



**PIERCE COUNTY
TEEN POETRY & FICTION WRITING CONTEST
POETRY WINNERS**

Poetry Winners (Grades 7-8)

First Place

A Winter Morning
Sammy Kodama
Charles Wright Academy, 7th Grade

Second Place

Different
Sarah Coe
Meeker Middle School, 8th Grade

Third Place

E Pluribus Unum
Emily Grover
Homeschool, 8th Grade

Poetry Winners (Grades 9-10)

First Place

Memories
Ginger Hany
Eatonville High School, 9th Grade

Second Place

Moon, Sun
Sarah Henry
Orting High School, 10th Grade

Third Place

Most Unsaid
Kelly Vincent
Gig Harbor High School, 10th Grade

Poetry Winners (Grades 11-12)

First Place

Why Drive into Dusk?
James Turner II
Gig Harbor High School, 12th Grade

Second Place

After Neruda
Emily Dale
Gig Harbor High School, 12th Grade

Third Place

Like a Dream But Not
Megan Sticha
Gig Harbor High School, 11th Grade



**PIERCE COUNTY
TEEN POETRY & FICTION WRITING CONTEST
FICTION WINNERS**

Short Story Winners (Grades 7-8)

First Place

Story Catcher
Amberose Kelley
Narrows View Intermediate School, 7th Grade

Second Place

Road to the Truth
Tami Kim
Hudtloff Middle School, 8th Grade

Third Place

Ovenous and Refrigeratous
Janelle Stavig
Aylen Junior High School, 8th Grade

Short Story Winners (Grades 9-11)

First Place

The Paper Crane
Laurel Kam
Steilacoom High School, 9th Grade

Second Place

Tanglewood
Amanda Stephens
Covenant High School, 9th Grade

Third Place

Caught in an Aqueduct
Hans Kvale
Covenant High School, 10th Grade

Short Story Winners (Grades 11-12)

First Place

Four Years in Isolation
Jeremy Glasco
Orting High School, 12th Grade

Second Place

The Flight of the Fleas
Jacob Anderson
Covenant High School, 11th Grade

Third Place

Crack of a Smile
Ian Beck
Sumner High School, 12th Grade

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2003

POETRY
Grades 7 & 8

A Winter Morning

.....

Swirling misty clouds,
Grey like winter morning,
Slowly swirl around,
The frost covered hills.

Lingering light mist,
Cloaks the frosty hill,
And the tree sprayed with
Tiny pearls of dew.

The crisp, light wind
Brings freshness to the air,
A whiff of spring,
On its journey here.

Sammy Kodama

CHARLES WRIGHT ACADEMY, 7TH GRADE

Different

I stepped into a room
where everyone was the same
they all were playing the exact same game.

In their gray suits and tuxes
with their shoes shining like the sun.
All the girl's hair was pulled into a bun.

They were gray,
but I, in vibrant, living color,
startled them into silence.

They look at me like I was strange, an alien among them.

Because I am, I am different,
I am me.

Sarah Coe

MEEKER MIDDLE SCHOOL, 8TH GRADE

E Pluribus Unum

Bestia
Wild beast

Stupor mundi
Wonder of the world

Ignus animus
Fiery spirit

Semper fidelus
Always faithful

Meis canis
My dog

Emily Grover

HOMESCHOOL, 8TH GRADE



2003

POETRY

Grades 9 & 10

Memories

With the lights dimmed
The old man
Rocks in his chair
Remembering the moments of
Yesterday
When cigars were
Just candy
And milk was delivered fresh
To the doorstep
With cream out the
Top
The rocking slowly stops
As the old man
Slips
Away into his
Memories

Ginger Hany

EATONVILLE HIGH SCHOOL, 9TH GRADE

Moon, Sun

He stares at his faint reflection in his silver puddle mirror.
Smiling at his pale roundness, he wonders if tonight he will see her.
Alas, she slips from his sight like the fading rays of the sun.
Perhaps, he sighs, she will return when another night is done.

She brightly awakens and turns her golden smile upon the earth.
She hopes her nights of dreaming tell the truth of her love's worth.
Sometimes, if the day is right, she senses a crescent of his presence.
Perhaps, she sighs, he will show his fullness in the day's absence.

Sarah Henry

ORTING HIGH SCHOOL, 10TH GRADE

Most Unsaid

Another winding discourse
Of left-to-minute tips of tongues
That swept us ever distant
In trying to melt the fog with
Our placebo words,
Attempts to reclaim the phrases
That sped unbidden out our mouths
To rest on the air like so many blows
And through my failing intentions slip—
To leave the most unsaid.

Kelly Vincent

GIG HARBOR HIGH SCHOOL, 10TH GRADE



2003

POETRY

Grades 11 & 12

Why Drive Into Dusk?

.....

Because driving into dusk
Kept the Cascade horizon
Still, peanut brittle golden
Like heavens edge;
And the gates are open.
Sunlight and it's drift
Plows the saffron sky,
Flaming geysers fire.

Because driving into dusk
Kept farmers farming
Till pin holes in the blackened
Canvas overtake the night
And farmers wake at dawn
When sunrays and moonlight merge.

James Turner II

GIG HARBOR HIGH SCHOOL, 12TH GRADE

After Neruda

Debajo de las sombras
de la ciudad,
En una calle oscura,
Llena de polvo, suciedad,
y ladrones,
Un viejo vende
las almas de los perdidos.

Están perdidos
de su camino,
De lo cierto,
De Dios.
Yo lo compré,
Y lo tomé a mi casa
en una caja pequeña.
Pero no podía ayudarlo.

Una noche, yo abrí la caja
Y miraba
mientras el espíritu,
Como una memoria olvidada,
Voló en el cielo.

Under the shadows
of the city,
In a dark street,
Full of dust and dirt
and thieves,
An old man sells
the souls of the lost.

They are lost
from their way,
From the truth,
From God.
I bought one,
And took it home
in a small box.
But I couldn't help it.

I opened the box one night
And watched
while the spirit,
Like a forgotten memory,
Flew into the sky.

Emily Dale

GIG HARBOR HIGH SCHOOL 12TH GRADE

Like a Dream But Not

.....

The worn, floral sofa sits in the same corner
Against the wood-paneled wall, across from
the tan blur of the second sofa. Comfortable.
She called them davenports. Shifting my gaze,
I note the wood framed photo of their wedding day
next to a black bible, lying open. John.
These things have never moved
from where they wait, still.

I close my eyes;
he sits and turns a fragile, gold-rimmed page
as she glides down the hall in her gauzy
pink nightgown. Familiar.
I open my eyes, about to grin,
as my gaze flies into eternity.

Megan Sticha

GIG HARBOR HIGH SCHOOL, 11TH GRADE



2003

SHORT STORIES
Grades 7 & 8

STORY CATCHER

There was once a smooth, green stone that sat on the ocean, just a day's sail past the sunrise, and slightly north of the end of the world. Once you neared the stone, it appeared to be a sea dragon, whose scales sparkled on the water as it basked in the sun. And then it wasn't a sea dragon, but a small island, covered in tangled hills of ancient trees, where drops of sunlight gathered on leaves and trickled into lazy streams that wound through the forest.

