

THE ALPINE PATH

Volume 4, December 2022

From the Editor

This volume of *The Alpine Path* was almost the last. As the submission deadline approached, we found that we had a very small number of entries. This made us question if there is a desire for this type of journal. So, we decided to extend the deadline and send out a final call for submissions to our subscribers just to make sure. We were blown away by the amount of artwork and writing that came pouring in.

What was even more impressive than the sheer number of submissions we received was the level of quality found in those submissions. We are pleased to say that you will find some of the finest pieces of writing and artwork in these pages that we've ever published. Heartwarming, heart wrenching, laughter inducing, awe inspiring; be prepared for all of that and more as you read Volume 4 of *The Alpine Path*.

Thank you to everyone who has continued to support this journal either through submissions or subscribing.

In the Eyes of the Donkey—Luke 10:25-37

Hunter Loewen, 13

My life has not been much. Wake up, eat dry hay, go for my morning jog, and then, if master doesn't need me, lay around. Journeys are fun, but rare. Here he is. See him? My master is strong but short. "Hey donkey!" he says. He's holding a saddle. "Let's go!" I give an excited HEY HAW! We're going on a trip!

Clip. Clop. Clip. Clop. The air is refreshing, and the scenery is beautiful. A priest passes us. Clip. Clop. Shortly after, a Levite. As we start down a hill, I look and look again. A beat and half-naked man is laying on the side of the road. I start to trot. Then I gallop. When we reach him, I'm amazed! The man looks dead, and at least the priest and the Levite could have helped him, and possibly people before! My kind master rushes to his side. He bandaged his wounds and poured on wine and oil. He was alive! I was loaded with the man, and set off on a trot. At the nearest inn, master paid for him, and told the innkeeper to take care of him. "I will pay back any additional costs when I come back." With my loving master on my back, we set off and shortly arrived at our destination. I will remember this kind, generous action for the rest of my life, and if ever there be an opportunity, I will do the same. 🏔️

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Representing Similes/Personification

Anderson Loewen, 11

The lake was as still as glass and the trees surrounding it were like statues, still and unmoving in the early morning sun. The mountain was tall and soundless, the snow glistening like diamonds. The boats sitting in the water like sleeping swans, motionless and silent. 🏔️

Daughter of Galilee

Meredith Leaverton, 17

I was fifteen when we heard the rumor of His coming; a barefoot girl in a veil bearing water on my head from the village well each day. But the from moment I heard of Him I longed for Him, and watched for Him, trembling each time I went out if this might be the day He would appear. We heard varying reports of Him, some saying that he was the Prophet, others a man possessed of devils, only the son of a carpenter. But I heard His Name: Jesus of Nazareth and loved Him. It was like music, and I had heard the scripture of Isaiah often enough in the women's court of the synagogue to know that this might be He.

But I was, as I said, a mere girl. My mother knew me and laughed. "Daughter, do you seek this Man also? Always searching for the Messiah. See if He speaks the Word! That is the only way you will know."

I dug my toes into the burning sand and grimaced. "Then I will wait to hear it from Himself!" I had never told them that I had visions often that I saw His face and heard His voice. I would know Him. But the daughters in Israel were not usually to speak like that.

I loved blue. In the village of Genesaret on the road by the sea of Galilee my father was a maker of nets, and when I did not have duties in the house I often helped with the weaving, but during the heat of the day when the village was resting, I would run out to the rolling hill lands under the azure sky below which the blue sea sparkled and glittered in the sun like Solomon's palace. There in one of the hollows grew anemones in all the colors of the rainbow, but my favorites were the blue ones, of which I made crowns and went to play in the olive groves.

Why my brothers and sisters never did this, I did not know—though of course my brothers were grown up men, and my sisters, wives and mothers of children.

I was betrothed myself, to be the wife of a young fisherman of Galilee. But I did not want to be a wife; not yet. There was too much life to be lived, it seemed to me. There was my daily trip to the well, my work beside my mother, the nets into which I wove the prayers and dreams of the sea, the wild sea itself that I loved so, my walks with myself along the colored shores and in among the hills. I hated and feared the idea that this would all be lost to me in the day that Matthias took me to wife. And there was Jesus. I wanted to see Him and hear His voice—before I was no longer free. I had the sense that after Him, nothing else would matter or compare.

One night in summer the sky grew dark and lowering, and the sea swelled and rolled in the rising wind in colors of purple and grey capped by snowy foam that broke on the shore as the sky above broke with whiplashes of blue lighting. The fishermen did not go out to sea that night, as was the custom, for the weather grew fiercer as the light went, and the sky that morning had been red as blood. But they stood on the shore watching as the heavens made war, and I stood alone in a cove that I knew of and watched too, for I loved a good storm.

