



First Annual

T E E N

Poetry & Fiction
Writing Contest

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**TEEN POETRY & FICTION
WRITING CONTEST WINNERS**

POETRY (*Age Group 12-14*)

First Place Christopher Hanks, 14
Keithley Middle School, Tacoma

Third Place Cory Farley, 12
Woodbrook, McChord AFB

Fourth Place Erica Ware, 12
Woodbrook, Fort Lewis

SHORT STORIES (*Age Group 12-14*)

First Place Amy Willis, 13
Spanaway, Home School

Second Place Tracey Barthel, 14
Curtis Jr. High, University Place

Third Place Yolanda Ramirez, 14
Mann Middle School, Lakewood

Fourth Place Katrina Woldseth, 12
Ford Middle School, Tacoma

POETRY *(Age Group 15-19)*

First Place	Stacey Marie Essman, 18 Curtis High School, Tacoma
Second Place	Emily Parker, 15 Charles Wright Academy, Tacoma
Third Place	Anna Stafford, 17 Gig Harbor High School, Gig Harbor
Fourth Place	Jeremy Voight, 18 Gig Harbor High School, Gig Harbor

SHORT STORIES *(Age Group 15-19)*

First Place	Jennifer Grant, 16 Curtis High School, Tacoma
Second Place	Brad Powell, 17 Franklin Pierce High School, Tacoma
Third Place	Bethany Maines, 19 Tacoma Community College
Fourth Place	Jeff Anderson, 15 Bellarmine Prep, Tacoma



Stories and Poems

by
Pierce County Youth

THE RAINY DAY

Drip, drop, splitter-splatter,
Drains flowing, filling, fatter.
Dim, wet, cold, and dreary,
Stuck inside and feeling weary.
Rumble, grumble, clap, boom!
Rupturing the mid-day gloom.
Crackle, smack, sup, whip,
A bolt, a flash, I bite my lip.
Breeze, calm, warm rays,
With joy I run to meet the day!
Pouring, drenched, soaked to the bone,
Twas just a pause, I should've known.

Christopher Hanks, 14

MY FINGERPRINT

Like waves splashing in the ocean,
A glacier running down a mountain,
Like a confusing maze hard to escape,
Like sound waves echoing through the air.
My Fingerprint.

Cory Farley, 12

MISSING YOU

Every night,
I go to bed,
I am missing you.

Everyday,
I go to play,
I am missing you.

I wish for you,
to come home,
but you're never there.

All my life,
I look for you,
my darling daddy.

Erica Ware, 12

MY WINTER MEMORIES

As winter comes on I see the frost more and more. It is like a downy quilt on everything you see. Soon the first light snows will fall. All I feel will be soft and cold to the touch. When I look around me all I see is white like the gentle, cascading silks on a Queen's gown that rules an enchanted kingdom. The remaining grasses and flowers are covered with the hair of angels, as the song of the winter birds float dreamily through the air.

Now we are progressing to the middle months of winter when we will have the heaviest snows. Everything is blanketed over with this special feather as all things lay undisturbed by the quiet and peaceful spectators standing about surveying the beautiful winter scene. The friends and family members in the neighborhood bundle up in their warmest coats and hats, scarves and gloves. We all troop up to the church hill. The pristine whiteness nearly blinds us as we walk the quarter mile to the best sledding spot in Spanaway. Even though we are there before eight o'clock in the morning, the hill is already overflowing with sledders and thrill seekers. When I stand at the top of the hill I can smell the pine from the evergreen trees, the hot chocolate, and the hot apple cider. All these blend and swirl around me, making me feel cozy, even in the outdoors. As I look, I see everyone sliding down or walking up the perfect hill. When they get to the top with their faces nearly frozen they are ready for more. The nippy wind stings my face as I travel faster and faster down the hill. Cheers and applause erupt from the top as I sled the farthest down without running into someone or collapsing on the steep hillside. The solitary evergreen tree is the only object not disturbed by the many fun-loving kids. The snow that fell the night before clings gracefully to the majestic limbs creating a delicate spiderweb-like appearance. Toward the end of the day, the hill slowly empties as

everyone begs one last ride down the hill before they begin the slippery walk home. Finally the hill is quiet, waiting for the next exuberant, but frozen, faces.

When I finally arrive home, my mom, who usually does not go sledding, has pots of fresh hot cocoa and coffee waiting for everyone. Then for an hour or so we all sit down around the table exchanging stories of the day. After a while mom sends us all to bed, then she and Daddy will sit up long into the night on the couch by the fire, drinking coffee, eating popcorn, and talking quietly to each other.

The next day the snow is crisp from the midnight frost. It is like walking on the sugar cornflakes my mother buys at the grocers around the corner. Early, before the rest of the street comes alive, my siblings and I are already building snow forts to block the pelting snowballs that our uncle is sure to deliver. While my sister and I are preparing the fort to last at least through the worst of the attack, my brothers are storing away our secret supply of artillery. It is sure to surprise anyone that gets within firing distance. After the fort is finished we head back inside to get our breakfast and hot cocoa and to thaw out our limbs that were quickly frozen in the morning air. As we are finishing breakfast, my brother happens to look out the French doors that lead to the back porch. Uncle Ricky and his gang are sneaking around the backyard trying to find the best position to throw the snow weapons that they have brought. Quickly my troops slip out the door and into our fort! Before our opponents know what has happened, we are pummeling them with tightly packed snow missiles until they retreat to the trees that surround our property. For the first time in years we have finally surprised and defeated our adversary in the snow.