The first story was born here, though no one knows how. Some say those first stories were the dreams of stars, which before daylight escaped into the protective forest, safe under a thick cover of branches. Or perhaps they're the memories of the earth, rising from within her in the form of delicate flowers and gurgling brooks. Whether by stars or by earth, they first appeared on the island.

Only children lived there. Well, there were birds and beasts and bugs alike, but no grown-ups. Only dozens and dozens of sun-browned children, as wild and untamed as any jungle tiger or prowling leopard. They lived in stumps or under rocks, behind bushes or high, high up in the trees. They dressed in twisted vines and old brown leaves and never bothered with shoes. It was a wonderland, blissfully free of school, or time-out, itchy socks, or chores of any kind. Days were passed by chasing butterflies and splashing in creeks, scampering up trees and chattering with monkeys, laughing and playing and finally collapsing, exhausted from a hard day of fun, in giggling heaps on the forest floor.

I was Gaea, the Story Catcher, being the only one fast enough. Story catching is no easy business. Waking early every morning and dropping from my tree branch perch into the dew-covered grass, I would venture to the shell-strewn beach on the east side of the island. That's where my canoe was, just the right size for a little girl. Before the sun

even peeked sleepy-eyed over the horizon, you'd find me, paddling around. Looking for stories, really. Searching for traces of them in the water and on the shore, until I found the daily story-hunting spot. Great fun, I must admit, forest buzzing as it awakened and salty water sloshing against my paddles... every day was a bright one.

There are four different breeds, when it comes to stories. Each breed is as different as can be, and very much alike. It takes a true expert to track a story correctly, and to know exactly what you're tracking. You must know the types if you want to get anywhere.

To start, you've got classical stories. I hardly troubled with these, seeing as many of the children found them long and boring and difficult to understand. When I *did* happen to be in a classic mood, I'd usually find myself rummaging through dirt and stones and a whole assortment of worms that buried themselves in the forest floor. Don't ask me why. That's just where the classics seemed comfortable.

Next were the fables. I particularly like fables-especially useful when it came to teaching the younger ones their morals, if you know what I mean. Sure, we had a no-rule policy on the island, but when you constantly find a younger one stealing your mangoes and sleeping on your branch...it gets old.

Legends, the stories of the past and its heroes, I plucked from the sky, the oldest and most magnificent thing of all.

Fairy tales were the most loved by the children. Having a rather flowery personality, the typical fairy tale spends its time around the fragrant petals of roses, lilacs and orchids, of which there were plenty on the island.

Knowing your stories is one thing, but catching them is quite another. You have to be dead silent, and lightning fast. Stories can be tricky, too. I once followed a fairy tale for three days straight, only to find, upon catching it, that it was a legend, and of the very boring sort. Something about slugs. I hardly worried to look into it - it was so disappointing. And I had scraped my elbows and

knees raw, thanks to all my fruitless jumping and pouncing.

So, as I was saying, to catch a story, you need to be very quick. You have to know where to look, and what to look for. Usually it's a little glimmer in the undergrowth, or traces of a wispy cloud swirling over the water. I love that story-catching excitement, getting closer and closer, thinking "It's a fairy tale-no, a classic...definitely a fable. Hmmm...a fairy tale?" Creeping up a crooked baobab, parting the branches to peer down below... There! Floating just above the roots! Leaping, hands outstretched, catching the story up in a whirl and tumbling over before bringing my cupped hands to my mouth.

That was the very last step. I've heard you can use a story catching net-I've always used my hands. Some use bait-usually a bowl of fresh moonbeams. Stories love them. But however you go about the catching, there's only one thing to do with your story in the end; swallow it. Yes, it sounds dreadful. It sounds cruel. It might even sound a little disgusting, though I've always been fond of the taste. It doesn't harm the story though, oh no. Once swallowed, the story will go... up! Right into your head, where it stays until you chose to let it spill from your mouth.

This mouth spilling part I did every night at moonrise. Children would gather round, draped over the long slender branches of eucalyptus trees, or lying belly-down on the grass-not a buzz, not a whisper, to listen with wide eyes and open ears. Even the silver clouds would come down from their perches in the treetops, and the breeze would stop it's dancing to pay attention.

But that's all over now.

I've always been very good friends with the stars. Talk comes easy between us, though it is not always pleasant. The other night, they told me of a place, which is so lonely and dark, it's all they can manage to glimmer a little, let alone shine. This place, they say, is far, far over the sea. Children don't know how to laugh or play, tree climbing

and butterfly chasing are forbidden, and school is from dawn until dusk, with chores in between. Itchy socks are a requirement. Time-out is considered routine. And, due to the severe lack of happiness, there are no stories. A place without stories? It's too awful to imagine!

I'll be leaving soon. The moon has agreed to pour a pool of moonlight, to attract fables and fairytales. The stars say they will corral as many legends as possible. And I'm sure the worms will help me collect a few classics. Once I've gathered heaps of stories from the island, I'll journey to that gray, story less world, and give every one of those children a story of their own, so they might learn of parrotfish flashing rainbows in the sun, and white shells traced with mother of pearl. I think you know what will happen then.

Amberose Kelley

NARROWS VIEW INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL, 7TH GRADE

Road to the Truth

.....

It was a bright summer morning when there was a knock on the old man's door. "Who is it?" A hoarse voice greeted the visitor, with the door yanking open. "Mr. Minchul Kim?" The visitor tentatively asked. He was a middle-aged man. His face withered but his eyes bright. From his appearance, you could easily tell that he didn't really give a care about his daily attire. "May I have some words with you?" The old man was quite startled at his proposal. He was old, though hale and sinewy. Also, very not social. Destitute of the reasons to the refusal, he stepped aside for him to come in.

"I am Sang-Min Lee, the journalist," The visitor introduced himself, showing him a business card. Not noticing or ignoring the old man's inquiry look, he proceeded. "I came here to ask for your story." The old man's eyes were transfixed upon him. The visitor stared at him back, fully into the eyes. How many minutes had passed, nobody knows. For the visitor, it was just one of the time where a second contained eternity. Finally, the old man spoke, his voice calm but fiery.

"Mr. Lee, I don't like journalists, nor do I trust them. All they do is ripping off some stories from innocent people for money. No. I don't want to see you lingering around my house again." Without being realized, the visitor was shown to the door. The old man shut the door immediately, ignoring the journalist's open-mouthed face.

He closed his eyes, recalling the conversation they just had. This was ridiculous. Almost 20 years had passed since he defected his own country, risking his own life, to come down to South Korea. Since then, he'd rejected all the reporters and journalists who came to his door almost every day, until they lost the interest. It took almost a year to fully get rid of them. Why was this happening to him now?

Without knowing, he was retracing his memories back.

He was slowly hanged in gallows. Gagged, but not blindfolded. He was dying... at a snail's pace. I tried to look away yet couldn't take my eyes off his emaciated body. They made us throw rocks at him for more painful death.

"No," the old man said to himself. "I will not allow anyone to bring back my hidden memories." He knew that he wouldn't be able to forget about them. It was too painful.

By the mid-afternoon of next day, the old man was quite certain that he got rid of the journalist. He was wrong. Two days later, he came again, this time with a package in his hand. The journalist knocked on the door; before the old man could say anything, he handed the package.

"Mr. Kim, I have something you might be interested in."