The wind whipped my unbound hair around my face, and my skirts rose and whirled, but I did not heed them in my wonder. Moses, they did say, had seen the Back of the Lord God as He passed by him in the cleft of a rock, and I thought that this was what His back might be like—

power and thunder and might. His Name was Jehovah after all, though I had always preferred His Name of Names, I AM. The cursed Romans had their god of thunder, but this God that I saw in the storm was alone and beside Him no other. The sharp mist of the sea spray stung my nose, and there came over me that strange calm that sometimes does come in the midst of a storm, and I strained to look out to sea, waiting. The squall was at its height now, and the waves came to my knees and sprayed in my face. Yet the calm remained, and I looked, and I saw something.

At first, I could not tell what it was, for it was very dark. But then I saw! A ship, a little worn-out fishing boat like the ones the men of my village sailed in, was rocking like a babe's cradle swung violently by a young sibling. My heart sank to the pit of my stomach; it was not the first time an unsuspecting ship had been caught out in such a squall, and usually their choices were to either be capsized into the deep, or to be dashed on the rocks near the shore. Too often I had worked with the rest of my village through the small hours trying to save some of the sailors. The sea was now black as night.

But then I saw coming toward the struggling ship, something moving along the water that was white and appeared to me to have its own radiance. It cast a glow on everything about it, and spread and reached even to my very heart, it seemed, and the waves did not hinder it at all. Above the roar of the storm as though I had been standing close by instead of miles away, I heard a strange greeting: "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." Then came a call so clear and pressing that my

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heart leaped and I moved forward: “Come!” But a mighty wave swirled to my waist and I stopped, rooted to the sand. Another figure had gotten out of the ship and was walking toward the first. But suddenly his light went out and I cried out. What was happening out there? “Lord, save me!”

The call for help rang across the sea to my ear. The figure of light stepped forward, and vaguely I could see Him grasp the man and pull him up, and they entered the boat together. The light went out, and the storm suddenly ceased. I realized I shivered with cold, but I knew: it was He, the One I had sought. He was in that ship, and He was coming here. He would be here in the morning. I ran home, and stumbled into my mother. “Goodness, child, where have you been? I was afraid you were drowned. But whatever is the matter?”

“Everything is right, Mother,” I said, and only then realized that my face was wet not from the sea and rain but with tears.

I could see Him. He came to me on the sea in a halo of light and caught me up in His arms and never let me go. I was His, and there was only joy. That had been my dream. I did not know myself the next morning as I caught up my jug to go to the well. I felt ready to shatter to pieces with joy, and at the same time could hardly choke the tears down. I tripped over the threshold in my hurry and battered my knee, but I didn’t care. My father had said that He was at the well, and they were bringing the wounded and diseased from every corner to Him; even the leper colony had been emptied.

This was my God. Father was skeptical, but I knew. Father had not seen what I had the night before. The God Who Is would not disappoint; I believed that with all my

heart. In the rough life of a fishing village, one didn’t have time to grasp at straws in the manner of the Pharisees and Sadducees. One needed a working faith, something of substance to buoy one up in the midst of daily life. Moses gave that to the people in the Torah, but it was also promised in the flesh, and I believed that this Jesus was the fulfillment of that prophecy.

In my way at the door was Matthias, my betrothed. He frowned at the broken jar and my excited face. I suspected that he thought he was too good for me; small, freckled, childish, and reckless as I was. Matthias was a handsome twenty-one-year-old, still a little stiff and smug in his manhood. I always had the urge to laugh in his face. “Have you heard of the Man from Nazareth, whom some are calling the Messiah?” he said by way of greeting.

“I have,” I said. “I understand He is at the village well, where I am bound. Will you come?”

Matthias cleared his throat. “You have broken your jar.” I was on my knees cleaning it up. “And going to the well is women’s work.”

I stood with the shards of clay pottery in my hands. “Well then, son of Galilee, you will just have to miss the Son of God while the women go out to meet Him, won’t you?”

Matthias came with me and carried the new jar.

I forgot about my companion very quickly in my anticipation to see the Lord. My knees grew weak and my head swimmy as though I had seasickness. “You are turning red,” Matthias said, and I flamed even brighter when I realized that I had forgotten to breathe. But—but what if I was mistaken about this Man? We were turning the corner now, and the well came into view. A large crowd was gathered, men and

women both, as well as children. For such a mob they were very quiet, but more kept coming. Matthias and I both drew back involuntarily when we realized that some among them were diseased with leprosy, and many were injured or maimed.