Even when all else is frozen, my heart is always warm with the precious memories of winter, memories I will carry all through my life.

Amy Willis, 13

IT'S NOT AS IT SEEMS

In the vague memories of my earliest childhood I remember my mother, my two brothers, and my sister. I have no memory of my father. One day my mother called me away from a game of Hide and Seek I was playing with my siblings and asked me to sit down. She then told me something that I didn't understand at the time, but soon after, I found out. She told me that soon I would have to look out for myself, she would count on me to be responsible and try to accept anything that happened. Looking at me with glistening eyes she told me to go play as she turned and walked sadly in the other direction.

The next day a man came and took one of my brothers away. We were taking naps and I woke to the sound of my brother groggily calling out in surprise. The man had picked my brother up, saying soothing words all the time, and walked out the door while my mother watched sadly. I never saw my brother again.

A few days later a couple came to our house while my brother, sister and I were eating. They waited until we were done and then watched us for a few minutes while we played. The woman then squatted down next to my sister and started talking to her. Once she had gained her trust, the woman picked her up and walked out of the room. The man then started to walk towards me. When I realized what was happening, I tried to get away but he caught me easily. Then he took me out to his car. He put me inside next to my very wide-eyed and confused little sister who I tried to comfort at the same time I tried to calm myself.

The couple treated us well, we lived in a large, two-story house, we ate more than we had before and we were overall well treated. Although nothing was wrong, I persisted in my efforts to find something wrong with our situation. I tried to convince

myself that my mother had tried to get us back, but I knew in my heart that she had stood there and watched us go. My sister grew to love the place we lived and forgot about our old life. I tried to tell her that they had brain-washed her, but the words sounded immature to my own ears. As time went on, I realized that I, also, was beginning to forget the finer details of our life before we had gone to live there.

After a few years I had totally lost all resentment of my situation and was really enjoying my life. Then one day something happened to change my happy world. The Andersons, which was the couple's name, had taken my sister to the doctor a few days before because she had been continuously sick for over a month. That day they received the results to some tests they had done on my sister, the results were not good. They took her to the hospital and the doctors tried, but a few days later I realized that she would probably never come home again. A while later my worst fears became reality.

After she died I became bitter and resented everything. I knew that the main reason I had come to accept my now-happy life was my sister. She was the one who, at every time I tried to doubt it, used her oftentimes maddening logic to calm me down and make me see reason. I realized that I missed my sister more than I ever thought it possible.

The Anderson's everpresent compassion and understanding started to wear thin when I began to deliberately get into trouble. Even more so when I started to hate everyone and everything around me just in spite. On one sunny afternoon I did it, I crossed the line. Mrs. Anderson was cleaning the house because they were having company over. I watched her carefully dust a very expensive and cherished vase and then walk into another room to answer the phone. For a few minutes I sat there and looked at the vase

thoughtfully. The colors changed ever so slightly as the sun went behind some passing clouds and the room darkened. As if in slow motion, I walked toward the vase and knocked it over.

The crash, as the vase landed, brought Mrs. Anderson at a run into the room. She took in everything in one glance and then let her gaze rest on me. I was at a loss for anything to do, so I just stood there and looked back at her. She walked toward me slowly and then she hit me. Not hard enough to hurt me, but it shocked me more than any pain could have. She had never done anything like that before.

For a few days I thought long and hard about what had happened, not just about the vase but about a lot of things that had happened. I remembered my mother telling me to accept my situation, whatever it was, and to be responsible. My sister, had taught me to let go of the past, be happy in the present and look forward to the future. I realized that my behavior had been totally unacceptable and the Andersons were probably the most caring and patient people in the world for putting up with me for so long. I decided that I would change, that I would learn from my many mistakes.

One night after dinner, I watched as Mr. Anderson sat down on the couch and turned on the television and as Mrs. Anderson turned the dishwasher on and sat down on the couch beside him. She picked up her book and started to read. Gathering my courage, I decided I would show them that I was sincere in my efforts to change my behavior. I slowly walked over to where they were sitting and in a final act of courage, jumped up onto Mrs. Anderson's lap, snuggled into the crook of her arm, and started purring.

WHEN IN ROME

I remember the day this whole affair started. My sister Juno was coming back from the temple of Venus after offering a sacrifice in hopes of finding a husband. She was 18 and still not married. It's not that she's ugly or anything. She has long, black hair, olive skin, and beautiful blue eyes. It's that she has the smartest mouth on this side of Rome. One of her numerous suitors started crying when she told him how much she despised him.

Well, back to the story. As we walked back to our domus, or town-house, we bumped into my friend Tiberius' brother, Marcus Tacticus. He's 19, tan, black-haired and charming. He has almost as sharp a tongue as Juno. Every time they saw each other, insults would fly. I've heard them call each other everything from air-head to zebra-droppings.

