying to find out what the mission objective is, or at least  
ANYTHING that concerns this piece of cargo we're carrying. Any luck so far?



Considering you've been disrupting my concentration with your moronic recap, no.

Duly noted.

END TRANSMISSION

LOG 17

Jen almost shot Cappy into space so we decided that keeping him in the airlock was a bad idea. Instead, we moved him into the ration room. On a separate note, does anyone know how to pilot a ship? Jen is busy fiddling with the controls and——...that's not good. Hold up a second.

END TRANSMISSION

LOG 18

I swear, I will have you court-martialed John! Why are you bringing me out now?

Easy, Cappy. Now tell us, what was that thing in the NORACO pod?

It was our cargo! That was what we were paid to bring to Tycho, you maroon!

By who? Who sent us exactly? You've kept us in the dark about this for months now!

Grr...Alright, fine. You want your [\*] information, I'll give it to you at the cost of this mission.

Did he just curse? That's a first.

I--we were assigned by an overseer of NORACO to deliver another colonist to Tycho. This specific employee had...something...feeding on him. They decided that they would send him to Tycho (a failing colony as is...

hmph) and record what would happen. Happy?

Yeah, I mean the mission is already dead in the water. I ditched the cargo yesterday, right out the airlock.

Whoosh.

YOU WHAT?!

YOU WHAT?!

Aw, come on! It's a scary-looking parasite creature. I don't want it picking us off one by one, or infecting us or something with--hey-HEY! Where do you think you're going?

I can't believe you. I'm going out.

Wait! Come back! Who's going to help me carry Cappy back inside?!

ASK THE ROOMBA!

It's name is PIP!...Well I don't see him saying no. Come on Pip! Let's get--Wait How did you get untied--PIP!

PUT PIP DOWN YOU MANIAC--THWACK! THWACK! THWACK!

Well...That was easier than I expected. Now let's see what makes you tick, little guy...

END TRANSMISSION

LOG 19

John, John! Wake up!

Huh?

How do you feel, John?

Well, My nose is bloody, I'm in some kind of jail cell on the bottom of the ship based on the old lock, and my best friend is dead.

The roomba?

His name was Pip, Jen! Pip!

It's a roomba, John.

I don't care! That thing kept me company for months. I have as much of a friendship with Pip as you had with the Captain.

Hmph...he's going to report you when he gets on Tycho, by the way.

I know. Why are you telling me all this?

Mostly pity. I mean I didn't want to be nailed for mutiny, so you're taking the fall on this one.

Thanks for nothing then. Leave me alone.

If I'm going to leave you to sulk, maybe this thing---is better off with you.

Pip?...I guess I should say thanks for bringing him here at least. Not flushing him out the airlock. It's a broken roomba, but I think he has something you might be interested in. He's my best friend. Please go away. If you say so. See you planetside then! Hmm... --Rattle Rattle-- huh...I guess you did come through for me, Jen. Thanks for the help, Pip...and I miss you buddy...  
END TRANSMISSION

#### LOG 20

Jen smuggled a lockpick inside Pip to help break me out...So she likes me after all...and we finally reached Tycho. This could be my last audio log for now. Cappy and Jen are on the surface, and I'm about to steal an escape pod to confront them. I snatched some more files from Lancaster's room; found some incriminating stuff. I'll probably be arrested when I land. I don't care. I've spent more than enough time on this cramped ship. I'll leave the logs that I've recorded over these past months floating around and hopefully those will make my case. I'm —beep!—just entering the pod now. Just directed it towards the landing site and set the five minute timer to launch. I'll be happy when I return to Earth, though. There's no place like home, but this place will have to do. One last note: I'm bringing Pip with me. Wish me luck. Everett out.  
END TRANSMISSION

# *Arrays of Color*

*By James Marchese '19*

The first thing she noticed was that everything was white. Well, that might not be true. The truth of the matter was that nothing was white. Nothing was much of anything, actually. This didn't trouble her though, it was how things were laid out and she knew that much. How the knowledge got into her head was beyond her, everything before now had been a daze. At one-point things weren't nothing, but that wasn't now. She looked around at the nothingness, a pit forming in her stomach. Am I all alone? The thought jabbed at her mind from every direction, bouncing around against the nothing. She felt the pit grow inside of her.

"Hello?" The words put a stop to the bouncing thought, echoing into eternity. Her feet carried her in one direction, picking up speed as she went. None of it mattered, she knew this before beginning to run. Where would she run to? There was nowhere to go, this was nowhere. Her legs gave out eventually, emotions dragging her down for she was not tired. The pit grew as she came to realize how much she wasn't. A part of her knew there should be hunger, thirst, pain, feeling. All that she was able to know was emotion, it tugged at her soul and cut through. It was everything this nothingness wasn't.

She looked around herself and let the emotions swallow her whole. There was no one to talk to anymore, if there was ever a time where such a thing could happen. A type of longing pulled at her soul, she couldn't place the word to the feeling. Couldn't place anything anymore. She didn't want to be here anymore, where ever here was. Why? The thought cut harder than the last, no amount of speaking able to make it stop bouncing around her soul. The nothing began to weigh down on her as she struggled to move forward. Wherever forward could be. It felt as if she was drowning in all of the emptiness that was in this place. She sprinted as fast as possible, pushing her soul as hard as it could possibly go. Water dripped from her soul with each passing eon, pulling her farther down into the nothing.

It was all she could do to not fall and give up, this couldn't be all there was. There had to be more, hadn't there? These consumed her every nothing until it was all that was there. They grew in her soul and tore it to the deepest depth they could find. The cutting only stopped when she finally collapsed again, the urge to run leaving her as if it never existed in the first place. She looked at the lack of anything above her and shut her eyes.

One moment, there was the nothingness and a girl. The next moment, there was an explosion and a Creator. She hadn't meant to do it, but most of them don't ever mean to. Before the explosion, while still in her sorrow, the girl lifted her hand up as if to reach for something. She hadn't even known why she was doing it at the time, but her hand brushed up against something in the nothingness. It felt cold, for a moment, and then the explosion happened.

The nothingness melted away with color filling everything. She watched with awe as things took form. Her hands moved without her knowledge, shifting the color into circles of fire and ice. They formed into vast arrays of color and light, dozens of the circles floating inside each of the different arrays. She swept her hand to the left and watched as everything shifted, swirling and mashing together to form millions of different objects. Her soul smiled as she swept her hand to the right and watched everything follow her lead, separating and re-forming into different shapes and colors. She pulled the color closer and held one of the balls of fire in her hand. It spun slowly as it floated just above her essence, some of the fire shooting off in different directions. Move faster. The shape begun to speed up, everything else moving faster as well. Realization took hold of her soul as the next thought came to her and the color all came to a stop.

She moved through the different arrays and took time studying each of the objects around her. Did I make all of this? A new emotion filled her soul as she continued to walk along the garden of color. Yes. A garden... That's what this is... It's my garden of life. The thought made her smile and become filled with something beautiful. She allowed everything to move again and sat while it shifted around her. Her eyes darted from color to color, all of it erasing any memory of the nothingness that dominated everything before. As they began to form into larger groups, she noticed words form from lines branching off of each separate one.

Rin Galaxy. The words played on her tongue as it left her mouth in a breathless whisper. She had created her first galaxy, the most breathtaking thing she could ever recall seeing. The Rin, as she began to call it, expanded before her so that she could investigate the objects inside. More words branched off each of the objects, naming the eight that circled Star at the center. She reached her hand out to Star and felt as if she could feel the warmth that radiated from its core. A laugh escaped her lips as Terrania, one of the eight, passed through her while continuing to orbit Star. She stepped back to look at The Rin fully. The seven other objects came into view without delay on their journey around Star.

She sat again and watched as other galaxies formed around her and The Rin, all of them littered with objects like Terrania. Each had its own shape and size, unique of any other in all of her Creation. She watched as the objects would crash into one another at times, forming countless other objects in their wake. The colors created were magnificent. Over time the galaxies would meld into one another or disappear into the darkness of the new Nothing. She tried not to let the new form of Nothing get to her. It was only able to touch the Creation from what she had observed. As far as she could tell, she was safe from it and could make new Creations whenever the Nothing would close in, if it chose to.

Things were done to try and rid everything of Nothing. Millennia were spent on trying to have more color within the Creation itself, but it still remained. Color wasn't able to be everywhere, there were obvious limits that were apparent since the first explosion and they wouldn't be ignored. She tried to break them but was met with ramifications that hurt her far more than the thought of Nothing so, eventually, she gave up. The Rin continued to grow and change before her eyes, becoming her favorite of all the galaxies in her Creation. Her eyes learned how to spot it whenever she would come back to her Creation, smiling like a mother would upon seeing its child. For her, this was like a child after all.