Then I pulled Matthias along with me, for I remembered the stories told of Him: the blind saw, the lame walked, the leprous were made well. When Matthias tried to stop, I stomped on his sandal with my bare foot and yanked him forward. A voice came to our ears over the heads of the crowd, a soft, clear voice, that mingled sorrow and joy. Perhaps the name for it was mercy. I recognized it; the voice of my dreams, the voice I had heard on the water the night before. A woman near us was weeping quietly. Her young son rested in her arms.

I strained upward, trying to see the Man with the voice called mercy. The weeping woman tugged at my sleeve, and I turned to her. “My son,” she whispered. “My son—the Master cured him of his fever. He was like to die this morning, but now he is made well. Surely He is the Messiah!”

“Surely!” I echoed with wonder.

Matthias said nothing, but he pinched my other arm. “The man in front of you is a leper!” He hissed in my ear. I stared at him, the urge to smack his face strong on me. Did he not understand what was happening? I turned from him, again trying to get to the voice.

Already we were hemmed in by people, but I thought that we were coming nearer to the object of everyone’s attention. Then we saw Him, and I heard Matthias’s sharp intake of breath in my right ear. A Man, seated on the stones around the well, dressed in white. His disciples were gathered around Him, but His eyes were full of what could only be called

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love, and they welcomed each one upon whom they fell, which I think was everyone. Little children came up to Him shyly and touched His hand, and He blessed them all. The leper in front of us came to Him, murmuring, "Unclean!"

I saw his hand tremble as he reached out and touched the hem of Jesus' spotless white garment. A shudder of horror went through me; I could not help it. Lepers were accursed, the living dead. Jesus only smiled on the man, and I wondered if I had seen rightly—he was whole, whole as he had been wasted a moment before. "Go in peace, my son, and sin no more," said the Lord in His ringing voice.

Then I stood next to Him, and I did not know what to say. He was as beautiful as I had dreamed, and I was choked by tears, though I had never felt such waves of joy. Dimly I heard Matthias speak, "—Lord?"

"Yes, my son," said the Messiah.

"We—we have come to follow You."

"Ah, children, would you follow me indeed? This daughter of Galilee knows Me, and finds all content in Me," He said, taking my hand.

"What must I do, Lord?" Matthias asked.

Jesus looked directly at him. "Come, and follow Me."

Again, my heart leapt at the call. I knew suddenly that the choice would change my life, but that there was no other choice: this was the Christ, the Lord, the very Son of God, and I would follow Him for all my life or die. Matthias at my shoulder must have felt the same, because he almost shouted, "Yes, Lord!"


"Daughter," said Jesus, squeezing my hand still in His, "you are to marry this man?"

"Yes, Lord," I whispered.

"Fear not," He said, and I realized that I didn't fear. "Only believe."

I became Matthias's wife shortly after we saw the Christ, and together we followed Him, through Israel, to Jerusalem, to Calvary. When He left us with the promise that He would one day come for us again, we were there. We were in the upper room praying with the brethren when the Holy Spirit

came down. And one of the proudest days of my life was when Matthias was made one of the Twelve.

These days now are troubled, with evil on the Roman throne. But we have seen the face of Jesus, and though Christians are persecuted and scattered all over the known world, we have the hope of His coming again for us. We know His face. Did I mention that His eyes are blue? 



*Bobbie, Rouen Duckling at three months
Joanna Malone, 16*

Flickers of the Promise

K. E. Keseman, 17

For centuries we waited, fading in **the** darkness, where our captive **people** filled their lamps and watched for One **who** was to come. Trapped in clouds of smoke, we **walked**, powerless to break free, alone **in** our misery. Yet we rejoiced, for these days of **darkness** grew fewer with each dawn, until what we **have** longed for from birth took place. Our fathers of old had **seen** flickers of the promise: in their footsteps, we awaited a King whose appearance would be **great**.
*Come and free us, O You who bring the **light**.*



Ruby

A Memoir by Kora Preuss, 12

I always did want a dog. When I was very little, I would pray for my future dog, whom I had already named Goldie and who looked a lot like a Golden retriever puppy. Dogs didn't scare me, the way they did my big sister. My parents would tell me, "Don't worry, it'll just happen, one day we'll end up with a dog." Strays would sometimes wander into our yard, and I was excited when they did, but they always had homes to go back to. The prospect of ending up with a dog of my own seemed dim by the time I was 11. So when our next-door neighbors moved out, and new neighbors moved in, of course, I scoped the situation for potential canine friends. They had a pitbull. This was no good. My parents had a strict rule about not playing with pitbulls. His name was Clutch, I found out later, and sadly he got cancer and died shortly after anyhow. My neighbors then got a new pitbull, named Jelly, another dead end for me, who was furthermore extremely fat and old and never did much but lay around. That dog was dangerous only because he could have caused a kid to die of boredom.