So I thought she hated Marcus. You can only imagine my surprise when I found several scrolls with poetry dedicated to him. I showed these to Tiberius, and his jaw nearly hit the floor. It turns out both our families thought that Juno hated Marcus. Tiberius told me that Marcus acts the same way Juno does when they're around each other.

Somehow, we had to get these stubborn lovebirds together. I knew it wouldn't be easy, but this is the happiness of my sister we're talking about!

So the next day I had Juno take me to visit Tiberius. It was like pulling teeth to get her to go. She was saying. "The Tacticus household! Isn't that where Marcus lives? Why would I take the chance of bumping into that sort of a camel?"

“Don’t worry. I won’t be long visiting Tiberius.” I said.

“Well, okay Juvenile.” Said Juno to me.

Luckily, only Marcus and Tiberius were home. Their mother always gives Juno dirty looks. Well anyway, Marcus answered the door. He said, “Well, look who the cat dragged in. If it isn’t Juno and her brother Juvenile.”

“Oh, why don’t you shut up, you cuckold!” Juno said.

I went inside and found Tiberius taking a nap. I woke him up and said, “Guess who’s outside insulting your brother?”

“Oh, you brought Juno. Look, I have something to show you. It’s about a month old, but look at what is written.”

It was a piece of papyrus, with Marcus and Juno Tacticus scrawled on it several times. So I said, “Yes! This is exactly what I needed to see! Tomorrow, take Marcus to the temple of Venus at two o’clock, okay? I’ll bring the mouth - er, Juno, and they can meet. Got it?” “Got it.”

As we left, I asked Juno if I could go around the marketplace and pick up a few things. So she gave me a large sum of money and I was well on my way. I bought a bouquet of flowers, hired several musicians and a singer. I told them to be at the temple of Venus at two and told them to say that they were hired courtesy of Marcus Tacticus.

But it turns out that Tiberius had an even better plan. He ran over and told me that Marcus had been hit hard in the head and was unconscious. He said everyone thought he was going to die. When I told Juno this, her eyes stared to mist and she said, “We

have to go over there. Fetch the chariot and driver. Come on, pea-brain! Lets move!"

Tiberius opened the door for us and told us to be very, very quiet. We walked down the hallway to Marcus' room. Juno whispered, "Can I go in there alone please? I promise I won't do any harm."

So she went in and sat beside him on the bed. We opened the door just enough to see and hear what was going on. Juno said.

"Oh Marcus! Please don't leave me!" she sobbed.

"I know it seems like I despise you, but I don't. Oh, I have loved you since I first laid eyes on you. Sure, I would call you names, insult you, and even hit you once in a while, but it was only because I wasn't sure how you felt for me! I knew that I would never face rejection from you, so I tried to hide my feelings. I love you."

Then she kissed him on the lips. Marcus said,

"I heard every word you said."

"So you're not injured?"

"I never was. Who said that I was?"

"Tiberius did. He ran over and told Juvenile and I that you were on the brink of visiting Hades!"

"That little devil! He must have known how I felt for you. I always loved you too, Juno."

It kept on going like this for a while. All that mushy stuff started to get to us. So we ran down the hallway, tripped and fell. We both broke our legs.

So now we can't participate in the games going on at our school. If those two hadn't have been in love and too stubborn to do anything about it, I would have won that race and have the teacher put those laurels on my head...

The End

Yolanda Ramirez, 14

HEART AND “SOLE” OR “BOOTIFUL” BETTY

Gus and Cornelius lay quietly in their lonely box. They are tan and firm with sturdy laces and their soles are dark and durable. Gus is fun loving, daring, dangerous. Cornelius is quiet, he keeps to himself. But when he does speak, his words are sharp, intelligent, and stubborn. No, Gus and Cornelius are not people, they are not animals either. Gus and Cornelius are simply shoes.

“Being a size eleven is so uncomfortable!” Gus grumbled. We hardly fit into this silly box!”

“Well Gus if you want my opinion...”

“And I don’t” cut Gus.

“As I was saying my opinion is that if we weren’t size eleven then who would be? And besides that...”

Gus drifted off to sleep as practical old Cornelius rambled on about the joys of being a size eleven. When Gus awoke, he discovered that he was no longer in the shoe box and, for that matter, not in the store at all.

“Cornelius?” he asked, “Cornelius?!?!”

“Whatever is the matter, my dear Gus?”

“Cornelius, where are we?!?!”

“We happen to be in Mr. Vatalinskies’s closet. While you were asleep, Mr. Vatalinskies came to the department store and purchased us. He said he needed a new pair of work boots dearly! You should have heard what happened to the last ones! They-well, never mind. It’s too gruesome!”

Gus looked around and found himself face to face with a

black leather dress shoe. "Who are you?" he asked.

"My name is William," the shoe said in a high snooty voice. "And this is my twin brother James," he said indicating an identical polished shoe.

"Hello," James replied.

"Oh boy," Gus thought, "this is going to be a long night."