So once again, the old man couldn't run away from him. Not to mention that he was curious what he was about to see. Without any hesitation, the old man opened it and found the pictures of youngsters.

"I had a chance to visit North Korea recently." He said, looking out the window. "Those are some of the pictures I've taken risking my life." The old man held each picture carefully as though he would break it. They were children – no more than 7 – so skinny that you could see bones sticking out. Their only clothes were ragged pieces of fabric that barely covered them. Traces of whip marks stood out clearly against their tiny bodies.

"How can they treat these children like this?" The journalist resented. He was quite surprised to hear a reply. "It's horrible up there. No matter how careful they are, they find reasons to destroy their lives. Kids, adults– ages don't matter to them. They can do anything to anyone especially at the death camp. That place is worse than a hell." The old man's eyes became dreamy. It seemed like he forgot about his companion. "My younger brother and I were taken there when I was 15. My dad was falsely charged in espionage. I never saw my parents again." Tears were streaming down his wrinkled face. I had to see my own brother..." The old

man abruptly stopped, realizing that he had a company. "Leave me alone," he quietly said. Without any protest, the journalist left, choking down the tears.

From then, the old man didn't answer the door whatsoever. Every single day, the reporter came, ringing the doorbell. The old man would pretend that nobody was home. The journalist knew it. And so did the old man. This little game of theirs continued for several weeks until the reporter suddenly stopped coming.

"Finally," the old man thought. He was wrong again. The old man was coming back from the store when he saw the journalist in front of the door. Before he could say anything, he got him. The journalist knelt down in front of him.

"Mr. Kim, I'm not even going to say that I understand your feelings. But what about those poor innocent children? They are being starved, tortured, experimented, and killed right now, right this minute."

The old man finally lost his temper.

"What do you want from me, Mr. Lee? Don't you know that every time I see you, bits and pieces of memories come back alive? It's a total nightmare. I saw a pregnant woman who had to work for 15 hours straight without any food. I saw men who were forced into coffin-sized rooms for what they call a starvation diet. I had to witness 10 persecutions, right in front of me, while I was in the death camp. Do you think it's pleasant enough to bring them back again? Why are you doing this to me?"

"I'm trying to tell the world!" He hollered back. "Look, I'm not doing this to torture you. Do you know how many people in the world know about these horrible camps and tortures? They have a right to know what's really happening there! Nazi's Auschwitz camp is nothing compared to these, I heard. But what's being done? Nothing. It's the only way to help those poor innocent people. The only way!" His face flushed, the journalist left, wondering what he's done to this old man.

The old man broke down, tears streaming down his

face. A scene of a lying boy flashed through his mind.

I picked up the tiniest rock I could find and threw, deliberately misaiming. Slowly, his eyes closed. His tightened fists slackened as his head dropped. Dead. It was the first time I've ever seen somebody dead.

His own brother. His only and precious baby brother who was persecuted because he wasn't worth eating pieces of corn from cow dung. A thought that there was nothing he could have done to save him tortured him, leaving him a deep scar.

Back in the house, the old man was deep in thinking, recounting the incident. Children in the pictures flashed through the mind. His brother, parents... It was his duty. The least he could do. Clutching the journalist's business card, he approached the phone. He was finally ready to tell the world.

Tami Kim

HUDTLOFF MIDDLE SCHOOL, 8TH GRADE

Ovenous and Refrigeratous

It was a dark and stormy night. The power had gone out and I was stuck at home babysitting my two younger sisters, Amy and Erica. As we sat on the couch with only candles and flashlights for a source of light, I could tell that my youngest sister, Erica was scared. Her eyes started to race when she saw lightning and she trembled when the thunder shook. Out of the blue Amy asked, "Janelle, could you tell us a story?"

"Sure, which story do you want to hear?" I could see Amy and Erica huddling for warmth under some blankets.

"Tell us the story of why ovens and refrigerators aren't set next to each other in kitchens," asked Erica in a shaky voice.

"Are you sure you want to hear that one?" They both nodded. "Well, okay I'll tell you the story of Ovenous and Refrigeratous."

"Once upon a time there were two brother gods, Ovenous and Refrigeratous. Ovenous was tall, had red-orange eyes which matched his fire coated hair, that looked exactly like a blazing fire in the middle of a dark cool night. He controlled all of the heat in the world. His younger twin brother, Refrigeratous, looked about the same as his older brother, except that his eyes were the purest blue and his hair looked like a blow torch at full power. Ovenous and Refrigeratous lived in the clear blue sky around Athens, Greece, almost to the heavens where the other gods lived. They were always fighting about where there should be freezing cold snow or intense heat. One day, in the midst of their fighting they hit Hera, the queen of all gods. At this precise time, she was picking some of the most beautiful flowers imaginable in the flower gardens for her husband, Zeus. The flowers were planted by the mortals as a kind of offering to try and impress her. The young Gods hit her in

the back of her head and nearly missed her neck! Hera fled back to beautiful Mt. Olympus, where most of the gods lived, holding her head and crying so much that all of the major lakes and rivers started to flood over in the world. This was not the first time the two brothers had hit one of the gods. Another time, Helius, the sun god, was driving his golden sun chariot west across the clear evening sky when a blazing fireball, mixed in with a freezing snowball, hit one of his golden haired, silver manned horses in the right fore leg, sending it down into the deep dark Black Sea and killing it.

One day while Zeus was at a very important council meeting discussing one of the mortal affairs, concerning how they could keep their food fresh longer and how they could cook their food without having to build a fire, a snow-mixed-fire ball hit him straight in the back between his shoulder blades! Not knowing who or what had hit him, Zeus angrily threw a thunderbolt hitting the council table and literally splitting it in half! "Who did this to me!" thundered Zeus, rubbing the burn on his back.

"It was Ovenous and Refrigeratous," cried Hera as she ran over to her husband. "They hit me in the head while I was picking some of the most beautiful flowers for you."

"They are so busy fighting they do not care who or what gets in their path, just as long as one of them wins," said Helius in anger and shaking his fist. "They killed one of my best horses while I was driving the sun chariot westward."

"And now they have gone too far," Zeus thundered madly. "They shall suffer for what they have done to me!"

And so, Zeus ordered Ovenous and Refrigeratous to come immediately to Mount Olympus. Ovenous and Refrigeratous came but were still fighting, throwing snowballs and fireballs when they reached Zeus. "You two have been fighting so much and for so long that you have not noticed that you have hit me, my dear wife, and killed the best horse for the sun chariot," said Zeus madder than he had ever been before. Both looked at each other so scared of

what Zeus might do to them, they started to argue all over again!

"Well, I would not have hit anyone if bat nose over there had not hit me with a snowball," said Ovenous trying to defend himself.

"Well, I would not have hit anyone if mouse brain over here had not hit me with a fireball," said Refrigeratous making a twisted face and trying to copy his older brother.

"Did not." said Ovenous.

"Did too." said Refrigeratous.

"Did not."

"Did too."

"I SAID DID NOT," yelled Ovenous.

"WELL I SAID DID TOO," yelled Refrigeratous back.