One sunny Idaho day, I was up in a tree where I could see the neighbor's front yard, and I saw something that I thought at first was a rabbit. It was soft, fluffy, and cute. After ten minutes of careful scrutiny, I determined it was a puppy, and oh joy, a German Shepherd puppy, playing around with Quinn, our neighbor's son, who was much older than us, an adult who went to a job everyday. I wanted that puppy. Of course, I ran inside right away to tell my family. This was exciting news.

Not long after, I was in my treehouse which overlooked the neighbor's backyard. My brother Ro came out and started bugging me, so I said "Why don't you go stand in front of the neighbor's fence and see if the puppy will come to you" (better for him to get in trouble than me). He did it, holding out his hand to see if she would come. The puppy looked at Ro, cocked her head, and then ran forward as fast as she could run. There was a crack in the fence, where the two gates met, and she stuck her head through the crack and Ro said "No, stop!" He tried to stop her, but it didn't work, she only got through further. At this point, I jumped out of my treehouse and ran, leaving my brother to deal with this problem that I had started. I still remember hearing, as I sped around the corner of the house, Ro saying frantically to the puppy, "No, stop, stay!" I ran to the front. Our front door was open and I heard Ro come inside the back door and announce, "The neighbor's puppy got out!", also choosing words carefully to defray any potential blame. I ran inside and, acting surprised, and said, "What? What happened?" I ran through the house, calling for Audra (my older sister), then I ran out back, and there the cute, sweet, coveted puppy was, running around in circles, and smelling the "new" people. The three of us ran about for a bit and she ran after us, up and down the hills of the field beyond our backyard, and in those few minutes we made a bond with that puppy, like we had been with her for years.

Returning to our senses, our reluctantly responsible party led

her back to the neighbor's fence. We saw Cindy, Quinn's mother, and told her, "Your dog got out!". We gave the puppy to her and she told us her name was Ruby. Well, it didn't take us long after that to figure out that we should ask to walk the puppy; we could be helpful exercisers. The next day I asked, and the answer was sadly "Not right now, but when she gets a bit older you can walk her." I was so disappointed; I figured it was just a nice way of saying "no" forever. After all, people don't usually want kids messing with their new purebred puppies.

However, one evening in late spring, Cindy approached us and in her too quiet way asked if we wanted to walk Ruby, and of course our answer was "Yes!" That was the best evening of my life. After that, all we had to do was ask, and we could take Ruby out to walk (play) in the back field whenever we wanted. Now, it may seem like we were getting ripped off as we were not getting paid to walk their dog, but I assure you, to us it was the other way around.

When we would approach the gate to get Ruby out, she would be sitting there waiting for us. If we were too busy to play, she would watch us with her big brown eyes and that one ear flopped over, and wait. When our time was up for the day and we had to take her back to her yard, and shut the fence, Ruby would howl and fuss, and do her best to keep us from shutting that gate. She never wanted it to end, and we didn't either. We had a lot of fun with Ruby over the summer days, running, throwing balls, and just sitting back in the shade of the trees. A favorite ritual was

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the “playing dead” game. One of us would fall over and not move, pretending to be dead. Ruby would run up and do her best to bring us back to life, licking the person’s face, sniffing and nudging and pawing, and then if that didn’t work, she would lay down and cuddle the person, waiting and loving until we’d jump back up and the fun was on again. The more we played, the more we plotted and planned various ways Ruby might become ours.

Summer became fall, and fall became winter, and amongst our chores and activities, our favorite part of the day was playing with Ruby, whenever we could. I will never forget the day when Ruby was about 6 months old, it was December 14th, and it was snowy, sunny and the air was crisp. We had not taken Ruby out for a while, and the night before I saw her whining pitifully at the gate, and I decided that I would take her out the next day, no matter what. She was so happy to see us, as always, leaping and wagging her tail and running around. We played for a while down in “the dip,” the low part of the field, the place where when our parents looked out for us, they

could not see, unless they walked to the edge and looked down. I had the leash and Audra was throwing the ball for Ruby to chase. Our neighbors were afraid that Ruby might run away, so when we played with her, she was always on a leash, which had some disadvantages, especially if we were playing ball. When the ball got thrown, the leash holder had to be ready to run or Ruby would take off and then get yanked if the person didn’t take off with her. That day, Audra threw the ball once when I wasn’t looking, and Ruby pulled the leash out of my hands, grabbed the ball and ran out of the dip! I yelled, “Grab the leash!” We ran after Ruby, but we could not catch her, before she started fighting with another backyard dog. There was a fence between them, but it still caused a big, loud, scary ruckus, and we wanted no trouble. Ro grabbed the leash, but handed it to Audra who led her away, walking off a few yards to separate them. Instead of resuming normal play, though, Ruby got quiet, stopped and layed down, then started to whine. This was unusual, something seemed wrong, and we were suddenly scared. Audra ran to get Dad who told her to run and tell Cindy or