Gus met many different shoes, but the one he enjoyed the most would have to be Bert. Bert was a bright blue and yellow tenny runner with slightly frayed chartreuse laces. He liked Bert for his honesty, boldness, and his annoying other shoe Bart. Not that Gus liked Bart, but he could relate to Bert and his impossible "sole mate." Bert and Cornelius were friends at first step.

Now, Gus and Cornelius had been living at Mr. Vatalinskie's house for some time and were getting tired of the same old company. The two shoes needed to meet some new faces.

One day after a long day's hike in the mountains with Mr. Vatalinskie, something bright and reviving caught Gus' eye--a beautiful purple pump (size seven of course) resting on Mrs. Vatalinski's foot. The sight was refreshing! Obviously, the pump had noticed Gus also and gave him a wink along with a big toothy grin! It was love at first step! The pump walked away, leaving Gus soft puddle of leather.

"I've just got to meet her!!!" Gus exclaimed.

"Why Gus, what on earth is the matter!?"

"What is the matter?! WHAT IS THE MATTER?!?!?!?!?!? I've just met the shoe of my dreams and you are asking me what's the matter?!"

“Well Gus, you’ll have to excuse me--I’ve just climbed a mountain!”

“I don’t care if you just climbed 5,000 mountains, Cornelius! When it comes to love--there are no excuses!”

Cornelius gave Gus a cold, blank stare. “Gus,” he said, “I don’t know what’s the matter with you, but we’ve got to get you to the shoemaker, and we’ve got to do it fast!”

When Gus and Cornelius met up with the other shoes in the closet, they had quite a story to tell! Gus told Bert about the beautiful pump that he had seen, and Cornelius whined to Bert about Gus’ love sickness.

All of a sudden Gus had a brilliant idea. “Bert, we are so stupid!” exclaimed Gus. “Why don’t we go into Mrs. Vatalinskies’ closet tonight so we can meet a few female shoes!”

“Hey, hey, hey, Gus, I like your thinking!” Bert bubbled.

“Okay,” whispered Gus, “but we can’t tell any of the other shoes--we don’t want to get into trouble!”

“Good thinking,” Bert gushed. “We’ll leave tonight at about ten.” And that’s just what they did. At exactly 10:22 the two shoes left for the closet. In approximately seven minutes, they arrived. Gus knocked but no reply came. He knocked again, still no answer. So the two shoes burst right in and found themselves face to face with a suede loafer. “What, may I ask, are you doing here?” she demanded in an exasperated whisper.

“Ummmm.... I’m, uh, Gus, and this is my friend Bert.”

“Howdeedoo!” Bert blurted. “Umm, I’m looking for a purple pump. Do you know where I could-”

“Looking for someone?” a voice cut in. Gus looked up finding himself inches away from the extravagant, violet beauty.

“Ohh, uhh, hello! My name’s Gus and I couldn’t help noticing you this afternoon.”

“Ohhhhh!” the slightly flushed purple shoe exclaimed. “My name is Betty,” she whispered.

Gus and Betty had a very interesting conversation and decided to meet regularly Wednesday nights from 10:30 to 12:00. After three months of meetings, Gus and Betty were engaged to be married on the following Sunday in the rose garden while the Vatalinskies were at church.

Finally, the day of the wedding arrived. Gus had purchased brand new white shoelaces and was polished to perfection. Betty was all decked out with a new fragrant odor eater and a beautiful white lace stocking. Betty’s best friend Clementine was to be the clog of honor and Bert the best boot. Cornelius was appointed the job of minister because of his highly advanced speaking abilities.

“Ladies and Gentlemen,” Cornelius pronounced. “We are gathered here to celebrate the joining of Gus and Betty in holy matrimony...”

Gus let out a long, happy sigh. This was going to be the happiest day of his life. And with Betty at his side and Cornelius’ blessing, it was.

Katrina Woldseth, 12

SING TO ME, O SHINING SURF

Sing to me, O shining surf, crashing on the sparkling sand
Let me hear the poem you chant, let it echo through the land.

Let it clap against the rocks that line your craggy shore
Let its melody enchant me; let my soul begin to soar.

Caress me, O my blazing sun, and kiss my silken skin
Warm me until you sink below the mountainside again.

Speak to me, O whisp'ring wind, what secrets do you keep?
Lull me with your soothing song and wish me off to sleep.

And as I sleep, I know I'll dream of music of the sea
And feel it linger in my soul, a drifting melody.

Stacy Marie Essman, 18

DISGRACE

But now the stark honesty of winter
seeps into our blood,
shaming the lies,
humbling the passion.

a solitary silhouette-
in the grace of a birch,
we see the silent endurance of sorrow

a careless summer retreats,
broken,
guilty,

and our eyes betray the unfaithfulness.

Emily Parker, 15

THE PLAYHOUSE

Above the buttercups and tall grass a shed,
the old playhouse, stands.

A cherry and plum tree live on each side to keep company
and shade the primed siding that now grows green from
rain and fallen fruit.

Lace curtains hang through a glass window and cover the inside
where jumps sagged the plywood floor and little hands
swung the rafters loose.

Rain begins to fall and forms pools on the sunken roof,
bowed inward from summers when we sat on the shingles
and ate Rainier cherries.

The top half of the Dutch door is missing;
the other hangs by a rusty hinge.