"I do not care who started it!" yelled Zeus. "You both shall have to suffer the consequences." In a stern but still furious tone of voice Zeus said, "You Refrigeratous shall become a freezing device so that mortals will not complain about how to keep their food fresh longer." Before Refrigeratous could object to his fate Zeus turned him into a two-door refrigerator with an ice cube and water dispenser. As Ovenous stared in horror and disbelief at what had been his younger brother, Zeus turned around and said sternly, "And you Ovenous shall be a device that the mortals can cook with without having to make a fire. You will cook their foods to perfection." Before Ovenous could say anything about all of this, Zeus turned him into an oven. "Well that problem is solved," said Zeus proudly. Zeus made several hundred, exact copies of Ovenous and Refrigeratous and gave them to mortals, however, Zeus told them never to put the two devices next to each other, unless they wanted to turn into a refrigerator or oven. For fear that the two brothers would change back and start fighting again and destroy even more things and killing more horses or hit one of the gods or even worse, hitting Zeus." "That is why people do not put an oven and a refrigerator next to each other in their kitchen. The end," I concluded.

The rain stopped and the thunder ceased and the

lights started to flicker on. "I guess Ovenous and Refrigeratous learned their lesson the hard way huh?" Erica said. "Yup. Say, are you two hungry?" I asked. They nodded. "What do ya say we order ourselves some pizza with the money mom left us now that the power is back on?" They both started to jump up and down and said with excitement, "Yes, please, pretty please?"

Janelle Stavig

AYLEN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL, 8TH GRADE



2003
SHORT STORIES
Grades 9 & 10



The Paper Crane

My life was going deeper down hill every second—falling apart. Since my fifteenth birthday, everything that could have possibly gone wrong did. When I thought, “It can’t get any worse.” It did.

My mom died the night of my birthday after dinner, before cake. I remember funny things. We ate beef, potatoes, and corn. Mother had three and a half slices of the beef. Dad wore a plaid shirt. I had only one shoe on. The other had fallen off after I swung my leg a little too hard. It lay on its side watching mom die. She choked on the potatoes—made my favorite way. A chunk of skin became lodged in her throat. She suffocated to death. Mother didn’t like it that way. By the time the ambulance got to our house, she was dead.

The week after mother died, we were busy with the funeral and everything else. Mother’s death didn’t really set in. We were in denial. “This is just a nightmare. When I wake up, it’ll all be gone. This can’t be real.” I kept telling myself—trying to grasp a cloud.

Then week two set in. We realized that mother was gone. Forever. Father went into withdrawal and denial. At first it was little things. He used to laugh, no matter what. Even in the first week he laughed—more somber maybe but he laughed. He always had found the good in everything, even if it was horrible. But this fact, he couldn’t shake. At first I didn’t notice there wasn’t any more laughter. But then I did and the house seemed even emptier. Then he stopped talking to me. We always small talked—whenever we were together. But it stopped.

Then he started to drink. He was trying to drink his despair away. He just stopped caring. Our once neat and tidy home became grungy. Broken glass welcomed any who entered through our door. But no one came. No one visited.

The couch was up turned from one of Father's raging fits of anger towards death and life. He couldn't decide which he hated more. Bills filled our rusty dented mailbox—they were left there, unpaid. First, light became darkness, then our faucets ran dry. Next, our heat—the little warmth I had left in my heart left.

I became bitter, despaired. I didn't care anymore. Mother was gone. Gone for all eternity. I didn't believe I would ever see her again; during life or after death. She had vanished from sight—but not from my mind.

Because of the law, I had to go to school and face the 'living'—I didn't feel alive anymore, but death would not come and take me. I was not granted my only wish. If I tried to defy father, he would beat me drunkenly, angrily, and I had to comply with his orders. I didn't want to face my old friends. It wouldn't be the same. They would be happy and try to cheer me up. I just couldn't face them.

At school I had to listen to laughter, joy. I resented them. Sullen, I walked the crowded hallways, pushing through, parting the sea of people. I would sit in class, drowning out my teacher with thoughts of other things.

For merely a year this continued, even though it seemed like eternity. People forgot I existed, Mother existed, Father existed. I became scrawny and thin frail from lack of nutrition; love. The little money we had was spent on beer.

At the lowest I thought I could ever get, I went to lunch and sitting at my table was a crane. Pure, white, serene. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen, since my mother. It was only a sheet of white paper, but somehow, it filled me with something. Gently, I lifted it off the table; I held it high in the light. The beams outlined it; making its carefully creased folds glow, shine. For the first time since Mother's death, calmness swept over me. Peace encompassed me.

School passed. I walked home, gently shielding my crane with my hands, rejoicing in its simplicity. My steps grew heavy upon the cement as I turned the corner. The

house I lived in sat before me, at the end of the street. I dreaded what Father would do to my crane. Although born optimistic, death made me a pessimistic. The door loomed ahead. Breathing in deeply I turned the doorknob; entered.

My fears became reality. Father loomed in front of me, worse than the door. He looked surprised, "Marthy! Where you been?" he slurred his words. Marthy was what mother's nickname. I wondered how death could have such a powerful affect upon people. Father once a daddy—now he was a drunk. I raise my hands to shield myself. Too late, I remembered my precious crane. It fell to the floor, smashed as father lurched forward, just as my world had been smashed down the night Mother died. The once white and serene crane was now only a dirty, crumpled piece of paper. I left the house.

The next day at lunch, two cranes were on my table. This time, on its back a single word was written on the crane: HOPE. It was serene and beautiful as the crane itself. A word was also on the other: JOY. Peace. I hoped. I tried to be joyful. I gently picked them up and set them side by side on the table. Perfection. I entered the tiny part on my heart that I had had before mother had died. I smiled for the first time. People stared. I didn't care. Then, I felt guilty. Mother was dead. How dare I be happy? I left, gently lifting my cranes. I place them in my locker.

I went to Lancer Park. Mother and I use to go there. I remembered playing with Mother. We chased each other. I remembered. A bag lady sat beside my—I didn't notice. I was lost in thought. Then the lady spoke, "You can't live in the past, hon. You can't blame yourself." I looked away. "Don't let this ruin your life." I turned to look at her, but she was gone. Instead, a crane was on the weathered wood. It read FORGET on its left wing and BELIEVE on its right. I lifted the crane.

I walked home. Father wasn't there. I took all the beer and got rid of the cans. I cleaned the house, like never before. I washed and scrubbed. Then I waited.

Father came in: sullen and sober, his arms laden with bags of beer. I took it out of his hands. Groggily, he looked at me. He had been asleep this last year. It was time he woke up. I had—thanks to the bag lady. Father's arms were held out still. I carried the cans of beer to the window and threw them out. They'd be gone forever. I'd make sure of it. I looked him in the eye, "It's time we had a talk."

Behind us, the sun set as I set a crane in his hands.
It read: LOVE.

Laurel Kam

STEILACOOM HIGH SCHOOL, 9TH GRADE

Tanglewood

Audrey Banks had a problem. As the director of Tanglewood Summer Camp, she had just one month to attract more campers or Tanglewood would be forced to close. She was considering her options when her assistant, Elise Taylor, burst through the door, completely out of breath and babbling incoherently. "Out there...out there...in the back...it's just awful!"

"Calm down, Elise! You're being hysterical. What's wrong?"

"There is a bear in the back! He's tearing the building down!"

"A what? Show me where," Audrey said, getting up from her desk.