Quinn, Mom appeared, and I just sat there beside Ruby, as everything seemed to swirl around me. I heard Dad saying, “Is the collar too tight?” So I took off her collar, and she drew in a deep breath and moved her head to look at me with her soft brown eyes, and I ran my hand over her side. Her mouth fell open then, and I stood up and saw the reflection of the sky in her eyes and I knew she was dead. Quinn came running and he knelt down, putting his hands on her, then he shook his head and then he told us, “She’s gone. It is not your fault. She had a heart murmur, we knew she was going to die early, but we just didn’t think it would be this soon. We wanted her to have a full life, and she loved playing with you so much.” This ended the terror that we had somehow killed Ruby, but did nothing for the grief and shock we felt. Audra started to cry, I bit my lip hard, and Ro’s eyes started to water, and then Quinn picked Ruby up and carried her away, and even Mom cried, mostly for us I think. We could hear our neighbor sobbing loudly as he left, too. I thought life could not go on without Ruby always waiting at the gate with a wagging tail, soft brown eyes, now gone forever. 🏔️



Lighthouse

Fredrik Loewen, 7

Lighthouse standing brave and bright
It's like a tall, tall tower at midnight
Standing there in the bright moonlight 🏔️

Mirror Mirror on the Wall

Madeline Wray, 13

I walk into the bathroom
“Mirror mirror on the wall. Who’s the fairest of them all?”
I ask it
And, as usual
Images swirl in the glass
Of girls smaller
Skinnier
Prettier
They are
It answers me

I walk out, heading into a day of constant sorrow over my appearance.

And so it continues
Day after day, I head into the bathroom and ask the mirror
“Mirror mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all?”
And day after day, it answers
“They are.”

Until the day I enter and ask,
“Mirror mirror, who’s the fairest of them all?”
I already know the answer
“They are.”

But today is different.
Instead of walking out,
Content to constant disappointment in myself,
I turn and say,
“I’m done with you.”
And then I walk out

I dye my hair and cut it short
I wear clothes that make me happy, not others.
I embrace my imperfection, for, in it, I find perfection.

One day, I enter the room.
And I ask the question that has dominated my life for so long,
“Mirror mirror on the wall, who’s is the fairest of them all?”

But this time, there are no pictures,
Of girls more perfect than I
All that remains is me, in my glorious imperfection.

“You are.”
I hear faintly
Before walking out. 🏔️



Fruit & Flowers—Liliana Choi, 7

Twilight Night

Breanna Gentry

Dreams are my living fantasy
The colors leave me in awe
As I look at the galaxy
The stars are all I saw

The moon at such an angle
Smiles down at me
How can the shooting star dangle
When the sun chuckles with glee

As I start to wake up
I’m filled with disappointment
My dream has ended
Time for another day 🏔️



ARP 2021

Manga Kora—Audra Preuss, 15

An Exile: A Character Sketch

Joanna Malone, 16

There is, I think we may all agree, something inherently romantic to our minds in the picture of the Exile longing for home. It conjures up in our thoughts all manner of wistful and fanciful images. It gives us much the same feelings as would the tale of two separated lovers, for, in essence and at their very best, that is what an Exile and his home-country (providing he truly loves it) are.

He was an Englishman, and an Exile, of a sort, and in form and features, as well as in the composition of his soul, he completely fulfilled one's idealistic expectations. He was youthful, of the average height, slightly but not frailly built; his head was covered in blue-black curling hair, not overly-long, but brushed back from the face as though a blithe and vagrant breeze had tossed it back in the course of its rambles. His complexion was, as one would expect, rather pale, but he had two warm spots of colour that leapt to either cheek in moments of high feeling. The form of his face was smooth and striking; his eyes were marvelous, with large black pupils and irises of a deep grey-blue that one seldom sees, a colour which can look the most unabashed blue in some lights and the most pensive grey in others, but caught between the two was simply splendid to behold. His mouth was most often curved into a melancholy smile, but when he frowned, he looked like a prince in exile.