Once we swung it loose, and now the wind swings it back
and forth and sways the faded curtains.

Once in a while, the shed creaks and slams the door as if
to call children inside.

Anna Stafford, 17

CRYSTAL

Lifted from white earth along
a line we dangle like clothes.
Parasol trees fold under dust.
Ridges move steadily closer.
Woman before me has red hair
and a fluorescent green coat.
Gloves cling to metal bars.
Snow valleys rumple.
Looking right, sun hangs above
trees and presses mountain peaks.

Jeremy Voight, 18

THE KNOT

The mists whispered to her that morning as she sat upon her favorite rock to feel the sun take its place over the sea. Like every other day, she had driven her father's flock to the high grasslands. And, like every other day, she felt the call of the mists, so thick and close she could feel them caress her face. This wasn't like every other day though; the air trembled with something different.

She loved the mornings spent here, where the sea holds hands with the land. Only here was she free from the feeling her parents did not want her. Mother sighed with despair and longing whenever she entered the hut. Father always seemed frustrated with her. He had wanted a male child to attend village council. She tried to help, but hers was not the authoritative voice of a male. Only here, at the top of the world, could she release the burden of her cursed eyes. The gods had taken away her sight, but in this place she did not hate them for it. She was content to feel the morning sun, breathe the fresh dew, and let the breeze send tingles down her spine.

She stroked the carved knot on the string about her neck. She had found it while wandering these cliffs as a little girl. She couldn't play with others because of her lack of sight, but was content to feel the warmth of the sun and play unknown games with the pebbles in her hands.

She had always had small hands. She was born a slight child, with eyes so dark and haunting, even the wisest elders felt as if her unseeing gaze was piercing their hearts as they laid their blessing upon the dark-haired baby. They named her Freya in honor of the Celtic goddess of compassion.

The bleating of a sheep returned her thoughts to the present. She followed its cry, letting the change in the coolness of the ground tell her if she was too close to the cliff's edge. After releasing a wild thorn that had wrapped itself around the sheep's leg, she again traced the knot. It was sleek and cool, for it had been expertly carved of smooth stone. However, the carver had made a mistake; there was a part that broke the symmetry. The unmatched pattern was an unanswered question. Freya just kept the knot around her neck, tied with the first thread she had spun.

She remembered how the other girls were envious of her even thread. Her hands told her everything that her eyes could not. Somehow, though, their girlish taunts had drawn to Freya's awareness that spinning was not her "calling."

The new day began to warm her back, the mists could no longer be felt. It was time to return to the village. She pried herself away from her peaceful place and began across the plain of dancing grass. Again, she traced the knot. This time, she felt a quiver. Then it seemed to be burning with energy where it hung. Something was not right. She clutched the knot and let her feet fly toward the village.

She was aching for air, and her feet had felt so many stones they no longer could feel the path. She stopped for a fleeting moment, only to feel the knot, urging her on. A strange heat was in the air and she smelled the cooking fires. She took a deep dose of the now acrid air and her feet pounded the earth harder, carrying her closer. The fire smell was even stronger, as through she were right next to it, and the heat grew more intense. Then she knew.

The whole village must have been swallowed by the cooking fire. As she neared the village, she heard the commotion and felt

her heart leap into her throat. Everyone was running and the heat was unbearable. The smoke filled her lungs. She was almost to her hut. She reached for its cool stones and circled it to find the door. She was almost there. She felt the heat biting her feet and hands and face. She heard her own scream, then felt herself falling.

Everything vanished. The hut, the heat, the noise. Quiet coolness remained. The knot was in her mind, tracing itself over and over. Freya struggled to turn away, but it held her there, tracing and tracing. She remembered running, flying, the knot burning, her hut burning. She was searching for a missing part, but couldn't identify it. She felt the familiar mists, but they were not. Finally, the search was over. The knot was right, the pattern appeared. Strength surged and pulsed all around her, like the mists, and swelled up inside her. She felt herself struggling to cross the line, the line between the mists and home, sleep and wakefulness. She traced the knot in her mind once again and awakened.

There was a man there. He smelled of the sea and the grass and the wind; she accepted him immediately, even though she could not recall how she knew him. She could feel the presence of her mother and father, her father was radiating a sadness that hung in the air like the mists. Freya opened her eyes. It was bright and a shudder went through her. This must be seeing. She could see. The gods had removed the curse and now not only could she feel her mother and father, but she saw how tall and powerful her father was. She did not know where her mother was, though.

She strained to get up. The stranger helped her. He was small in comparison to her father and had dark hair and amber eyes that saw into eternity. She looked from him to her father who was kneeling by a woman laying on a skin. This woman was her mother. Freya looked at the small man and seemed to know his thoughts. They were strong, but sincere.

Freya, you are one of us, the Faery people. Your life until this point has been preparing you for your real work in the world of men. You are to be a healer -- both in body and spirit. Take this gift of sight with you always for it is not only in your eyes, but in your heart.

Out loud, he spoke, "Welcome, Freya of the Faery. There is much work for you to do." He placed something cool in her hand.