Elise took her to the back of the dining hall. There about fifteen feet away with his back to them, was a brown bear.

"See?" Elise stammered, "It's huge and he is tearing the whole building apart!"

Audrey rolled her eyes, and groaned, "Great," she said to no one in particular, "All I needed was a bear. It's not huge, Elise. It's hardly more than a cub and he's not tearing down the building, he's just rummaging through the garbage cans, looking for food. Now go get me two medium size pans from the kitchen."

Elise tilted her head with a blank look.

Audrey's patience was evaporating, "I need them today, Elise!"

Elise turned on her heels and ran for the kitchen. She returned moments later holding two shiny silver pans.

Audrey took one pan in each hand and began banging them furiously together. The bear turned quickly, listened for a while, and returned to the garbage cans. For several long minutes the noise continued until finally Audrey's arms hung limp at her sides.

Elise timidly asked, "What were you doing?"

"The noise," Audrey gasped, "It's supposed to drive

them away. Bears hate loud noises."

Elise was thoughtful. "I think he liked it."

Audrey's shoulders slumped, "Yeah," she sat heavily on the porch rail.

Elise joined her, "Do you have any more ideas?"

"I don't know, it's not my normal line of work, you know. Wait a minute! Pastries!

"Huh?"

"Bears like pastries...don't they?"

"Yeah, I mean, I think so."

"Audrey was becoming more animated. "We'll lead him back into the woods with pastries."

"I hope this idea works," Elise added, "The kids will be lining up for lunch soon.

Ten minutes later Elise and Audrey were congratulating each other on the triumph of their second plan. They had successfully lured the bear far into the woods as he followed a trail of donuts.

"Do you really think he'll stay gone?" Elise inquired.

"Let's hope."

The next morning Audrey had just sat down to a bowl of Cheerios. But before she could take the first bite, Elise burst in again. "Bad news."

"The bear?"

Elise nodded, "Yea, sorry. Should I get some more donuts?"

"No, this time I think we should get some help," Audrey said picking up the phone.

It was 7:15 when Sheriff Tom Brewster received Audrey's call. "You want me to what? Lady, bear catching isn't part of my job description. If you don't want to be around bears why'd you put your camp in the woods? No, I'm not unsympathetic, I just can't leave my office to go bear hunting today...tomorrow or anytime soon."

Audrey hung up the phone and glared at Elise, who in turn took a step backwards, "When's he coming?"

"He's not," Audrey growled with her teeth clenched.

"Well, what'd he say?"

Audrey's eyes were two pools of angry fire. "He said to bang two pans together."

Two hours later Elise and Audrey were still in the office "I can't think anymore my brain hurts," Elise moaned.

"We've got to think of something. We've got to get rid of that bear," Audrey persisted, "No one will send their kid to a camp with a bear."

The ringing phone interrupted their conversation. "You'd better answer that Audrey"

"I know, I know," Audrey reluctantly got up and answered the phone. "Hello? Yes it's true. We have a bear, but it's really just a cub."

On the other end of the line a man introduce himself as the curator for the Hood Canal Zoo.

Audrey spoke excitedly, "Yeah. Great! Sounds good. All right, I'll see you soon. Thanks, bye."

She hung up the phone and looked at Elise "Our problems are solved! That was the zoo. They want our bear and they're coming to get it right away."

"Good, then it will be taken care of *quietly*. And he'll be gone before anyone knows he was here."

Thirty minutes later a white flat bed zoo truck with a cage on the back arrived at Camp Tanglewood. Excited children peered from their cabin windows. After a brief introduction, the curator pulled a rifle from behind the truck seat.

A fearful hush fell over the children. "Is he going to shoot it? Will he kill the bear?"

Sensing their fears, Audrey moved to intercept the curator. "Please, your gun is scaring the children. You don't really need that, do you?"

I'm afraid I do, ma'am. There is just no other way to get the bear into the cage."

Audrey was about to answer, when a car rolled down the drive and came to a stop. A man with a camera and a small notebook got out. "Is this the camp with the big bear?"

Audrey stammered. "Well, yes, sort of, although he is really not very big.

"Great!" He took out a pencil, wetted it on his tongue, and began writing while walking towards them.

"Who are you?" Asked Audrey hoping against all hopes that he wouldn't be in anyway involved with spreading the news about the bear.

"Pat Dixon with the Hood Canal Review. And I could just smell a story," he finished with a wink.

Audrey felt sick. So much for *quietly*.

The curator brought Audrey back to the problem at hand. "So have you decided if I can tranquilize the bear?"

She remained firmly against shooting the bear. "I can show you an easier way," she said flatly.

Twenty minutes later the door of the cage slammed shut. Audrey had lured the bear inside with a trail of donuts. She'd hoped for a chance to dissuade the reporter from writing about the bear but her attempts were futile.

For the next two days a glum hovered over Tanglewood. Audrey and Elise resigned themselves to closing the camp. Neither of them read the newspaper article. On the third day the first phone call came. A woman in Seattle had read about the compassionate counselors and how humanely they had dealt with the intrusive bear. She wanted to register her son at Camp Tanglewood. By noon they had received ten more calls. By the end of the week they had taken 160 prepaid registrations. Audrey was amazed. Rather than hurt their reputation, the article which they dreaded had saved them.

Amanda Stephens

COVENANT HIGH SCHOOL, 9TH GRADE

.....**Caught in an Aqueduct**.....

When Mathew Caldwell began work as assistant engineer of the city water works, he found himself at once opposed by a horde of rough, rude men, who could not understand his knowledge. They looked with contempt upon the slender young man, and were more than ready to make his success impossible.

One of the most important duties of the assistant engineer was the inspection of the tunnel to assess the condition of the masonry, and repair any damage which might have been caused by the continuous flow of water through it.

It was a long, cold, much-dreaded task; and when the men, some carrying lanterns, others tools and materials for the work, went down one by one through the narrow man-hole into the black, dripping tunnel, they were all serious and reluctant to leave the daylight.

Mathew walked ahead, sharply scanning every inch of surface as he went, until some defect was found. Then he would bark out his orders and stand watching the work.

Time went by monotonously till it seemed that a whole day must have passed since they had left the sky behind them.

An unusually bad place in the tunnel delayed then for some time. All the men were occupied with the work, grouping together against the wall, and working quickly in order to finish as soon as possible.

Mathew seemed strangely negligent of his watching. He stood back from the men; gazing at a little stream of water which ran down the tunnel. Several times he sounded it, and measures its width with the long stick he carried.

"Hurry, men!" he said, at last. "We've got quite a way to go."

Some minutes passed. He sounded and measured the stream again. Then he drew out his watch and looked at it

with a concerned look on his face.

“Quick! Let’s go! We gotta move!”

Something in his voice made the men instantly abandon the work and wheel about. One of them uttered a loud exclamation, and threw down his hammer.

“Pick that up, and keep still!” said Mathew quietly.

“But the water’s rising! We’ll all-”

“Keep still and listen to me!”

The man scowled at the engineer, who looked him steadily in the face; then he stooped and picked up the tool.

The other men were beginning to slink off toward the nearest manhole, but Matthew stepped in the way.