It is here where some things must be laid out. One will be said simply and left to Nothing while the other shall be brought to the foreground. The first, fodder for Nothing, is that she is not alone in her position. There are countless others somewhere, sometime. The second is that when one is in her position they open their souls to amounts of information that are limitless, yet with limit. For instance, she never learned how she got to the position she was in. That was – and still is – withheld and simply in the horizon for the ones like her. Since the moment of the explosion, she learned how to create the galaxies and planets within. The information came to her with the friendliness of a distant memory once forgotten. Her first Creation was never used to try and eliminate Nothing, there was a pull deep within her soul to keep the first one safe from reckless experimentation. The other Creations were thrown apart for that goal, all knowingly in vain. The limited limitless information had told her of how Nothing couldn't be taken away for it was always going to be present, in the holes between the color.

By the time she gave up in her pursuit of eliminating Nothing, The Rin was easily her favorite in her Creation. The immense growth from The Rin had little to do with this its placing in her soul. The favoritism for this galaxy most likely came from it being the first she ever felt in the palm of her soul. There's a special connection that cannot be ignored after that moment. For a time, she modeled some of the planets in other galaxies after those in The Rin to pay homage to the love she had. They became orbs of red, white, green, blue, some were mixed while some had splashes of each. When together in the galaxy they belonged, the orbs all would come together as a magnificent painting dripping with Stars in the background.

One planet in The Rin, Estocia, called for the most attention. It was heavily populated by a wide array of



colors and had developed like no other in the galaxy. She looked to the other planets that were mirrors of Estocia and saw the same changes in their growth. Watching the colors grow on the planet made her soul grow warmer as time went on, her soul's warmth mirroring that of Star. It was here she learned of something unique to a Creator.

While looking closely at the life formed on Estocia, she felt a tug towards one of the many forests on the land around her. The pull made her fearful at first and caused her to try to go back to her place watching all of The Rin, a piece of her soul being left behind on the soft ground. She stayed silent as the piece of her soul shifted in form while lying on the ground, branching off in different directions before returning back to a circular-like form. New knowledge came as everything shifted around her until she lie sitting on the ground her soul occupied a moment ago. Her eyes darted from tree to tree, her senses becoming overwhelmed with the touch of the ground and the smell of the air. She knew immediately what was happening and how, the new knowledge flowing gently into her soul. In this form, as she came to realize, her abilities were limited significantly.

While like this, she traded the power to create with the power to live as if she was one of her own creatures. It was a sacrifice she was willing to make for the time being and walked on Estocia alongside the many creatures she had created beforehand. None of them paid any mind to her being there and would continue on with their lives as if she hadn't been there at all. The noises of the world would overtake the beauty of the colors in her mind as she continued to travel. Everything she saw, heard, felt, tugged at her soul in a different way. She fell in love with each experience that came to her and, slipping for a moment, turned to ask someone if they felt the same way. She hadn't known why the feeling came over her, she had been alone for as long as she could remember. Why had now made it feel different? Whatever the reason may have been, it was a turning point for the still young Creator.

Like before, something must be laid out. She had not known the extent of her abilities to create, for some reason it was shrouded in mist for her. Creator to Creator, the time it took for one to figure out the extent varied – as it would from soul to soul. It never was meant to show fault in a Creator or put one above another, it was – and is – simply how things were and will always be. What she felt after that moment could not be ignored, and wouldn't allow her to ignore it. The feelings hit her like one of the waves on the sands she held in her hands, sending her back to watch The Rin as a full soul.

Knowing what could be done about how she felt brought fear to her at first, it always does when a Creator learns. She, if she chose, could take part of her soul and forever cut it off from the rest. Instead of being able to walk along Estocia as she had before, this part of her soul would grow into a being just like her yet different. It would be able to act on its own and live a life it chose to live, if she was willing to let this creation occur. Time continued on while she decided what should be done with her newly found knowledge. She was torn, inside and out. In the end, choosing to create life in this way was what brought her the only pain she had ever experienced while as a Creator. Pain worse than the death of any creature on Estocia.

The death comes later though, for now she decided to depart with some of her soul for the outcome of a new creation. The first one, a man, formed easily from her soul. The Creator was able to make more based off of this first one, all without having the sacrifice anymore of her soul. This new species, huminai, spread through the lands of Estocia with speed like the Creator had never seen before. She guided them to make new discoveries and aided them in surviving the world they were given. To keep them safe, she made barriers around each of the huminai. She decreed that they would be protected from death of nature or creature, failing to see the flaw in her protection. A Creator never plans to watch what came from their soul turn dark and crush the light that was once so bright. The Darkening, as it was called, came suddenly and without pause. It took everything one held dear.

Huminai continued to populate and grow swiftly with the help of these protections. The Creator watched as they began to make families with one another and further populate Estocia. As they grew older and wiser, the Creator was content with her stance in their galaxy. The Rin was continuing to offer Estocia energy from Star

that it didn't matter how many lived on the planet. Like before, she began to be filled with emotions that were normal for the huminai. She hadn't been able to see how she was similar to the huminai until she saw a girl sitting alone under a large tree. Whereas others were becoming close and making families, this girl wasn't. The Creator became close to the obsessive side with watching how the girl moved through life, intrigued as to why the girl chose to be alone. Others tried to talk to her but usually received nothing in reply and gave up quickly.

Soon watching wasn't enough for the Creator. The girl's heart and soul were open for the Creator to see, as typical with any Creator and their creations. The Creator studied as much of it as she dared, more emotions swarming through her soul at the thought of what she would do next. By now the huminai had developed ways of telling time and marking it. For a Creator, this way of recording was obsolete as a Creator could make everything move faster or slower. Time was something the huminai liked to call what was the Law for Creators. All of this became clear to the Creator as she looked into the girl's heart and soul.

The Creator locked this knowledge away in her soul and made sure she was ready for what was coming next. As like before, she took part of her soul and placed herself onto Estocia. It took a moment for her to feel the ground, the smell of fire drifting through her nose. The girl sat under the same tree as when the Creator first laid eyes on her, looking down at something in her hands. The Creator moved towards the girl as quietly as possible and felt something wet slide down her neck. It was a great deal of time before a pair of eyes looked up from their place under the tree. The eyes looked the Creator up and down before allowing the lips to curve into a smile as small as a twig.

Looking at the smile made her feel as if something was hammering away at the inside of her chest. She had known what the girl liked and made herself in that image when moving onto Estocia, it worked. The girl spoke first, a name gliding through the wind, and a question. The Creator answered the question as best as possible, more words coming to her lips as others leapt off the side. They exchanged this volley of words for the rest of the day, and well into the night. Neither of them was bothered by this passage of time. It allowed for them to grow closer to one another, making it as if the Creator were huminai herself. She didn't care for going back to her place watching over The Rin and took all of her time being with the girl she had come to love. All things come to the end of their Law, however. This was true for all the Creator had made and had slipped her mind like so many other things while living on Estocia. What brought about the beginning of the death was not something noticeable, instead it was one sentence spoken in a hushed tone underneath browning leaves and a setting sun. Neither knew that death was coming near, the Creator had not even noticed the beginning of the Darkening. Her time with the girl had come to be everything the Creator cared about and looked for, even missing the Darkening when watching over The Rin while the girl slept. She missed it until it came knocking on her doorstep.

The day began like the many before, the girl waking up to the Creator lying next to her. The girl, of course, had not known what it was she lie next to and had always assumed it was a fellow huminai – or human as they called themselves. The knowing came later. What came first were three events tied together in a bow of decay.

First came a knock at the door of where the girl lived, calling for her to move from her lover's side and answer it.

Second was the man with the teeth as white as nothing. He came asking for directions, his soul corrupted beyond repair.

The third event came when the Creator called to know who was at the door. She felt something deep

within her that made her want to call the girl back to the bedroom, something that became clear after the scream marking the beginning. The scream beckoned the Creator to the door and brought her to see the girl fall to the floor in a pool of blood. She had failed to realize the flaw in her protection up until this moment, as all Creators do. By making the huminai unable to die from the lesser creations, the Creator had failed to make them saved from themselves. This is what brought about the Darkening. This and the ability for the huminai to choose what they wanted to do.

A killer charged at the Creator without a moment wasted, hunger in his eyes as he drove the knife into her stomach. It took the same time for his soul to be twisted out through his eyes and for him to be left to suffer eternally on the wooden floor. The Creator felt the Nothing fill her soul as she retreated back to her place overlooking The Rin. Large rocks of ice floated around the outer part of The Rin now, more forming as the Darkening spread to all of the huminai. The Creator came closer to Estocia and felt her own soul begin to darken at what she wanted to do.

Her first action was the destruction of the huminai and their horrid disease. She made sure they all suffered and screamed just as the girl did. What continued for centuries for them, was merely a moment or two for the Creator as she came to her next action.