Without thinking she tied the knot back around her neck, and traced it with her finger. Then she saw the knot reflected like the surface of the lake; there was the same knot about the strong neck of the stranger. She read knowledge in his eyes and kindness in his heart and knew that this man was her real father. She acknowledged him with all her heart. He gazed at her mother as Freya knelt beside her. She found burns on her face and shoulder. Freya traced the shape of the knot on the burns and they vanished.

Freya of the Faery, now a Healer, traced the knot once more.

Jennifer Grant, 16

THE CREATURE IN THE ALLEY

The woman's quick footsteps made a hollow echo; the claps of her cheap high-heeled boots broke the eerie silence of the empty alleyway; empty, except for the creature. The woman whose name tag said "Janeane" pulled her tan raincoat tighter about her in a vain attempt to ward off the penetrating chill. She knew it was foolish for a young woman such as her to pass through a dark alley at night, but she was tired and it was a good shortcut that would save her much time. From its concealed vantage point in the shadow of a garbage can, the creature stared at her.

The small woman stared about her at the trash collected in piles here and there next to the mass of over-filled dumpsters and garbage cans, forming mountains of foul refuse stacked against the slimy walls of the decaying buildings to either side of the cobblestoned way: empty soft drink cups and crumpled up hamburger wrappers; used condoms and discarded hypodermic needles; old newspapers wet and soggy with the ever present moisture of early spring. From that same moisture, pools of putrid water festering with the pollution of motor oil and the stale urine of the homeless collected in the low spots of the alleyway. All of this was made visible to her by the dull light of a pale gibbous moon. By this light, Janeane saw everything; everything but the creature. A light drizzle could be detected in the air, evidenced by the thin patina of cool droplets which covered the creature's hairy face and by the quiet pitter-patter of water running down the sides of the old brick buildings through pipes rusty and covered with the little holes of disrepair.

From beneath the perforated sewer grate and to the ears of both Janeane and the creature there came the faint squeal of sewer rats; their massive bodies pained for the lack of food. The rats

made do in these grim times with small nibbles of half eaten hamburgers or molding pieces of discarded pizza scrounged from among the refuse of the dark alley. Only the industrious sounds of their inhabitancy of the sewer kept the solitary creature company on lonely nights such as this.

The staccato rhythm of Janeane's hurried steps came louder and louder to the waiting creature's sensitive ears as she drew closer and closer to its concealed position. As she came almost directly adjacent the shadowed spot where the creature lay crouched in silent waiting, it decided to make itself known in the hope that she might take it home with her. Nudging the rusty garbage can which created the thick, dark shadow in which it lay concealed, the creature sent its dented lid tumbling down to the cobblestones below, where it landed with a resounding din. As the lid crashed to the ground, Janeane's body froze stiffly in sudden terror. Her once dulled wits, tired from a long day's hard work, were instantly replaced with the heightened instincts that her species had once relied heavily upon.

The first thing her wary eyes saw as the beast emerged slowly from its abandoned resting place of old clothing were its yellow ones staring unblinkingly back at her with a haunting, phosphorescent glow. This sight sent Janeane into a fit of terror. Her eyes of deepest midnight widened to their farthest limits and her delicate jaw dropped sharply downwards, causing her mouth to open up in a silent scream of terror. As the sinuous body of the watcher came farther and farther into the pale moonlight Janeane saw all that it was, wet and matted fur, sharp and pointed fangs. Shortly, however, her mouth and eyes steadily relaxed and a thankful smile of relief spread across her embarrassed face. She elicited a short chuckle, turned her covered head away and once again resumed her hurried pace.

The stray cat stood silently in the dark alley for some time and watched her fade away into the cold and gloomy distance. Then, with a mournful “Meow” of parting sent unanswered into the night, the lonely little animal crawled sadly back into its cold bed of abandoned clothes and said goodbye to a love that it would never know.

Brad Powell, 17

JUST BETWEEN YOU AND ME

Miss Leslie Fenster, high school English teacher, sat at her desk and shook her head. In her hand was a piece of notebook paper, covered in the scrawling handwriting of two of her students. Miss Fenster frowned and read it one more time.

Emily: Let's skip P.E. and go to the mall.

Ariana: Nah. I like P.E.

Emily: Oh, come on, where's your sense of adventure.

Ariana: I sold it to a longshoreman who wanted to be a ballerina. He gave me a Nose for Trouble.

Emily: I think you have enough trouble with the nose you already have.

Ariana: Well, I didn't keep the nose. I traded it to a bored Buddhist monk for some Inner Peace.

Emily: I'd settle for some out pe...

The word was never finished because that was when Miss Fenster had snatched the paper from under Emily's pen.

For Miss Fenster the English language was a clear and precise tool through which the world could be placed into an orderly system of adverbs, prepositional phrases, and punctuation. Miss Fenster took a dim view of creativity; it had a way of disrupting the system. Miss Fenster looked over her glasses at Emily and Ariana. Emily was watching the dust settle in a sunbeam. Ariana was blowing pink, highly irritating, bubbles.

"Emily, you may go. Tomorrow you will have a paper about our school's absentee policy on my desk." Emily grimaced at her friend, slung her back-pack over shoulder and hurried out of the room.