“Listen, men!” he said. “There’s been a mistake at the dam. Robertson thought I ordered the water on at eleven in the morning, instead of eleven at night. He’s a little deaf, and he’s letting it on now. In a few minutes, it will be up to our necks, but we have time to reach manhole number 13 before the steam gets to strong if you do as I tell you. But if you don’t, everyone will be drowned.”

“Oh, we’ll be drowned anyway!” moaned two or three. “We’ll never see our families again!”

“Steady, now!” continued Mathew calmly. “There are twenty-one of us. You must do as I command you if you ever want to escape alive. Let’s move! Chad, you come up with me, the rest of you, form a straight line and follow.”

The water now reached their knees and its force began to pull against them. The men tramped along at a rapid walk, following their young leader who looked like a small child in comparison with Chad, who towered high above all the others.

“Chad,” said Mathew in a low tone, “you and I must see this thing through. The pinch will come when we get to the hole, only one can go up at a time, and the last men will have a hard time.”

“Yes sir” answered Chad.

“They’ll have to help the others, and they may be drowned doing it. I’m one of course.” There was an uncom-

fortable pause for several seconds, then he continued. "Will you be the other?"

"Yes, sir."

Mathew shook his hand confidently without saying more.

The stream kept rising, and hissed over the smooth floor with continual increasing power. The men marched on, leaning backwards against the current which swirled around their hips. Occasionally one of the lightest would stagger; but his neighbors were able to pull him up again.

They had gone on in this way for some time, when a cloudy gray light came into view far ahead, streaming through the open manhole. Mathew commanded the men to form two ranks and link arms across so that they could help each other through the now waist deep water that grew steadily stronger and stronger. Occasionally a man fell and was dragged to his feet.

"Halt!" shouted Mathew.

They stopped at the foot of the iron ladder, with their arms still locked. By Mathew's directions, the first rank formed across the tunnel, while the second rank, pressed closely together in single file, they began ascending the ladder, one by one. After four or five had gone the others could not keep firm footing and were swept down against the second rank of men which held them by its united weight.

"Go in there and help them up, Chad" cried Mathew

Chad, clinging to the foot of the ladder with the bend of his arm, seized man after man by the collar, hauling and lifting them, half underwater, half out, until they could reach the rungs of the ladder themselves.

Finally, only the one rank remained, fighting with the breast high current. One by one, a man would struggle with the help of Chad towards the ladder and climb towards safety. As each man broke away, another hundred-odd pounds was lost to help the others fight the rising waters. So it went until there was only a group of three men grasping onto one another, fighting to keep their heads above the water.

"Let go, Jim!" ordered Chad.

"But you and the boss will die if I do, it's murdering you both!"

"It ain't murdering me!" said Chad gruffly, "I can make it out. But I can't save the boss alone, and if he don't get out, I don't. He's too light to help himself, and he's nearly gone anyway."

"There are two of us for the job!"

Taking Mathew between them, and exerting every muscle in their weakened bodies, the two worked their way toward the ladder. Chad grasped hold of it at the same moment that the flood carried them off their feet, and after a confused, blind scramble, somehow succeeded in thrusting the young engineer into the hands of the waiting men above.

Then Chad, with a great surge of power, dragged Jim after him by brute force, laboring through the turbulent waters, and all were saved.

"Hurrah for the boss!" roared the twenty-one men, waving their dripping caps.

The slender young man lay white and panting against a rock.

"He's the best man of us all, and his brains are worth our muscle a hundred times over. Now don't let me hear somebody say different!" exclaimed Chad.

No one did say different, and no one even thought so. There would never be any doubt about that again.

Hans Kvale

COVENANT HIGH SCHOOL, 10TH GRADE



2003

SHORT STORIES

Grades 11 & 12

Four Years in Isolation

.....

"It seems you will have your wish, Azcar." Azcar Holowitz looked up at the sound of the deep voice heavily laden with contempt.

"Ah, so you have decided that you are not too good to walk among the Jews, eh?" Azcar said, a weak smile of petty triumph spreading across his face.

"I assure you that one's race will make no difference the way things are going. Come with me to my quarters; we will have a cigarette," the man said as he stepped out of the shadows, rain dripping from his hat and running onto his long trench coat.

"You must be careful out here in the rain, Fredrick," Azcar said, "Your medals might rust."

"Come, my friend, let us go to my quarters," was all Fredrick said in return, smoothly dodging the insult.

Azcar turned and walked to Fredrick, who gave him a ghostly smile, then grabbed his arm into his own. They walked in this manner as they exited the prisoners' lodgings and entered the guards' barracks. They walked past banners with messages like "Heil Hitler! Heil Der Fuhrer!" and "The Communist hoards are coming for your children!" until they came to a door marked "Warden" with a small card reading "Colonel Fredrick Kleinschmidt, S.S." nailed to the door underneath it. Fredrick opened the door.

A small oak desk sat in the center of the room with two mahogany chairs facing it. Off to the right, a book shelf stood, proudly displaying books with names such as Mien Kampf and Der Fuhrer's Policies on Jews for Camp Commanders. Fredrick settled in behind his desk and waved for Azcar to sit.

"Cigarette?" he asked as Azcar eased himself into the tiny chair. Azcar did not respond. "You are very funny, Azcar. All these times you have been in here, and yet you still refuse to accept even the smallest gift from me. I am

only doing my job you know." Fredrick sighed, then lit his cigarette with a lighter emblazoned with a swastika on one side and an eagle on the other.

He took a long drag on the cheap cigarette, savoring the dry smoke in his lungs for a moment before exhaling. "My radio told me something interesting today, Azcar. The Allies have almost taken Berlin. Four years of this homicidal mess, and it may finally be drawing to a close. You no doubt have been praying for your American saviors' speedy arrival." He took another drag, watching Azcar's impassive face. He sighed again before reaching into a desk drawer.

His hand pulled out a dusty bottle of French wine. "1913. A good year. You know how I got this, Azcar? In 1940, we entered Paris, ablaze in glory. I was a mere lieutenant then, in command of a platoon of young recruits. I ordered my men to occupy the *Resteraunte de Paris*. As—"

"I won't drink that alcohol, Fredrick, and you know it. Also, I have heard the stories of your *Werhmacht* service many times. I know how you got injured by a British bomb and were ordered off the front lines to command this "Relocation Camp." I know how you met that young *freuline* at the train depot in Warsaw and I know how you continue to resent having been denied the chance to participate in the brave defense of the Fatherland. Believe me, Fredrick, I have heard it all before."

Slowly, a smile lifted Fredrick's thin lips. He set down the bottle and took another drag off of his cigarette.

"A message came in from Der Fuhrer himself today. I thought you might wish to read it." He reached into his drawer and pulled out a yellow card. He set it on the desk and slid it to Azcar. It read:

To: All Relocation Camp Commanders

From: Adolf Hitler, Der Fuhrer auf Deutschland

Subj: Termination of Prisoners

Effective 0900, April 18th 1945, all commanders are to purge their camps of the most influential of the

Jewish parasites and the most radical of the political dissidents. Failure to comply with this order will result in arrest, trial, and execution of the commander under Order 2564. I know you will all do your part to save the Fatherland.

"I must be the chief parasite," Azcar said as he looked up. Fredrick did not reply, only sat behind his desk, smoking his cigarette and looking at Azcar.