The huminai would be made into the smallest of cells on Estocia and put into the ocean. She made the creatures which were once lesser than the huminai stronger and larger, populating them in the corruption's place. The cells that were once able to control their own choices were now forced to be slaves to their nature. She didn't allow for them to evolve, forcing each back to its original state whenever the population managed to. Everything remained like this for millennia, and would have stayed this way were it not for the girl.

Death was undoable, even if the Creator tried with all the power she had. The girl's soul was gone, in another place filled with nothing and awaiting the limited limitless mind that the Creator had upon first waking. This didn't mean that the girl was gone. She was never to be physically seen again by the Creator, true, but she was still there. It was the memories of the girl that brought about the mercy for huminai. Like all things, something must happen for change to occur. This something was Star located in the center of The Rin. The Creator had not known for a long time the full function of Star other than to heat the planets circling it. She came to know, just like the creation of galaxies, by accident.

It was when she was deciding whether or not to plunge Estocia into Star that she heard the girl's voice call from the fire. The Creator tried to ignore the voice at first, focusing only on what to do with destroying what had once been her favorite creation. The voice, just like wanting to know the girl all that time ago, prevailed and demanded her attention. It spoke of the final bit of knowledge that she must come to realize; her role was that of a Creator. She was not meant to be a destroyer.

The voice spoke of what the girl felt for the Creator and how she would always be there in the huminai. It told her how she would never have to think of a time without the girl as, just like the Creator's soul, the girl was a part of every huminai that would be brought back to walking Estocia and having the will to do what they chose. Words are what brought the salvation of the huminai, even if they never would deserve it. The Creator allowed the cells to evolve and watched as they grew towards being what they once were. This time, they were not protected from the other creatures. The Creator took all of that away as a reminder for what they did to the girl who once sat peacefully alone under a tree. No matter how Darkened some of the souls of the huminai got, the Creator stopped herself from destroying them for they all had parts of the girl in them. With each showing of kindness, love, beauty, care, the Creator heard the words she would share with the girl all that time ago. The girl was forever with her now, and nothing would break them apart.

# *A Lovely Adventure*

*By Paul Retterer '19*

I hear the numbers slowly flip over from 5:59 to 6:00 AM and my alarm goes off. I wake up and smile. It is playing my favorite song. I think to myself, 'Thank God for Sirius XM. Without it, how would I hear the classics?' The heavy sheet encompasses my legs. I wiggle my toes to make sure I can still move. I chuckle and gradually sit up. I feel a crick in my back, it can't bend in the way it used to in younger years. With much struggle, I prostrate myself and reach down and drag the crinkly, warm blanket off my legs. Now fully exposed to the cool air of the room, blood rushes throughout my body and I turn towards the edge of the bed. My legs strain as I slide my feet into my slippers. I gently place pressure on my feet and stand up. I look to the alarm, which now reads 6:03, and smile again. 'I really do love this song' I think as I stretch out my arthritic hands to turn it off. I make my way over the curtains and slowly drag them open. After the warmth of the Florida sunrise cuts through the darkness of my room, I close my eyes and took a deep breath. "Today is going to be a lovely adventure!"

After I brush my teeth and take a shower, I wander out of my room towards the dining hall. It's time for breakfast. When I reach the cafeteria, I am greeted with laughter. The room, itself, is alive. People are talking, music is blasting, and the TV's are playing in the background. I am quite surprised, as this is a real change of pace from the normal silent breakfasts. The food is also different than usual. The aroma of bacon and sausage fills the room. While the smell waifs its way into my nose, I am reminded of the same delicious breakfast my mother used to make. As it would turn out, all the food from my old Sunday morning brunches is here: the crispy bacon and sausage, the donuts with loads of sprinkles, the eggs (both scrambled and hard-boiled), the deep-fried hash browns, the sugary cereal, the chocolate milk cartons, and the waffles drowned in maple syrup. There is so much food I worry that eating it all will give me a heart attack. That concern does not quench my hunger and I fill my plate up with loads of the comfort foods. I am able to eat all the goodies with ease. Surprisingly, breakfast does not make me feel sluggish in the least. In fact, I feel rejuvenated and ready for the day at hand.

After my magnificent breakfast, I walk out the back door of the Senior Center. As the automatic sliding doors open, the rays of sunlight rush over me as if the Sun is reaching out to give me a hug. I love Florida, it's certainly much better than New Jersey. New Jersey has a roller coaster of a climate and even as a kid I hated roller coasters. They shoot up and down and go from side to side. I never know what to expect and can never fully adjust to what's going on. Only reason I ever go on them is because other people make me. I just find them too difficult to keep up with. If New Jersey is a roller coaster, then Florida is a carousel. It's nice, calming and peaceful. It's very predictable as it circles around and around, repeating itself. While it may go up and down a bit, I always know what to expect.

As I am enjoying the warmth during my walk along the beach, I hear a group of young children playing. I love the sound of kids having fun as it brings me back to more innocent



time. I decide to take a detour and head toward the playground. Upon my approach, I see all the jovial fun of childhood. I see a group of boys chasing and diving after each other in an epic game of tag, a bunch of kids trying their hardest to not touch the ground in a round of the floor is lava, and a child no older than five sprinting up a ladder and down the slide in an attempt to get as many rides as humanly possible. If I were to associate a sound to in maple syrup. There is so much food I worry that eating it all will give me a heart attack. That concern does not quench my hunger and I fill my plate up with loads of the comfort foods. I am able to eat all the goodies with ease. Surprisingly, breakfast does not make me feel sluggish in the least. In fact, I feel rejuvenated and ready for the day at hand.

After my magnificent breakfast, I walk out the back door of the Senior Center. As the automatic sliding doors open, the rays of sunlight rush over me as if the Sun is reaching out to give me a hug. I love Florida, it's certainly much better than New Jersey. New Jersey has a roller coaster of a climate and even as a kid I hated roller coasters. They shoot up and down and go from side to side. I never know what to expect and can never fully adjust to what's going on. Only reason I ever go on them is because other people make me. I just find them too difficult to keep up with. If New Jersey is a roller coaster, then Florida is a carousel. It's nice, calming and peaceful. It's very predictable as it circles around and around, repeating itself. While it may go up and down a bit, I always know what to expect.

As I am enjoying the warmth during my walk along the beach, I hear a group of young children playing. I love the sound of kids having fun as it brings me back to more innocent time. I decide to take a detour and head toward the playground. Upon my approach, I see all the jovial fun of childhood. I see a group of boys chasing and diving after each other in an epic game of tag, a bunch of kids trying their hardest to not touch the ground in a round of the floor is lava, and a child no older than five sprinting up a ladder and down the slide in an attempt to get as many rides as humanly possible. If I were to associate a sound to the word fun, this would be it. After a few minutes, I figured that I had watched long enough and turned to make my way back to the Center. As I began walking away, a ball lands at my feet.

"Excuse me! Mister!" I hear a young boy call me from behind "Can you please pass the ball?" I reach down and grab it.

"Why sure. Here you go. What are you kids playing? I've never seen this game before."

"Oh! I invented it myself. I call it Ball-Ball."

"Ball-Ball," I laughed. "That's a clever name for a game."

"Thank you! Do you want to play? It's really fun!"

"No, no. I'm well past my Ball-Ball playing prime. I would probably throw out a hip."

“Are you sure? You could become really famous!”

“Oh I will now?” I smiled.

“Absolutely! Ball-Ball is going to catch on really soon, I can feel it. As soon as the sport breaks through, I’m going to be a star athlete and super rich. If you played with me then you will be famous too.”

“And how is that?”

“We’ll be the inventors of a sport! We’ll have so much money that we can do whatever we want!”

“Well, what do you want to do?” I queried.

“See, I’m going to marry a really beautiful girl, but that will only happen after I become famous. So, after a few years of Ball-Ball, I’ll find the perfect woman and we’ll tie the knot. After we get married, we’re going to live in a mansion and drive red Ferraris. She’ll never have to worry about anything because of all the money from Ball-Ball. Eventually, I’ll be able to retire from the game. At that point, we can finally travel the world and see everything. It’s going to be epic!”

“That sounds like a great plan kiddo! Well, I don’t want to keep you from your Ball-Ball. Good luck and have fun!” The kid smiles, hugs me, and runs back to play with his friends. ‘What a lovely young lad’ I think to myself as I head back to the Senior Center.