And yet, I don't think he was, strictly speaking, an aristocrat. He had been forced to leave England several years earlier due to financial difficulties, but that was the most I knew of his story, for while he often spoke of his homeland, he very seldom spoke of the place he had held in it; it was part of the strange humility of the man, I believe. But he had the appearance

and air of a nobleman, without any of the arrogance or disdain which we in America associate (however rightly or wrongly I am in no position to say) with the English aristocracy.

His voice, too, was different from what one is accustomed to hear in America, for his speech was soft and educated, but with a faint thrill of passion hidden behind it, especially when he spoke of his own country, that made it a pleasure to listen to.

Odd things reminded him of his own land: a rose twining up the side of an arbor, a curiously-shaped cloud in the sky, the very whisper of the meadow grasses when the wind stole through them. Things were sweet to him because they held some remembrance of the place he had left behind. A bird that sang outside his window was beautiful because he had heard a similar song on the Sussex downs. A sunset was lovely because he had seen, across the waters, something like it that was, to his eyes at least, even more lovely. When he said "Spring" he meant the first touch of green that the changing season brushes on the English hills; when he spoke of the sea he meant the North Sea, washing up beside Dover's bleached cliffs. And when April touched the pussy-willow outside his door, I could very easily imagine him giving voice to the first lines of Browning's famous poem.

He never could look at the Atlantic sea for long, he said, for it gave him such a heartsickness and the wish to rise at once and go where his heart lay, across the wild foaming waters. When we went for long walks along the beach, he would either walk with his face turned towards me and the land, or, if I happened to be on the seaward side, with his eyes upon the sands at his feet.

He was a Catholic, too, and perhaps his love for his homeland was somehow tangled up in the misty tales of saintly kings and martyrs of old and Our Lady's Dowry, which are the true and lasting glories of England. If all else were to pass from the "Sceptered Isle", these things would remain.

He could write the most wonderful poetry, which I think arose partly from the intense longing in his soul; words that flowed like clear water, and melodic lyrics that could have come from the very throats of the wild birds. There was always something melancholy in the man, but he was melancholy without becoming morbid for, though it was a joy mixed with yearning, he still took joy in whatever recalled to his mind his country. He did not despise this land, but it was as though he was in a dream-world, a world insubstantial and unreal, and that he was only waiting through the dream till the morning should come.

There was a strange nervous trick he had of absently caressing whatever was placed in front of him with his hands, whether it was a book or other object he was holding or the long, warm muzzle of my dog, he stroked both with equal tenderness and with equal detachment. Sometimes, he was lost in thought for hours at a time, and only came out of his reverie with a start and a bewildered gaze around, like a man who wakes from a very vivid dream. I believe much of his time here was a very vivid dream, for he was a solitary sort and only occasionally broke the lonely vigil of his solitude with walks or visits with me, and I am sure much of his solitary time was spent deep in his reflections of the dear home he had left.

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It is odd; sitting here and writing this, I can almost make out his lonely figure standing on the rocky promontory overlooking the bay and gazing out across the unquiet waters, with his coat and his dark hair blown by the rough, nomadic winds, and the white mysterious mists from the surf creeping up from below, looking like the Wanderer above the Sea of Fog. He did sometimes stand there and bear the heartsickness of the sea. But I have not seen him for many years now, and I know not where fortune has since landed him. Perhaps he has found his way back to his England. I hope so.

So there it is, the picture of an Exile. No doubt the grass over here is just as green as in England, but not to his eyes. No doubt the sky, and the sea, are fully as blue here as they are there, but not in his mind, my friends. No doubt of the colour of a rose is as vibrant, the song of a bird as dulcet as they are sweet to the senses here, but you could never make him understand that. The first fragrant breath of spring may be the same and mean the same in all lands, as it brings the promise of a new year, but, if that is so, my friends, then why is it that it is never fully spring unless we are where our hearts are? 🏔️

Constant

Alexandra Schade, 12

Strange, what you're saying. It must be nonsense, as I don't understand it. It can't be true. That sounds crazy. Everything you do is a joke. This is a waste of time. We shouldn't do that. You are ridiculous. Why would we ever do that?

Why? Because times are changing. We can't stay in the past when new opportunities are arising every day, ideas are always being shared, and everything is evolving. It's time to be more open minded and embrace the new. After all, over time, change is the only constant. 🏔️

If I Could Give a Voice to a Flower

Joanna Malone, 16

If I could give a voice to a flower

I'd give it to the rose.

And then she'd tell me, hour by hour,

Everything she knows.