"You know what time it is, Azcar?" he asked. "8:37." Fredrick took another pull on his cigarette, then crushed it into his glass ashtray. He looked at it for a moment, then opened a drawer and pulled out a Luger semi-automatic pistol. He set it on the desk. His hand was shaking.

Fredrick gave a snort of a laugh and shook his head. "You know, not so long ago I shot Polish, French, and Belgian soldiers without the slightest hint of remorse." He looked up. "I guess four years in isolation can change a man."

Azcar sat without the slightest hint of emotion playing on his face. Inside, he was as scared as a child lost and alone in the woods. Fredrick picked up the pistol and looked at it, feeling the cold steel against his skin, examining the small engraving on the butt: "To Colonel Fredrick Kleinschmidt, with all my gratitude. *Der Fuhrer.*"

Fredrick sighed as he put the gun back into the drawer. He did not look back up as he said, "A young guard from Section R has come down with a rather nasty flu, and will be away from his duties from 11 to 12 tonight."

Azcar looked up, gazing in disbelief at the top of Fredrick's hat. "I've enjoyed our chats, Azcar. They kept me sane when the rest of the world went to Hell. I have often wondered what may have happened had we met in another life, as ordinary citizens. Might we have been friends, perhaps?" Fredrick smiled mournfully. "Go now, Azcar. Good luck, and ...dare I say? God bless."

Fredrick shook his head as his chest started to heave gently. Azcar stood up and considered saying something.

Then he turned and walked out of the small office. Passing the door, he thought he heard the hollow thunk of a gun being set on wood.

He marched past the flashy banners and the guards' barracks until he entered the prisoners' quarters. As he walked through the gate and saw the comforting glances of his Jewish brothers, a single shot rang out through the camp. Azcar stopped and stood on the muddy ground of eastern Poland. He looked up at the dark sky with questioning eyes, letting the thin rain wash down his face.

After a moment, he stood up erect, looked straight ahead, and walked into the crowd of inquisitive Jewish faces. He was their leader, their guide, and they weren't safe yet.

Thirty paces behind him, a man in a German officer's uniform stood at the head of a crowd of soldiers. In one hand he held a yellow card, in the other a pistol. He glanced back at his troops. Now that Colonel Kleinschmidt was dead, he was their leader, their commander, and nobody was safe yet.

Jeremy Glasco

ORTING HIGH SCHOOL, 12TH GRADE

The Flight of the Fleas

A violent shaking and twisting shocked Terrence out of his deep, warm slumber. The ear splitting rattling of dog tags and the scathing slashes of claws, quite close to him, sounded like a train wreck and made him hold on for dear life with his powerful six legs as Bowser waged war on Terrence and the rest of the flea community peacefully dwelling at Ear Tip mountain. Terrence was not amused; he was used to Bowser's frequent expressions of discontent, and watched with delicious boredom as many of the younger populous sprang down from Ear Tip to Neck Ridge, where they buried themselves in the long, greasy forests of shaggy hair in terror.

As the tremors subsided, Terrence unlatched himself, tensed his legs, and leapt down to Neck Ridge, where a few fleas were just starting to emerge from under Collar Cave, black beady eyes bright with fright. "Come on, that was nothing!" he exulted, strutting down and puffing his thorax with immense pride.

A wrinkled gray flea, Artie, looked up sharply at him. "Silence, young flea! You know very well how frightening that can be for the little ones. You think you're so brave," he taunted, smirking and exposing well-worn mandibles, "well, I remember when you were their age, you used to - "

"Nobody," Terrence interrupted, pouting a little, "asked your thoughts on it."

Suddenly, Terrence's best friend, Gordon, sprang up. "Hey pal!" he yelled, but then sobered. "Say, what's eating you? You look like you've come down with the plague or something!"

"Not funny," snarled Terrence, his jaws clacking, "let's get out of here."

Just then, a short, powerfully built flea jumped on top of Collar Cave and, waving his legs and hopping up

and down, attempted to silence the community. "Ladies and Gentle fleas! I have something very important to tell all of you!"

"Ha! It's Louis!" Gordon snickered. "Where has that sneeze bag been?"

Louis waved his short, hairy legs in exasperation, and continued: "As some of you may have noticed, I have been missing for a while."

"You probably overslept!" yelled one.

"Listen!" Louis squeaked. "There is another world out there, fellow fleas! Another land, with no hair and where the dog skin is cold! Last week, I somehow was carried off of Nose Point in a tremendous sneeze storm, and found myself in a completely different place, standing on cold ground. And, my fleas, I have discovered something that will terrify you all!"

His audience erupted into laughter. "Get that crazy bug down from there!" someone screeched.

Gordon held his abdomen and shook with mirth. "The only thing that has ever scared me," he cackled, "is a flea who tells lies! Another world? Another dog? Crazy talk, if you ask me!"

"I heard a giant, hairless dog- another world with two legs- talking to another one!" Louis yelled, with desperation in his voice and gasping for air. "I heard the word 'Bowser' and the word 'flea bath'! Now, I couldn't tell you exactly what that is, but it sounded pretty serious. You'll just have to trust me."

Everyone started yelling and arguing, as fleas of all ages ridiculed the very absurdity of it. Only Artie and a few others were deep in thought, weighing Louis's words, but the vast majority would hear nothing of it.

"It's obviously untrue," spat a plump, middle-aged female, "because I have never seen it."

"It's a good story," acknowledged one wise looking flea, Professor Hewlett of Mange University, nodding his head and pushing back his glasses, "and Louis is a good

man. He does not mean to say all that. He is a good moral example for all of us, being so kind to people, but just does not realize what he is saying."

A wild young male with tattoos named Dwight bounced around in a circle, then put aside his beer for a second. "Even if we do get attacked and flea bathed into oblivion," he slurred, "I'll still be with my buddies, no matter where we end up. Right, guys?" "Definitely, man," one of his friends assured him, "We's is gonna stick togetha."

Terrence bit his leg in frustration. He knew deep down that Louis was telling the truth- he had better eyesight than anybody else and had seen huge faint shadows off in the grayness once, and Louis was not the kind of flea to tell lies. The fact that he knew it was true him feel sick to his stomach, but he also knew what everybody else would think of him if he said anything of the sort. It would take him weeks to build his reputation back up, and Gordon would be ashamed to be seen with him. "I'll try to explain this to the others later," he reasoned, "and maybe they won't think me uncool...and we can all get away together."

But as Terrence weighed the matter Louis sprang up and down, crying for their attention once more. "Please listen to me - I have a plan to save us! We must all gather at Nose Point and wait for a sneeze storm to take us away, then jump further as fast as we possibly can!"

"What, and leave my life of comfort?" scoffed an elderly, hardened male, tensing himself angrily. "I just made a new nest down by Front Leg Forest. No way I'm leaving that behind."

But about 20 fleas had now separated themselves from the main group. "I have never known Louis to lie," reasoned one, "And he doesn't look crazy. Let's do it!" The others agreed, and bounded up to where Louis was standing. "We will go with you," said a mother, towing her baby behind her. One young female, Rae, seemed especially excited, springing up and down as she cried, "Lead on, Louis! I will follow you wherever you take me!"