I hear the numbers slowly flip over from 5:59 to 6:00 AM and my alarm goes off. I wake up and smile. It is playing my favorite song. I think to myself, ‘Thank God for Sirius XM. Without it, how would I hear the classics?’ The heavy sheet encompasses my legs. I wiggle my toes to make sure I can still move. I chuckle and gradually sit up. I feel a crick in my back, it can’t bend in the way it used to in younger years. With much struggle, I prostrate myself and reach down and drag the crinkly, warm blanket off my legs. Now fully exposed to the cool air of the room, blood rushes throughout my body and I turn towards the edge of the bed. My legs strain as I slide my feet into my slippers. I gently place pressure on my feet and stand up. I look to the alarm, which now reads 6:03, and smile again. ‘I really do love this song’ I think as I stretch out my arthritic hands to turn it off. I make my way over the curtains and slowly drag them open. After the warmth of the Florida sunrise cuts through the darkness of my room, I close my eyes and take a deep breath. “Today is going to be a lovely adventure!”

It is really hot today. As I stroll through the sliding doors to take my daily walk, I immediately realize that the carousel is at a high point in its rotation. Rather than the Sun greeting me with her usual warm hug, today I am welcomed with an overwhelming swell of heat.

Sweat immediately starts running down my face even though I've only been outside for 30 seconds. For fear of a stroke and just general discomfort, I turn around and head back inside. When inside, I grab myself a glass of water and drink up. After I finish, I decide to hold off on the walk and wait until after dinner.

Dinner is quite bland tonight, especially compared to yesterday's breakfast. There is no welcoming smell, only the odor of pea soup. I hate pea soup. In my opinion, pea soup is the worst of all the soups. At least cream of chicken and cream of broccoli have some substance. Pea soup has nothing. It's just glorified vegetable water. The other food isn't any better. The chicken is way too overcooked, the green bean casserole is too undercooked, and the prunes are, well, prunes. The people are also duller today than yesterday. Rather than lively conversations about our youth and our lovely grandkids, today people are quietly chatting about what body part hurts the most and how the new generation is destroying America. There is no TV/music playing. The sound of silence overwhelms the hall. I take my plate, shuffle over to my table, plop down, and spoon my way through my food. The highlight of dinner is the multi-colored Jell-O, but even that keeps slipping off my spoon before I can get it to my mouth. At least I look forward to my walk.

Immediately after dinner, I leave for my walk. It rained earlier in the day, so the temperature has dropped pretty significantly. But while the thermometer may read a crisp 60 degrees, it's still very humid. In fact, when I walk outside, my glasses instantly fogged up. I take a few seconds to stop and wipe them down with the bottom of my shirt. The air itself feels really dense, almost like it is trying its best to be water, but can't quite get there. Due to the moist nature of the air, I choose not to walk along the beach like I did yesterday. Instead, I elect to stroll along the boardwalk.

For a Saturday night, the boardwalk is extremely dead. When I chose the boardwalk, I was expecting to meet some dynamic people and hold some good company. Yet, I am passed only by a few runners and a handful of people walking their dogs. Everyone seems so invested in the moment that they can't take a step back to chat with an aging man. I think back to the sweet boy from yesterday and his game (Ball-something?). 'He was so nice to take some time out his day and talk to me,' I think as I begin to turn back around. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I see a man sitting underneath a lamppost reading a newspaper. I don't make much of it, except when I notice a little trail of breadcrumbs that lead his way. I laugh and I realize the universe is literally leading me towards another conversation. Pausing again for good measure, and to wipe moisture off my glasses, I slowly follow the crumbs towards him.

I know that I'm not in peak physical form myself, but there is no way that the old man on the park bench is under 100 years old. He is rather short, no taller than 5'7". The wrinkles on his face are the size of the Grand Canyon and his skin sags like a pair of jeans that don't fit right. Despite all this, he still manages to look - happy. This is all because he has a spectacular beard.

Without his beard, he would have looked like a beggar on the streets of New York. However, the man's beautiful white facial hair let me know that he has wisdom to dispense. As I approach the man, he put down his newspaper. Instead of beginning a conversation with me, the man reaches into a paper bag sitting next to him and throws some crumbs towards the seagulls. He does so in a manner very reminiscent of a lady in my favorite movie, Mary Poppins. After he is done feeding the birds, the man redirects his attention towards me.

"Why hello there son. Would you care to join me and feed some eagles?" I look to the second bag he offers me, almost as if he was expecting me to jump right into the bird feeding action.

"You know what? I would love to," I said as I grabbed the bag and sat down next to him. The old man smiles at me.

"I bring an extra bag with me every day and offer it to every person that passes. You are the first to ever say yes."

"Really? That's crazy."

"Yeah. People just don't have time to stop from their busy schedules any more. My wife and I used to come here every Sunday night just to sit and feed the eagles. God really blessed me with her. I don't know what I ever could have done to deserve someone as loving and caring as she."

"She sounds lovely."

"Oh, she was. We had the kind of love you read about in story-books. The ones that start with 'Once upon a time...' The moment I met her, we instantly fell in love. I know a lot of people don't believe in love at first sight any more, but I'm living proof that it exists. We were married within a year. After the marriage, I fell on some hard times. Money got tight and I couldn't buy her the house I thought she wanted. She always has a smile on her face and optimism in her heart. She told me that she didn't care about houses or fancy jewelry or nothing. All that mattered to her is that we were together. Eventually I realized that I would never be able to buy my dream house, but that didn't matter. All that mattered is that our house was our house. So, I built us a house from the ground up. It wasn't much, but it was just enough for me and my then pregnant wife. Do you have kids? Because they change your life."

"Yes, I do," I said. "And I know exactly what you mean."

"You and I are part of a dying generation. A lot of people these days don't realize how much of an honor it is to have two little girls look up at you and call you daddy. After my wife, my daughters are my everything. I remember chasing them around the house. While I never became an official athlete, I had to be a track star when I chased my girls around the house. Those twins were little balls of energy. I used to drive them home from every soccer practice.



I would play their favorite song and we would just scream the lyrics at the top of lungs until our voices hurt. Then, to soothe our raspy throats, I would stop the car at our local ice cream parlor and let them each get a cone. Where did the time go? Before I knew it, my little girls were all grown up and living their own lives with their own families. Then it was back to just me and my wife again. While the money situation resolved itself over the years, we were not rich by any means. Yet, we still found ways to have fun. Every Saturday, I would take her to a different park and we would have a picnic. It was our own little way of exploring the world. It's funny. In the end, all those little things are what meant the most to me. They're the best memories I'll have of my wife until I get to see her again." By this time, the man had run out of birdseed and so had I. "Well that's the end of my story. Thank you so much for spending some time feeding the eagles with me tonight."

"Any time. Enjoy the rest of your night sir." I shake his hand and stand up. 'What a lovely old man' I think to myself as I head back to the Senior Center.

I hear the numbers slowly flip over from 5:59 to 6:00 AM and my alarm goes off. I wake up and smile. It is playing my favorite song. I think to myself, 'Thank God for Sirius XM. Without it, how would I hear the classics?' The heavy sheet encompasses my legs. I wiggle my toes to make sure I can still move. I chuckle and gradually sit up. I feel a crick in my back, it can't bend in the way it used to in younger years. With much struggle, I prostrate myself and reach down and drag the crinkly, warm blanket off my legs. Now fully exposed to the cool air of the room, blood rushes throughout my body and I turn towards the edge of the bed. My legs strain as I slide my feet into my slippers. I gently place pressure on my feet and stand up. I look to the alarm, which now reads 6:03, and smile again. 'I really do love this song' I think as I stretch out my arthritic hands to turn it off. I make my way over the curtains and slowly drag them open. After the warmth of the Florida sunrise cuts through the darkness of my room, I close my eyes and take a deep breath. "Today is going to be a lovely adventure!"

I think my day was eventful, but there is an air of uncertainty clouding everything. As I walk towards the cafeteria for lunch, I can't quite remember what I'm supposed to do today. I keep pondering my day, trying really hard to discover what I'm missing. I keep feeling like I'm getting close to remembering, but then it slips away from me. It's like how after a dream I can remember what happened and exactly how it made me feel, but at the same time I remember absolutely no specifics and just feel really frustrated. I refuse to let myself get worked up and figure that food will cure all, especially because the nurses say they are serving my favorite.

I look down towards the food and I am perplexed. The nurses claim that it's my favorite, yet I don't recall ever seeing it before. As a matter of fact, I don't remember picking up my lunch or sitting down at my table. I take a bite. It's not bad, it's just new. All of a sudden my sandwich is gone and a man is sitting across from me at the table. It is almost like he appeared out of thin air. I don't remember when he sat down or who he is, yet he claims to be my best friend. When I tell the man I don't know him, he ushers over a nurse and points her in my direction. I think he told her what was going on because she came over to me and immediately addressed the situation.

“Hey Harold. I hear you’re feeling a little out of sorts right now.” I nod my head. “Well don’t you worry about it. Let’s get you a nap and you’ll feel better by tomorrow.”

She assists me in standing up and walks me down the hallway towards my room. While we’re walking, I notice a sliding automatic door.

“That’s a cool door! I didn’t know we had one of those. I wonder what’s behind it.”