The springtime when she was the first,

The summer she was last,

The kindly rain that quenched her thirst,

The hues in which she dressed. 🏔️



Stumped—Luke Choi, 6

Still Thinking of You

Dedicated to a girl named A.K


Lindbergh Hughes, 17

You my first thought in the morning,
The more I try not to think, I think,
You are in every song that I sing,
Like a ship about to sink.

The farther I go away from you I know,
I will miss you all the way along,
Do we feel the same? I pray
The same way back from where you stayed.

It is hard not to think,
Though still thinking of you,
This pain hurts, bleeds me inside
Loving you so much and not even knowing why.

You inspire my verses and rhymes,
You give all the colours for my day,
You my bright shining star in the sky,
You my lonely beautiful flower on my way.


Will you be thinking of me? I wonder
Does your heart beat fast like mine?
When the time comes and like a thunder,
Our thoughts scream aloud,
“Just for a moment, we belong to each other
from the looking of our eyes.” 

Proudy's Lesson

Hanna Law, 12

A Proud invention by mankind, the Titanic,
Biggest, coolest, grandest, O how majestic,
They claim it unsinkable, it surely won't sink!
But that is just what proud minds usually think!
Special designed with watertight compartment room,
Seeming obviously will not result in doom!

Like Tower of Babel, the Proud would dare to say!
“Even Great God cannot sink this beauty, Nay!”
The Proud, also wanted Titanic as fastest,
With that, Proud needed it to be the lightest,
Proudy took half the lifeboats away, that's a cheat,
Despite passengers being twice the lifeboat seats.

Titanic in grandeur, maiden voyage began,
Midway collided with iceberg, who can plan?
Panic ran high, unsinkable Titanic sank!
Lacking in lifeboats, passengers died in ranks,
Who can challenge God? No one,
Proud should pay the price.
Let's learn not to be proud, and accept advice. 

Three Wild Hares


Joanna Malone, 16

Down the hill last night
When the moon silvered the trees
Three hares danced
To the music of the breeze.
The frenzied fling of their wild dance
Held thrice its usual madness.
Three hares beneath the moon.
Soon comes Gladness.

When last the moon cast down its rays,
Beneath its pallid glow,
Three hares sat still
Their eyes brimful of woe.
Last night when all the world was grey
Beneath the stars, no dance danced they.
Three hares sigh beneath the moon,
Sorrow comes soon.

The moon was tossed on stormy skies
And on the grass below
Three wild, brown hares
Dashed madly to and fro.
With feint and leap and dash and dart,
As wild doe or maddened hart.
Three wild hares beneath the moon,
War comes soon.

The sky was soft and blue as silk
When last they held their dance
The graceful motions that they made
Held me within a trance.
I saw, in that enchanted hour
How the hares were gliding slower.
Three hares drift beneath the moon
Love comes soon.

Three wild, brown hares,
Their eyes and whiskers gleaming.
Strange is the moon-dance,
Full of secret meaning.
Ever when three hares dance,
Beneath a waxing moon,
Ever when the three hares dance
Something comes soon. 

The Biggest Win

Ryleigh Mae Henry, 14

I sigh as I fumble through my suitcase for my swimsuit. Why does my best friend have to be such a morning person? In my opinion, six-thirty is way too early to be doing anything but sleeping, but Livvy has different ideas. Somehow I'd let her convince me to meet her across the hall at the hot tub before everyone else got up so we could enjoy a few moments of solitude. Honestly, I'd enjoy a few more moments of sleep.

I stumble into the bathroom and quickly change into my swimsuit. I'm still sore from yesterday's long day of volleyball games, so maybe the hot tub will feel good after all. Yesterday, my team had driven three hours to a sports complex for a weekend volleyball tournament. Our whole team was staying at the same hotel, which was fun, but last night had been kind of hectic with ten girls, plus tag-along little siblings, crowded into the pool room.

Once I've made myself at least slightly presentable, I open up the door of our hotel room to find Livvy Pierce waiting for me in the hall.

"I thought you weren't coming," she says, flashing me one of her famous Livvy smiles. Her dark blonde hair is perfectly plaited in two neat french braids. My hair, however, is gathered in the droopiest, saddest messy bun in history. Livvy always manages to show me up when it comes to looking cute.

I sling my pink and blue striped towel over my shoulder and follow her into the pool room, which is delightfully empty and quiet. "I said I'd meet you, didn't I?" Although in truth, I had been really close to telling Livvy to just forget it, that I needed another half hour of snoozing before I started my day.

We're both silent as we climb into the steaming hot tub. It feels so good that I close my eyes and try to forget the fact that Coach Zoey will no doubt be yelling orders at me on the volleyball court in just a few short hours.