“Now then, Ariana. What is the meaning of this?” Miss Fenster waved the paper back in forth.

“Please define your pronoun, Miss Fenster,” replied Ariana sweetly. The muscles along Miss Fenster’s jaw tightened.

“Ariana, what is the meaning of the nonsense you wrote on this piece of paper?”

“It isn’t nonsense.”

“Do you expect me to believe that you sold your sense of adventure? Ariana, a sense of adventure is not a tangible object. You cannot sell a non-tangible object.” Miss Fenster looked sternly at Ariana.

“You mean education is a tangible object?” Ariana’s face was innocent, but her eyes twinkled just a bit too much. Miss Fenster opened her mouth to riposte, but Ariana cut her off. “You know what you need, Miss Fenster, is a Sense of Humor. I know where I can get one, real cheap.” Ariana leaned forward and stretched her face into a smile that a used car salesman would have paid for.

Miss Fenster was uncomfortable. This was not the way after-school conferences were supposed to go. Ariana had a chaotic influence on the mind.

“I don’t need a...” Miss Fenster turned her head, trying to disconnect her eyes from Ariana’s. “I don’t need a sense of humor.” Miss Fenster fixed her eyes determinedly on her desk and shuffled through some papers. “I certainly wouldn’t be silly enough to pay for one.” Ariana stood up and slinked over to Miss Fenster’s desk. Gently, she removed the papers from Miss Fenster’s nervous fingers.

“You know what? I’m going to make you a deal. I’ll lend you my Sense of Humor for the next twenty-four hours. Free of charge. And if by this time tomorrow you aren’t perfectly convinced that you want a sense of humor for our very own, I will never trouble you or your class again. What do you say Miss Fenster?” Ariana held out her hand, ready to shake.

Miss Fenster could never say afterwards just what came over her. She would only say that her hand had slowly risen, without any direction from her mind, and shaken Ariana’s hand.

“You won’t regret this, Miss Fenster. Trust me.” Ariana picked up her bag and walked out of the room without being dismissed, but Miss Fenster didn’t even notice. After a while, Miss Fenster locked her room, went to her car and drove to the grocery store. In the store she absentmindedly selected a cart and wheeled it down the produce isle. It wasn’t until the frozen food section that Miss Fenster began to notice the difference. Two ancient women stood next to the yogurt, gabbing about injuries and insults.

One said “Yes, it’s true, that nasty dog bit me right below the coffee shop.”

Miss Fenster found herself giggling all the way into the chips and soda aisle. There a man, with nothing but vegetables in his cart, was buying four bags of pigskins. Next to him a woman picked up two tins of bean dip and placed them in her cart next to a bottle of Pepto Bismol. After the toilet paper aisle Miss Fenster abandoned her cart and drove home.

The next morning Miss Fenster was late for the staff meeting. She had started watching a Bugs Bunny cartoon and hadn’t been

able to tear herself away. However, when she explained her lateness to Mrs. Smith, the head of the English department, she merely got an uncomprehending glare for her pains. And then Miss Fenster had the temerity to laugh at Mr. Tarlton, the P.E. teacher, and one of his jokes. Miss Fenster got the feeling that she'd be making the English department coffee for the next two months.

Miss Fenster hurried through the day, anxiously awaiting fifth period and Ariana. Although in second period, she did pause long enough to laugh out loud at Joe, the class clown. The students whispered among themselves that either the world was ending or Miss Fenster was headed for the Western State Mental Hospital.

Fifth period came, and then went. The bell rang and the class rushed away like the tide, leaving Ariana behind like an immovable rock.

"So, Leslie." purred Ariana steeping her fingers. "How did you like having a Sense of Humor?"

"It was nothing but trouble!" exclaimed Miss Fenster, ignoring the use of her first name. "I laughed at complete strangers in the grocery store, Mrs. Smith thinks I'm insane, Mr. Tarlton said we should get together sometime, and now Joe thinks he can get away with his shenanigans, just because they happen to be funny! A sense of humor is nothing but trouble!" Miss Fenster paused, realizing that she had just uttered a run-on sentence.

"Leslie, you're not looking at things from the right point of view. Think how boring life is without humor. I mean, when was the last time you had that much fun at a grocery store. As for the teachers, well, Mrs. Smith thinks everyone is insane and Mr. Tarlton is king of cute."

“What about Joe?” Miss Fenster asked sullenly.

“You’re more than a match for Joe. Trust me.” Ariana smiled her predator smile. “Leslie, can you honestly tell me that you’d like to live your life without a Sense of Humor? Go ahead, picture it. A whole life of nasty children, boring people, stupid jokes, oddly shaped vegetables just being oddly shaped vegetables... The list goes on. Do you really want to be that bored for the rest of your life?” Miss Fenster shifted uncomfortably in her chair. The she raised her eyes and whispered “This doesn’t leave the room, right?”

“It’s just between you and me.” Then Ariana smiled. “Now let’s talk about price.”

Bethany Maines, 19

NO FARE

There were not as near as many taxis in Seattle as there were back in New York. It took me fifteen minutes just to get one at the hotel. Usually there are taxis around a hotel like lawyers on an injury accident. But not in Seattle, especially at Thrifty Sleep hotel.