The next thing I know, I’m at the doorway to my room. As the nurse escorts me inside, I hear a voice call me from behind.

“Harold.”

I look over my shoulder, but don’t see anyone there. As the nurse is tucking me in, I feel a wave of clarity rush over me. I know that voice I think to myself but where do I know that voice from?

I hear the numbers slowly flip over from 5:59 to 6:00 AM and my alarm goes off. I wake up and smile. It is playing my favorite song. I think to myself, ‘Thank God for Sirius XM. Without it, how would I hear the classics?’ I go to wiggle my toes yet they don’t move. ‘That’s curious’ I think as I attempt and fail to sit up. I then try to move my arms, but they’re stuck in place. In fact, now that I think about it, I can’t even feel the sheet on my legs. As much as I struggle, I can’t move a muscle in my body. I’m stuck. Right as I am beginning to panic, I hear the same soft comforting voice that I heard yesterday.

“Harold.”

Then I feel a rush of warmth. It moves body part to body part, slowly granting movement in all of them. Eventually, when I regain control of my body, I sit up with ease. I don’t feel any arthritis in my hands nor any strain in my legs. I feel young. I smile and laugh. I look down at my hands and pull the sheets off my legs. They look the same that they did when I was twenty-one! I am in total shock and look over my shoulder. Then everything makes sense. I see my Elizabeth lying right next to me. She looks at me, opens her eyes and smiles.

“Harold! You finally made it!”

I kiss her on the head. “I’ve missed you so much.” As I roll back into bed and cuddle up next to my wife, I come to the ultimate realization. “Our afterlife is going to be a lovely adventure together?”

“Indeed.”

# Dinner with the Gods of Death

By Matthew Vaccaro '19

Dinner was to be held in the underworld, out of necessity. Hades was only a month into his designated six months with Persephone, and he didn't want her mother attempting any trickery by luring her to the surface. At this moment, Hades, ruler of the underworld, sovereign of life's ultimate inevitability, would do anything to avoid sharing a meal with his mother-in-law. He really didn't understand why they were having her over in the first place. Demeter wanted nothing more than for him to be swallowed up by the hellhole he ruled over, so there didn't seem much point to socializing. She had been less than approving of Hades' and Persephone's relationship, and after their nuptials had the mild overreaction of threatening to plunge the mortal world into eternal famine should her daughter not be returned to her immediately. The situation got so out of hand that Zeus himself actually stepped in, decreeing that from thenceforth Persephone would spend half the year with her mother on Mount Olympus, and the other half with her husband in the Underworld.

This agreement made no one particularly happy, but also kept everyone from getting too desperate. Still, Demeter continued to sulk whenever Hades was with his wife by recreating small-scale famines, which the mortals had become accustomed to calling 'winter.' These did nothing to make Zeus reconsider his ruling, but she found a perverse delight in spiting Hades nonetheless. It was because of these continued irritations that Persephone suggested hosting this dinner in the first place. She wanted the two to put their differences aside, and thought they could 'extend an olive branch', as the mortals would say, by inviting Demeter to their domain for an evening. At the very least, she argued, they could grow to tolerate each other. Hades sincerely doubted this would be the case. He was used to the other gods looking down on him, and over the millenia he had grown quite apathetic. He wasn't going to change just because Demeter didn't like him, and he sure as hell knew she wouldn't either. Under no circumstances would this be happening if it weren't for Persephone.

The prepared room shined with an unearthly glow; Across the cavernous hall hung a multitude of torches, haphazardly burning from both ends, as if a child had tried to chase out all remnants of the all encompassing dark from his bedchamber. The sparsely set table was far longer than necessary or even tasteful to seat three people. It had been built a mere days earlier, as the underworld rarely entertains, for the express purpose of putting as much distance between Hades and his mother-in-law as possible.

The once mighty Hades was beginning to wear thin. The strain of his kingdom weighed down upon him like the earth on his kinsman Atlas' shoulders. Unlike the kingdoms of sea and sky ruled by his brothers, there was little glory to be found as king of the underworld. The unending drudgery and despair had grown monotonous, and had taken a heavy toll on the first born of Cronus. As far as was possible for an immortal, he was getting older. His skin was pallid and sagging, as if, like one of his 'clients,' he hadn't seen the sun in a thousand years, which, in fact, he hadn't. His gait no longer bore the unshakeable confidence of the other gods, and each step seemed as if he feared the ground itself were going to give way beneath him, hurling him back to the underworld from whence he came.

She however, was looking radiant as ever, the lack of sunshine only highlighting her more sensitive features. Though technically mortal, her vigor rivals that of the Olympians. In contrast to her lover, lack of sunlight only underscored her delicate skin tone. Her straw-colored hair once hung down to her knees, but was now ornately tied up in the most regal manner she could manage. She wore a necklace of bones and daffodil petals. She stood with equal stature to her husband, but her posture spoke of a greater intensity, that can only be found in someone born without power, who snatched the first opportunity that turned its head. Being the queen of the underworld suited her, and since she had come to live with Hades, she had taken personal interest in the judgement of souls, a field to which Hades had been previously apathetic, jaded by generations of mortal atrocities.

She took a cathartic pleasure in ensuring the wise and noblest of souls find their way into Elysium, while relishing in the increasingly retributive punishments she devised for those who had escaped justice in life. Demeter arrived at the strike of midday, no less than an hour earlier than she was expected. She smelled like dried grass and bitter honeycomb. Her eyes were keenly focused, scrutinizing every detail of the cavernous hall. Hair the color of untilled earth, draped about aimlessly from her shoulders making her smaller frame appear more grandiose. Her role in the greater Pantheon placed her as goddess of the Harvest, grain, and nourishment. Given that mortals needed all of those things to survive, she held the rare ability to make Hades' occupation a living hell.

Once she had been kind, but that compassion soured to cruelty when threatened, especially where her daughter was concerned. She had sought to shield her daughter from the anguish it was to love an Olympian, and thus kept her as far away from the other gods as possible. But of all of the brothers, she had never expected it would be Hades to take her Kore- or "Persephone," as she calls herself-away from her. For that betrayal of trust, she would never forget.

Not wishing to prolong the coming ordeal any longer than it had to be, Hades spent half of that hour holed up in his throne room, trying to pass the time as best he could, sifting through a dozen quarterly distribution reports from his inferiors, haggling out new shipping fees with Charon, and playing with Cerberus. Finally, Persephone came in to retrieve him.

"How ya doing?" she asked, softly, reaching up to pet the three headed dog.

He looked up at her slowly, before responding blankly, "I've been better."

"How was work?"

He hesitated, "It honestly feels like it's getting worse every day. Pretty soon I'm gonna be drowning in souls, and there's not a blessed thing I can do," he stops for a moment, "How about you?"

"It was good. You should come down some time. It may give you some perspective."

"Maybe."

"I'm serious. You don't have to carry this burden alone. You can find a purpose, like I did. I can help you if you let me."

"I know. I know."

They stood in silence for a moment, until they could no longer evade the unavoidable.

"You ready for this?" She asked

"Not really, no," he offered, "Do we really need to do this?"

"You need to do this, yes," she smiled at him, "This will make things better for you, I'm sure of it."

"I'd give anything to believe you right now, but I just can't

"I know," she said sympathetically, "Will you do it for me, at least?"

He sighed, longer than he needed to, "For you, anything."

With that, they strolled out, hand in hand, from the lofty throne room to the recently built dining hall.

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After a small eternity of silence, Persephone finally elected to address Demeter,

"So, Mother, how has our family on Mount Olympus been since I left?"

She offered a gruff, "Insufferable," and asked no question in return. With that, Hades raised his wine glass, a well-worn goblet of copper.

"Well, now that we're all here, I'd like to propose a toast to start the evening," pouring blood-colored liquid into his glass first, followed by Persephone's, then her mother's, he added,

"To Dionysius, god of spirits, and the only nephew I ever liked."

And with that, they began.



Not ten minutes past before Hades had drained the first bottle of wine, while Demeter simply glowered at the at the spread, not taking a single item to her plate. Both of them earned a scowl from Persephone. The couple slowly progressed through the first few courses the servants had offered, a spread which included figs and raw chestnuts, roasted honey cakes, wine preserved olives, almonds, and Persephone's favorites, ripe pomegranates. On the order of Hades, no meat was to be served. Persephone and Hades gorged themselves as only the living know how, but Demeter never hastened to lift her fork. Picking up on this detachment, Hades glanced at his wife, as if to say, "I told you this was a bad idea." Persephone gave a sympathetic glimpse in return, then addressed Demeter.

"Are you feeling alright, Mother? You've hardly touched your plate."

"One should never swallow the hollow fruits of the underworld. I thought I taught you at least that."

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"Are you feeling alright, Mother? You've hardly touched your plate."

"One should never swallow the hollow fruits of the underworld. I thought I taught you at least that."