"But what about the rest of these poor fleas?" cried Louis. "They must come! There isn't much time!" Then he addressed the masses once more: "You all must hurry!" he yelled, but they only laughed at him.

Louis straightened himself, and turned toward the small group next to him. "There is no time to lose! To Nose Point!" He bounded off, and the small group followed him up Neck Ridge. After a short while, they could see Nose Point ahead: A gigantic oozing black mountain greeted them, its twin abysses spouting clouds of hot stench.

However, the young female, Rae, was not prepared for what lay ahead. "This is too hard!" she exclaimed, panting and wiping the sweat from her antennae. "I never wanted this...all I wanted was flea bath insurance, not a long, hard struggle!" She turned around and hopped back.

But the rest pressed on, crawling, hopping, writhing, and swimming through the swampy terrain until they were in the nostril. It suffocated them, and they nearly fainted from heat and exhaustion.

And what was that? They could hear water sloshing around beneath them, lapping at Bowser's legs. Artie looked over the side, then snapped his head back with a look of horror in this face. "It's the flea bath," he moaned, "It's over."

All of the sudden it came. An explosion of heat and pressure, then everything went dark as the fleas were launched high into the air, above Bowser, above the bubbling vat of flea bath that he was seconds away from being immersed in, but not quite above the hairless, two legged creature crouching next to Bowser. They had found their new home.

Jacob Anderson

COVENANT HIGH SCHOOL, 11TH GRADE

Crack of a smile

.....

Ben smiled his most winning smile. "Sorry, Ms. Feldman," he said. "I didn't do my homework. Again."

"Ben," said Mrs. Feldman as she stood over his desk while her nails brushed out a quiet staccato beat against its surface. "Why don't you just do the homework? You'll never get ahead in life if you keep up this attitude. People don't look at *you*, you realize. They look at what you've done. Or in this case, haven't done."

"Truth is just your convenient excuse to dismiss my fantasy life out of hand," said Ben.

Mrs. Feldman rolled her eyes. "You've got promise, Ben. If you'd just try a little harder."

"Ya," said Ben shortly.

Mrs. Feldman moved on. The rest of the class was waiting.

* * *

Ben walked home every day after school. It was boring, just clouds, yards, and junior high kids coming the other way who wouldn't meet his eyes. He stared at the sidewalk, and tried not to think about homework, and failure, and his mother's constant disappointment that dripped down from the skies like rain.

* * *

He could remember lying in his room and staring at the crack in the wall. It was an old crack, one that had been there for so long that he could not even remember what the wall had looked like without it. Outside his open door, down the hall and beyond the dining room, his parents were talking in voices that weren't intended to carry, yet did.

"What did I do wrong?" his mother was saying. "I tried everything, praise, criticism. Nothing works. He just stares at me with that blank look in his eyes, and I know he's off in his own little world."

"Leave the kid alone, Miriam," said his father, and there

was the creak of the right couch cushion, his dad's favorite spot. "He'll grow out of it." Through his father's speech the sound of the television was clearly audible, the roar of the crowd, the rush of the game.

"Sure he will," came his mother's voice, bitter. "It's always you and him against me. You're both living in a dream world. Why don't you pay attention to something besides yourself for once?"

His father's voice dropped to a level almost inaudible, "Jesus, Miriam, the kid's down the hall."

"He's not listening," said his mother. "He never listens. He's off in his own little world. Just like you and that...that game."

The couch creaked again, presumably his father gearing himself up for battle, and Ben stared at the crack. He'd watched it lengthen and spread tendrils from itself into the rest of the wall as the years passed. He would imagine it sometimes, stealthily creeping through the wall, undermining the foundation, and then when the whole house was riddled with cracks it would leap imperceptibly across the lawn to the neighbors, there to eat away at their house until a good stiff breeze came through the neighborhood and everyone's houses fell down.

* * *

His mother was silent when he walked in; she was often silent now, but he could hear her eyes as they followed him on his path from the door to his room to rid himself of his backpack and other burdens of school; her eyes rasped slightly, and he swore it wasn't his imagination.

* * *

Mrs. Feldman was waiting with more than reasonable patience for her class's attention.

"People," said Mrs. Feldman. "People!"

Despite its best intentions, the class slowly subsided into quiet attention.

"We've been studying the elements that make up literature for the past three weeks," said Mrs. Feldman. "Now it's time to apply your skills. The assignment is to write a story, fictional or otherwise, that is at least one thousand words long."

"A thousand words?"

"That's crazy!"

"No way, we have to write a story?"

"People," said Mrs. Feldman. "People! People! You are all perfectly capable of writing a story that long, you've probably written longer papers in other classes. So don't worry about it. Just do it. First draft is due next Tuesday, so you have the weekend if you need it."

Ben doodled on his desk, retreating to the world in which he was the hero.

* * *

The man who showed up on his front doorstep was wearing some version of a suit, fairly richly tailored, and he had a briefcase in hand and a glint in his eye.

"We got your story from the teacher, Ms. Feldman," said the man when Ben answered the door. "Here's a contract for ten grand. May I come in?"

Ben's mother stood up from the table where she was poking listlessly at a crossword.

"A contract?" she said.

The man smiled. "We never would have found him if not for Ms. Feldman," he said.

* * *

On Friday afternoon after school had ended, Ben brought in a scrap of story that he had scrawled out the night before.

"Hey, Ms. Feldman," he said. "I wrote this little bit of a story and wanted to see what you thought."

Mrs. Feldman read through it once and handed it back. "It's all right, Ben, but shouldn't you try a little harder?"

"What do you mean?" asked Ben, backing up a step from the desk.

The bags under Mrs. Feldman's eyes were looking at him, even though she wasn't. "It's just...I don't know, Ben. I expected more from you. That's full of clichés. It's just not you."

"How would you know that's not me?" asked Ben. He was scowling, his eyebrows like weights above his eyes. "Life's made of clichés; without them how would people understand

each other? No one can hear, no one listens. Clichés are a common ground."

"I don't need this. Please leave, Ben," said Mrs. Feldman, not looking up from her desk where her hands busied themselves by squaring up one pile of papers, moving another.

"No," said Ben. "I finally come looking for help and all you can say is that my paper is cliché? Why should I bother? I get enough crap without having to deal with it from a teacher who I thought believed in me."

"You think you're the only one with problems, Ben?" asked Mrs. Feldman. "I'm sorry, but I'm not in the mood to help you through all your problems right now."

"That's all you can say?" asked Ben. "Just cliché..."

"My marriage is breaking up, okay?" said Mrs. Feldman. "Is that what you need? Some admission of weakness? Go away, Ben. I can't take your fatalism right now, I just want to be alone."

Ben was silent, no ready comeback coming to mind, nothing but the stillness of cracks spreading through his mind; something small that grew in silence and argument and darkness.

"I'm sorry, Ms. Feldman," said Ben.

* * *

On Tuesday, Mrs. Feldman did her normal rounds, checking her student's homework.

"I did my homework, Ms. Feldman," said Ben. He handed her his worksheet. Hidden underneath was a story, one that he had painstakingly pieced together over the weekend, written in the darkness of his room to fill a crack he had seen in someone else's wall in the only way he could.

"Thank you, Ben," said Mrs. Feldman.

Ben looked down at his desk, and he smiled.

Ian Beck

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