When the taxi pulled up I was relieved to get out of the cool drizzle. I took a seat in the back. The taxi driver was a middle-aged man, clean cut, glasses. He looked like a bachelor, like me. He wasn't too talkative, yet not too withdrawn. In New York the taxi drivers scared me. No matter what they do, they make me feel uncomfortable. But this one wasn't like the cabbies in New York.

"Where to, pal?"

"The Kingdome," I indicated quietly. I wasn't good with people, I've always known that was a fault of mine. But somehow this cab driver made me feel different. I felt like I could tell him my deepest secrets. He was almost a counselor, a bartender might be a better example.

"What's going on up at the dome?" he asked.

"An investor's seminar, this is the second day. I'm going to be rich someday." I never would have said this to anyone, but for some reason I found my self opening up to him.

"I got an uncle, Uncle James Brunette, me and my brothers always called him Uncle J. He bought himself some stocks and now he's pretty well off," he replied in a friendly tone.

“Yeah, yesterday was kind of a pep talk, a motivational thing, today they’re gonna tell us the companies to invest in. This guy, Maurice Green, he’s a smart man. He knows where to put his money. He knows how to make more too, charging twenty thousand men two hundred dollars to go to the conventions,” I stated, almost as if I was boasting about Mr. Green. I grinned a corny grin. The driver smiled.

I knew it was only a short drive to the Kingdome. It had awed me when I first saw it. I’ve never been inside a big domed stadium like that before.

“Shoot, I missed the exit. Sorry ‘bout that. Tell you what, this ride’s on me,” he said, “I wouldn’t want you to have to pay extra because of my stupid mistake.”

“Thank you, no problem,” I replied enthusiastically.

“So, what’s your name?” he questioned boldly.

“Robert, Robert Lee Papp,” I responded with a confidence I had never seen in myself before.

“My name’s Allan Sparks, but you can call me Al. We might as well get to know each other. It’s going to be a long ride.”

I wondered what he meant by that.

“When do we get off? The Kingdome must be five miles away.” My friendliness had worn off and I was beginning to get irritated. He didn’t reply, he just turned around, smiled and winked at me.

We weren't in Seattle any more. The city had gradually begun to stop. We were driving north on I-5. "Hey, do you think you could take me to the dome now? I'm late."

"I can't turn around now," he said, "you'll just have to wait." His smile wore off and the dark side of Allan was showing. I looked in his eyes through the rear view mirror. All I could see was evil.

Ten more minutes passed. I began to get scared, "Just get off at the next exit and I'll find my way there," I demanded firmly.

"Mr. Papp, don't worry about it; this rides on me," he hissed softly in a snakelike voice. It was then I knew I would never make it to the Maurice Green's Investor's Seminar. The minutes passed, they were going by so slowly. We drove by a city called Everett. I was getting goosebumps. I was truly afraid for my life.

I considered my possibilities. How could I escape? As soon as the car stopped, at a red light or something, I would open the door and jump out. But cars don't stop on the freeway unless someone makes them stop. This time I shouted. I had lost my patience, "Stop the car! I want out!"

"But Robert, I have something very special to show you. I can give you what you want." These were words of a mad man! My blood felt like it was boiling. I knew this man was going to try to kill me. I had to stop him. I would just wait until he stopped the car.

The evil wore off his face and he again looked like the jolly man I'd known before he took me on this ride. "Do not be afraid Mr. Papp. Please be patient. I'm going to give you something

Maurice Green could never give you,” he remarked in a voice almost too friendly. I didn’t know what was on his mind, but whatever it was, I didn’t want it. It scared me.

On a stretch of freeway, maybe fifteen minutes after we passed the city called Everett, we exited. We drove on a barren two-lane road, no cars anywhere, a perfect place for him to stop and have his way with me, whatever that may be. I was sweating like I had never sweated in all my games of tennis. He drove ten more minutes and turned off that road, onto a smaller, well-kept road. It looked like it was a driveway or something. “This is where he was going to kill me,” I thought. I panicked! I looked the back seat over for things to defend myself. Nothing! I was a dead man! I put my head in my hands and began to cry. I noticed something. It was then I knew what I could do! I unbuttoned my pants, and pulled the drawstring out of my boxers. I would strangle Allan Sparks with it. I couldn’t let him get me first. He turned and looked me in the eyes as he carefully guided the taxi down the road, “I’m going to make you a very happy man. I’m going to show you something I’ve never shown anyone before. We’re almost there.” I cringed. This removed any doubt about what I had to do to him.

After he turned back towards the road I lifted each hand over his head and tightened the drawstring around his neck. He swiftly stopped the car, nearly knocking me through the windshield. But my grip remained. After a minute and a half or so he stopped struggling. I had killed him. I had saved my own life.

I got out of the car and took a deep breath. I looked down the road. There was a gate, where the road came to an end. There was a sign near it. I couldn’t quite make out the words. I walked down

maybe thirty yards. I looked at the sign again. I read it to myself aloud, “Brunette’s Elite Investing Company.”

“Good God,” I whispered to myself, “what have I done? He really did want to make me a happy man.”

Jeff Anderson, 15

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