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Finally, an hour later, Persephone finally decided to attempt conversation with her mother once more.

"How goes the affairs of the over world?"

She paused for a moment, then replied, "They are as they have been for the last thousand years and how they will remain for the next thousand. Nothing has changed."

"Are you certain? Because Hades has been taking in an unusually high number of clients--"

"Do you think Hades is the only god in the pantheon with a tedious position? Do you believe it is easy to provide nourishment for all living things? That it is so simple causing the crops to grow?"

"But they haven't been growing, have they?" Jeered Hades, from the other side of the table, "Not one moon has past since your daughter has come to live with me, and suddenly I'm up to my eyeballs in emancipated corpses? Famines like that don't just happen on a dime. It's awfully convenient, that's all I'm saying."

"The fates of mortals are no concern of mine. If you're having a population crisis, then perhaps you ought to take better care of your kingdom."

"Why have you got such a problem with me? Why can't you leave us the Hell alone!"

"You're old enough to be her father? WHY couldn't you just leave her alone?"

Why did it have to be MY DAUGHTER?"

"You're insufferable! I suppose you would have preferred her to end up with my slutty brother, or one of his idiot sons!"

"She had her whole life in front of her before she met you, then you snatched it all away from her."

At this, he was taken aback. He knew she was right and hated it. Hated himself, for being so stupid and cruel. He had no right to steal her daughter's youth away from her, to opening up the underworld so close to her favorite field of flowers. It was something his brothers would do, and he hated it. Yet somehow, she loved him anyway, in spite of all that. Of course, he wasn't going to tell her any of that, so he prepared to go on the defensive, when Persephone erupted,

"My gods! Would you two stop it! You're acting like petulant children. SIT DOWN, HADES! You're not getting out of this so easily! Neither of you are leaving until you put this petty feud behind you. I'm sick and tired of being caught in the middle of your squabbling!"

"You deserve better than this, Kore!"

"Mother, for the last time, that's not my name!"

"The laughing stock of the Pantheon, that's what we've become."

"Are you even listening to yourself? Have you ever MET Zeus and Hera? Aphrodite and Hephaestus?"

Hades and I barely register!”

“Trapped in this abysmal plane, only able to escape every six months-”

“Has it ever occurred to your thick skull that I like it here? That I’ve actually built a life for myself.

“-And all because you were stupid enough to eat those pomegranate seeds!”

“Of course, it had to come back to that. You realize that you never once allowed me to explain what really happened-”

“What more do I need to know? Hermes told me everything-”

“HERMES is a tactless gossip who’d claim Olympus were burning if he thought it would get him attention. No! No more words! I’m tired of taking this from you. I just can’t spend another thousand years being treated like a helpless child who didn’t know any better- by either of you. You’re going to listen- really listen- to my story now, whether you like it or not.”

She drained the goblet in her hand, then took a deep breath and began,

*I was alone in that field on purpose. We just had another one of our fights, mother, remember. Those boys, Apollo and Ares and Hermes, were all relentlessly catcalling me, and somehow that was my fault. “No daughter of mine will fall for such wantonness.” Even if I were interested in their attention-which I wasn’t- I wasn’t allowed to enjoy it for a peloponnesian minute. Somehow, I was expected to be this immaculate paragon of a daughter for all eternity- this delicate, unchanging flower you could show off to your friends. I couldn’t take it. I’d been hidden off to the sides for too long, I had to get away, had to clear my head.*

*So I went out into the fields. If there’s one thing I inherited from you, it was that I preferred flowers to people. Then all of a sudden, I stumble across a patch of daffodils, more fragrant than I’d ever encountered before. I followed the rows of flowers, believing - I admit, naively- that no harm could come from wandering down from Mount Olympus. The flowers led down to a cave, and peering in, it seemed as though their colors became more vibrant as the light dims. Again, I chose to follow them to their source. Something- or someone- was trying their hardest to get my attention, and I wanted to find out who. It didn’t take me long after that to realize I had stumbled into the underworld. Still, I felt I could control the situation. I remembered you said to always refuse food from the underworld- yes, mother, I did remember- as it creates a bond between one’s soul and the realm. As long as I kept my wits about me, I could leave whenever I wanted. Then I saw him.*

*He seemed regal, in a brooding sort of way- a sort of pale, white lord so unlike what I had seen before in the gods. I don’t know if you’d quite call it love yet, but it was certainly attraction at first sight. Don’t give me that look. I told you you’d be hearing the whole story, mother, and by the Styx you’re going to hear it.*

*He mustered the biggest, dumbest grin you’d ever seen, and then, mustering all the theatrics in his being, he sang out, “Welcome I’m Hades. How’ya doin?”*

*I was taken aback, to say the least. From what the other gods used to say, I had a clear image of what the lord of the underworld would be like. Booming voice? Sure. Threats to toss you into the fiery pits of Tartarus? Perhaps. I was not expecting, “I’m Hades. How’ya doin?” He continued, “I brought you here to- to.” And just like that, mid-sentence, all the swagger faded away. “I’m sorry, I can’t do this.”*

*I was confused to say the least. Clearly, he had lured me for a reason- a reason I chose not to dwell on- but at the last moment backed out of it. He never laid a hand on me as long as I was there, never even raised his voice as long as I was there.*

*“I’ll, uh, I’ll have a chariot sent to take you home. In the meantime, just uh, stay put, make yourself comfortable. Oh, him, that’s Cerberus, he’s harmless. Yeah, Don’t let the three heads intimidate you. Deep down he’s just a big, spotted softie. Aren’t you boy? Aren’t you?”*

*And just like that all my anxiety evaporated. It was the bizarrest sight. All that grandeur, all that power, and behind it, the god of the underworld was just a lonely man playing with his dog. Desperate, not for love, per se, but for company. While the other gods would not waste a second thought on simply taking whatever they wanted from whoever they wanted, Hades was different. He had, what I suppose the mortals call “decency.”*

*Then we just sat there, watching Cerberus run around his throne room, making a mess, until that chariot he promised me arrived. He actually let me leave that first day, and I did leave. The thing is, this is the part you don’t know, that nobody ever knew, except Hades- I didn’t go home. I stayed in a local village, under the hospitality of a kindly elderly couple, for a few months. I had a lot of feelings to process. I’d never experienced such*

*freedom, but at the same time I felt enamored with the tragic character I had met below. And I was angry: angry at you, for our fight earlier, angry at him for nearly kidnapping me, and at all the gods for lying to me about him. Hades wasn't this desolate, paragon of cruelty, any more than Zeus or Poseidon. He was, at his core, an inherently lonely man, thrust into the dark corners of creation. Whether or not he deserved compassion, I did not know, but I determined to find out. I searched the whole countryside before I found that entranceway once again. I visited him several times over the next few months, at first only once every few weeks, then every week, until finally I was staying overnight, in his guest quarters. All we did was talk back then. Talk about our family, about the roles the fates had thrust upon us. I began to realize I needed the company of an understanding ear as much he did. It didn't take long until that initial curiosity, turned to friendship, which eventually blossomed into love. That's when it all turned to hell.*

*Hermes came knocking at death's door. Apparently my mother believed I had been kidnapped, and threatened to starve the living world into oblivion if I wasn't safely returned. Zeus knew where to send Hermes, as he was the one who pointed Hades in my direction in the first place, misunderstanding his brother's intentions as similar to his own.*

*"You have to go back," he said, "It's for the best of everyone. But I want to thank you for all you've done for me. You've no idea how much it means to me."*

*I just couldn't do it. For the first time in my life, I felt free from the expectations of being the goddess' daughter. I could form my own niche in the cosmos, alongside Hades. Quickly, I turned to him,*

*"Before I go, bring me something to eat. I'm famished."*

*He looked at me sideways, his eyes asking me if I knew what I was asking.*

*"Please, do it. I need something to eat. A piece of fruit perhaps?"*

*Slowly, he conceded, conjuring up a sparkling, juicy pomegranate. I thanked him, then split the succulent sphere with my hands. I carefully counted six red seeds and swallowed.*

*Demeter, for the first time in Hades' memory, was lost for words. Slowly, she rose from her chair, and as she did, the light of the hanging torches began to dim. She began to stagger towards the entrancing, mumbled beneath her breath something along the lines of, "That's. That's fine, dear." She refused to make eye contact with both her daughter and son in law, and, as if in a drunken daze, wandered out of the hall, now completely drenched in darkness, leaving the couple alone in their own dining hall.*

# Anastasia

By Sebastian Marchese '21

I lean back in my chair and make a faint sound that could probably be an excuse for a sigh. I set my pencil down and stretch before examining my handiwork. It's a rough sketch of a girl, around 15 or 16, sitting on a bench. There are no background details yet but the mental picture I have of what I want tells me that there will be a pier behind her and then vast ocean. I can't tell if the girl is waiting for someone or just enjoying the view. Sometimes my art is like that, mental images will come to me randomly and just demand to be drawn. I don't always know who the people are or why this image is in my head. They usually take on a life of their own and I'm just the one recording their journey. I don't mind but I'd prefer to know when they're coming because the images are fleeting and can disappear in a moments notice.

I pick up another pencil, made to draw darker lines for refining the sketch, and as I start refining the sketch I hear glass shatter from downstairs. I flinch and drag a dark line across the girl's face. I sigh deeply and get up, leaving my desk behind. I make my way down the hall towards the kitchen and hear glass shifting around as my mom sweeps it up and shovels it into the recycling bin. She must hear my footsteps because she looks up at me and smiles.

"Hey, honey. Sorry if I disturbed you, I just dropped my glass and, well, here we are." My mom finished cleaning up and puts the broom away in the closet right next to the entrance to the kitchen. I take another glass out of a cupboard and hand it to my mom. "Thank you." I nod in response and get another glass for myself. I might as well get something to drink now that I'm out here. My mom gets out the carton of milk and pours some in her glass. She tilts it towards me, a gesture asking if I would like some milk to. I take the carton, accepting her silent question, and pour some milk for myself and put the milk back in the refrigerator.

I start to walk back down the hall to my room when my mom calls out to me. I turn around and see her holding up five fingers. I get the signal and nod, giving her a thumbs up. Five minutes until I should go to bed. I debate just staying up as late as I normally do but decide that I'll actually get an adequate amount of sleep tonight. I close my door and close my sketchbook, taking note of the angry line across the girl's face. Setting my alarms and turning out the lights, I pull the covers over me and slowly drift off to sleep.

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A pier, a girl on a bench, and the vast ocean. The girl turns towards the boy. He wasn't there before and, while he doesn't know it, he brought himself here. She's startled. Company is rare here. The girl stands up and smooths out her skirt. She has to hold her sunhat to her head as a gust of wind threatens to blow it away. She knows that the hat will come back when she sleeps but she would just prefer to not let it blow away in the first place. Sunburn isn't a problem here but that doesn't mean the sun can't hurt her eyes.

She looks back at the boy. He is taller than her, maybe slightly older by a year or two. Dark hair falls over piercing blue eyes. Blue like ice. His dark skin is a stark contrast to her pale, almost completely white, skin. Tans also aren't a thing here. The girl assumed that if she couldn't get a tan then she probably won't have to worry about any bodily harm. She tested this theory several cycles ago and whenever a mortal wound was inflicted she would wake up at the beginning again.

She hears the distinct and familiar sound of a car. The car. The girl turns towards the boy. He hasn't said a thing to her and he has a slightly shocked look on his face. The girl turns to where the familiar headlights shine on her. A man steps out of the car and starts approaching her. The girl talks to the boy but receives no response. Almost like the boy could not hear her. The man approaches and brandishes the familiar knife. He pulls the mask over his face as he steps past the headlights, shadow no longer shrouding him. The series of events that follows happens every cycle to the girl. The girl doesn't know what time it is but she knows that it is before the sun sets, just before. The sky turns into a portrait of color as the man demands for her wallet and whatever is inside. She reaches into her purse that she left on the bench and feels her hand close around the pepper spray that she keeps on her at all times. She turns and is about to spray him but like every cycle he grabs her wrist and twists it, forcing her to drop the small canister. She cries as the cycle ends. Not because it hurts, but because she knows that it



will happen again. And again. And again.

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I jolt awake as my alarm goes off. I wipe the tears from my eyes and briefly wonder why I was crying. I can remember a girl on a pier and the man that tries to mug her. I get out of bed and start gathering clothes for school. The girl on the pier. She was the same one as the drawing I was trying to complete last night. I let hot shower water run over me as I slowly wake up.

Putting on my trademarked band T-shirt that nobody will recognize and black sweatpants, I step out of the bathroom. I leave the house without getting any breakfast. I never eat breakfast. Mom left for work hours already so I don't have to say goodbye to anyone either. I start my car and drive to school.

I don't pay attention to my classes, opting to continue the drawing in my sketchbook. The girl on a bench that overlooks the vast ocean. I manage to erase the dark line that crosses her face and leave as little of a trace of the line as possible. By the end of the day I have completed the sketch and just need to color it. If I want to that is. Once math class finished I pack up my stuff and walk out. I didn't pay attention at all but I don't have to. They always teach the same subject twice since most of my classmates usually have an issue in the middle of the day that forces them to leave the room and miss out on the lesson. I don't have any sensory issues or cognition issues like my classmates but my teacher is the only one that can speak sign language and my highschool doesn't care all too much about it's "Special" students. Anyone who has "special needs" is just shoved into the same class.

I can hear just fine, I'm not deaf. Speaking is where I have trouble. There were some complications when I was born and it left me with paralyzed vocal cords. At least that's what my mom told me. I've always had a small doubt that there's probably something more to the story than birth complications but I don't question her. It's been tough on her. Especially since my dad didn't appreciate having a broken son so he left.

I pull up into my driveway and turn the car off, sitting there for a moment. Mom isn't home yet, she works as much as she can to keep us afloat. That means she won't be getting home until I'm supposed to be asleep tonight. How late she comes varies but since it's Monday she will come home around 23:00. She always does. I close the door and lock it. Just in case.

I eat leftover chicken from dinner last night. She came home around the time I'd usually eat dinner and insisted that she cook something. I didn't object so here I am. I watch a TV show as I eat. It's in the middle of a season and I don't even know the name of it but watching random TV shows has become a ritual. I enjoy just being able to jump in and jump out. No commitment. I like that. Most of my life is this. Wake up, go to school and every other day just zone out because it's a reteaching day, go home, eat in front of the TV, draw a bit, go to sleep. Cycles and cycles.

After washing my dish I head into my room. I start coloring in the ocean with various shades of a blue. Dark blues with some light blue overtones. I blend this all together with a Q-tip and then close my sketchbook, finished for now. I set my alarms again and then crawl into bed. It's much later than I thought it was. I sometimes lose all sense of time when drawing. I'm used to running on very little sleep though.

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The girl looks up at the boy. This has become a ritual for her. The boy appears and she just talks to him. He doesn't appear to be able to hear her but that's okay. She just needs someone to listen. She ponders where she is, purgatory maybe? It would make sense with the ending of the cycle. Maybe she's living out her last moments forever. That leads her to thinking that this might be Hell but she doesn't remember doing anything terrible that would warrant Hell. She wasn't very religious but she was a generally good person. At least she thought so.

"I wonder if you're trapped in cycles just like me. I hope your cycle is just drifting off to sleep and then waking up because that is a lot better than my reset." The girl looks at the boy and she notices that he reacted to her. She quickly stands up and rushes over to him. "You can hear me?"

The boy opens his mouth to speak but no sound comes out. The girl waits a few minutes before she hears the car again. The girl just bursts out laughing as tears stream down her cheeks. "He can hear me but can't speak. Perfect. Now we just reset and who knows if you even remember anything between cycles." The girl doesn't even look at the man as he asks for her wallet and all the money. "I don't want to repeat this over and over again. You're here now. Things are changing, they have to be." The girl grows ever more panicked as the man starts yelling at her and swinging the knife wildly. "Please... don't leave me here. I'll see you next cycle-" The girl is cut

short as the ending to the cycle begins. She puts her hand and it pulls away wet. She feels the cycle ending but she has to try something. The girl reaches out as the cycle collapses around her and puts a hand to the boy's cheek. It's warm. The boy's startled face is all that's left before she wakes up on the bench again.

I wake up crying everyday now as the dream repeats every night. This night was different, though. I could hear the girl. She spoke every night but I could never hear her. I wipe my tears and notice that my cheek is stained red. I jump out of bed and rush to the mirror in the bathroom out in the hall. Remnants of fingerprints are left on my cheek in blood. The girl's blood. I can't stop shaking. I quickly wash the fingerprints off and can't stop crying. I open my phone and video call my mom. She picks up at the first ring. She always has her in her line of sight in case I ever call her.

"Honey? What's wrong? You look like you've been crying. Is everything alright? Are you hurt?" I prop my phone up against a wall and start signing to her that I'm fine but that I had a night terror and don't feel well. I used to get night terrors a lot when I was younger and they used to leave me unable to focus on much of anything but they stopped soon after I turned eight. "If you want I can call your school and tell them that you'll be absent." I sign that I would like that and thank her. "Don't hesitate to call me if you need help. I'll try to get home as early as I can and then we can talk about it, yeah?" I nod in response before hanging up.

The boy is sitting at the bench when the girl wakes up this time. He is making hand movements that the girl doesn't understand. She quickly grows frustrated as she struggles to understand what he's saying.

"Look, I can't understand you. You're going to have to teach me... is that sign language? Yes? Alright you're going to have to teach me sign language somehow." The boy just nods and starts pacing the pier, thinking. The girl quickly grows anxious with his constant pacing and starts tapping her foot. A nervous tick of hers. The boy then picks up a stray stick on the pier and walks over to the sand in between the pier and the ocean. The girl doesn't venture far from the pier, she can't, but the beach she's always been able to walk on. The bench is like a rope tying her to that point, though. She once just ran along the road that runs parallel to the pier in an attempt to find other people but as she got further and further from the bench she felt herself get weaker before she passed out and just woke up on the bench again.

The girl walks down to where the boy is and looks at what he's drawing in the sand. What is your name? The girl chuckles slightly. Names, she doesn't care much for hers but she hadn't thought about it in so long that it felt strange to think about exchanging names now. "My name? It's Anastasia." The boy nods and starts scribbling in the sand. My name is Dylan. Progress. Do you know where we are? That was a complicated question. The girl knew the address of the pier but she didn't know where this new, different pier was. This place was definitely not the pier she used to visit as a kid. This pier is definitely not the same pier she ran to, crying, when she had fought with her parents. It was over how she wanted to be an artist and they wanted her to be a doctor or something. She was yelling and then her parents were yelling. The girl wished that she could go back to that time and stayed instead of running to the pier. To the bench.

The girl conveyed the address and the boy looked startled. Near me. The girl grabbed the boy's wrist, physical contact was able to be made since that first night several cycles ago and while they rarely touched each other it still was a reassuring anchor for the girl. "Do you think that you'd be able to come find me? Please, try." The girl could hear the car door closing behind her and the man asking for her wallet and her money. The man didn't seem to notice the boy or that they weren't on the pier anymore like in the other cycles. The man was a marionette that had no say in what he did here. "The cycle is ending but find me, please. Try to find me. You know where to start looking."

I park my car at the pier. It's Saturday so I have off today and mom took a last minute shift because winter's bitter hands have closed around us and that means heating bills will be on the rise and she wants to stockpile money to get us through the winter without cutting spending on other things or just generally living paycheck to paycheck.

The pier is empty because of the cold and that leaves me standing alone at the bench that I've seen every night for the past month. I look at a plaque on the bench. That's new. In memory of all women who have been as-

saulted. We will not go silently into the night. Anastasia's incident probably brought about this plaque. A woman walks up to me, holding flowers. I realize she's here to put the flowers on the bench and quickly step aside. "Sorry, I just leave flowers here annually. Don't mind me." The woman snuffles. Annually, does that mean this happened at least a year ago? If that's true then does that mean this is the anniversary? I can't accept this as a coincidence and as she turns to leave I tap her shoulder. She turns to me, confused and slowly reaches her hand into her coat pocket. I open my sketchbook to the drawing of Anastasia and show it to her. I've since finished it and added all the coloring. Anastasia's pale skin, red hair, green eyes. The woman's eyes widen in recognition and I see her start tearing up. "Are you one of her friends? None of them have come to visit her yet but her friends knew that she loved to come here and sit at this bench. Your name is?"

I write on the next page that my name is Dylan along with just the word "mute". The woman nods in understanding. She sits down on the bench and taps a gloved hand on the spot next to her. I sit down next to her. She shivers and wraps the scarf around her neck tighter.

"You can call me Mrs. Wright or just Tameka, I don't mind either. I don't know how you kids aren't cold. You're wearing a light jacket and here I am all bundled up." She chuckles but her eyes are filled with tears. "I didn't know Anna knew you. She rarely talked about her friends to me. We fought a lot, you know." I nod and put my hand on hers in a weak display of comfort. She gives me an equally weak smile and continues. "Would you want to visit her sometime? She's still recovering but I'm sure she'd love a visitor. She's at West District Hospital. I can take you if you want." She looks at me before wiping her eyes with a tissue that was retrieved from her jacket. "What am I saying I just met you and you just met me. You shouldn't get into a car with people you just met." She pauses, like she wants to say more. "Please visit Anna often, I'm sure she would love the company."

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The girl waits on the bench for the boy. He doesn't appear that cycle. The girl starts crying, not understanding where the boy went. She is still crying as the man comes back to end the cycle.

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I walk into West District Hospital and up to the secretary at the front desk. I set the slip of paper down that Mrs. Wright gave to me granting me permission to see Anastasia. The secretary nods. "Mrs. Wright told us you were coming. She's in room 305. Third floor." I nod in thanks and make my way to her room. I hesitate in front of her door, my hand gripping the handle. This is a girl I've only met in my dreams, which I don't understand and I sound crazy just thinking about it, and all I know about her is what she talked about in the brief time that we could talk to each other. I clear my head of all my worries. I need to see her. She wanted me to find her. I take a deep breath and walk into the room.

Anastasia is lying on a hospital bed, hooked up to a machine that measures her heartbeat. I forget what it's called at the moment. She's sleeping. I sit down in a chair next to her. The same flowers that Mrs. Wright would put by the bench on the end table. White roses. They must be flowers that Anastasia really liked. I reach out for her hand and hesitate again. The worries from before buzzing in my head as my hand hovers over hers. I quickly take her hand in both of mine before I lose all courage and leave the hospital. I squeeze her hand slightly and receive no response. I take another pause then. The incident happened at least a year ago, so why hasn't she woken up yet? She should be fully healed. I look at Anastasia before it clicks. She must be in a coma. But why? She doesn't get hit on the head in the dreams, or cycles as Anastasia calls them. Or does she? I don't get to see the end of it, just to a certain point. What if when she falls she hits her head? What if in real life and not in the cycles she hits her head and because she does different things in the cycles all that remains the same is the knife?

I tear my sketch of Anastasia out of my book and leave it on the end table. I squeeze her hand one last time before leaving the room and going back home. I don't have the dream with Anastasia that night. I don't have the dream the night after that either. Or the next night. Or the night after that. Or the night after that.

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The girl feels something touch her hand. She jumps and turns hoping to see the boy but seeing no one. This happens every cycle, each cycle the feeling growing stronger until she can identify it as someone squeezing her hand. The girl knows who it must be immediately. Dylan. The girl is overwhelmed with joy and she feels tears run down her face. This time, the tears aren't tears of sadness.

The next cycle something feels different. The space around her feels fragile, like it could break at any point. The girl could feel deep inside her that one last push was needed to break the space and break her free. The girl would focus on Dylan holding her hand but it wasn't enough to shatter her prison. She started to give up when one cycle Dylan was there again, faint but there. He seemed to waver in place and she knew that they didn't have much time. The girl grabbed his hands.

"I know you're the one squeezing my hand. I can feel this place breaking but it just needs one more big push to shatter. I know you can do it. I know that you can free me from this place. I believe in you."

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I sat in the hospital room with Mrs. Wright and looked at Anastasia. I've been visiting her for a while now. I can't say for sure how long but long enough that Mrs. Wright now knows enough sign language to get by in our conversations. My mom thinks Anastasia is a school friend that got into an accident and has stuck with me for many nights that I spent worried for her and supporting me.

I look at Mrs. Wright and nod at her. I wanted Mrs. Wright and I to hold Anastasia's hands at the same time and for Mrs. Wright to try to call out to her. I desperately want to call out to Anastasia, too but accept that Mrs. Wright will have to be the one doing that. I hope it's enough. In the last dream with Anastasia she told me that the space around her was breaking down and that one last push was needed. I decided to contact Mrs. Wright, we had exchanged numbers after my visits to Anastasia became a regular occurrence, to try and provide that last push.

We both take her hands in ours and Mrs. Wright starts calling out to Anastasia. She doesn't just chant her name but retells stories from Anastasia's childhood. Times when Anastasia would be so stubborn that she'd end up sabotaging herself or when Anastasia once said she would pack up and leave when she was seven because they made her eat her vegetables. Those cliché sort of things.

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The girl feels the world vibrate around her as she hears a familiar voice. Her mom's voice. The girl starts crying as she feels the world breaking down around her and a bright light starts shining through the cracks. Hospital smell overtakes her and a faint beeping, like one from a heart monitor, surrounds her. Above it all she can hear her mother's voice and she follows it out into the light.

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Mrs. Wright looks like she is about to give up when Anastasia suddenly stirs. Mrs. Wright shouts in surprise and then starts crying. "I'm here, baby, I'm here. Mommy's here, Anna." I smile as Anastasia slowly opens her eyes. Our eyes meet and I can see the instant recognition in her eyes. Her eyes are more vibrant in real life. We both smile at each other, albeit Anastasia's smile is weak. Mrs. Wright calls out for a nurse and soon a nurse fetches a doctor. Anastasia gives my hand a weak squeeze and I squeeze it back. A doctor asks me to leave so that they can do check-ups on her and I don't struggle. I know that I'll see her again and not when I fall asleep but when I'm awake.