"Are you excited, Kat?" Livvy asks, breaking the silence.

I smile, and open my eyes. "Of course. We played really well yesterday. Maybe we're finally figuring out how to play as a team." Well, maybe that was a bit too generous. Jayda McClain, the captain of our volleyball team and the president of the cliquiest clique on the face of planet earth, was still being her snobbish self, and the rest of the team was following suit. To sum it up, volleyball wasn't all sunshine and roses like I'd thought it was going to be.

Livvy must have sensed my thoughts, because she gave my foot a nudge under the water. "Don't worry, Kat. We'll figure it all out."

I sighed, sinking deeper into the wonderful, soothing warmth of the water. "It's just that today's the end. These are our last games for the season. I just wish we could all get along and be friends, even if it's only for one day."

Livvy doesn't respond right away, letting my words hang heavy in the oppressive chlorine-scented air.

"I wish Jayda wasn't so mean," she said finally, picking at her already chipped pink nail polish.

I snort, and the sound echoes in the quiet room. "I'm not sure she can help it. I mean, that's just who she is."

"Which is so sad," Livvy interjects. She's always been the kinder of the two of us.

"She's just so aggravating," I continue. "She completely ignores me until I screw up, then she's giving me a mini-coaching session like she's so much better than I am."

"Jayda is a good volleyball player," Livvy says. "But she does have a pretty superior attitude."

I scoop up a handful of water and let it drip through my fingers. "It just makes me mad. I don't see how people like Jayda are always the popular ones."

Livvy shrugs. "That's just the way it is, Kat." She glances at the pink FitBit on her wrist. "Well, we should probably start getting ready if we want to meet everyone for breakfast."

"Oh, good," I say as I pull myself out of the cozy warm hot tub and wrap myself up in my towel. "I'm so hungry."

Livvy laughs and holds the pool room door open for me. "You're always hungry, Kat."

* * *

"I'm so nervous," Livvy comes up next to me as I grab a volleyball from the cart, picking anxiously at her nails. Playing the Tigers, our rival team, always gets her worked up.

I put a hand on her shoulder and shove a ball into her arms. "You'll be fine, Liv."

She takes a deep breath and smiles at me. "Thanks, Kat. I know you'll be great too."

I walk to my position on the court with the other starters. Jayda flashes me a thumbs up from where she stands beside me.

"Good luck, Kat," she says.

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I freeze for a moment, looking at her in bewilderment. This is the first time I can remember Jayda ever saying something nice to me. Usually, when she isn't ignoring me, she's telling me what I was doing wrong. However, her attitude seems much improved today. In fact, she's even smiling.

I wish Jayda luck as well, accompanied by my best attempt at a sincere smile. Maybe she's changing her ways, I think to myself as the ref blows the whistle. The shrill sound is my cue to focus on the game.

Twenty minutes later, we're tied with the Tigers, only two points away from a monumental win. The Tigers have the ball. They serve, and Livvy dives and gets the ball back up in the air. Jayda quickly gets under it and sets it to me. After just a moment's hesitation, I take my approach and swing. I make solid contact, and the ball hits the ten-foot line on the Tiger's side with a resounding smack.

I just stand there for a minute, staring at the glossy gym floor where the ball had landed. Then I start laughing, positively elated. Livvy gives me a high-five, and Jayda turns to face me, hands on her hips.

"And you tell me you can't hit," she says. A smile travels all the way to her striking green eyes. "I think you can."

I laugh again, adrenaline still pumping through my veins. "Thanks."

We get the ball back, and Livvy walks back to serve. It's game point now. The ball flies over the net and drops quickly. One girl lunges for it but comes up short. Another sharp thud sends my jaw dropping to the floor. Our point.

"We did it!" Livvy squeals, bouncing up and down.

"We just beat the Tigers," I say more quietly, then let out a squeal, even higher-pitched than Livvy's.

High fives all around, then we slap five with the other team and tell them "Good game."

"I'm so hungry, I think I could eat a horse," Livvy says as we plop down on the bench to gather up our stuff. "Why don't we go raid the concession stand for some lunch?"

I stand and sling my duffle bag over my shoulder. "Sounds like a plan."

The two of us weave our way through the crowded sports complex to the front, where the delectable smell of hotdogs and pretzels is wafting through the air. We hop in line and order ourselves hotdogs, then Livvy heads off to call her grandma. I spot Mom sitting at a table not far away, so I scurry over to join her, giving her a quick hug before sitting down across from her.

"I've been hoping to catch you, Kit Kat," she says, squeezing my hand on top of the table. Her eyes crinkle at the edges as she smiles. "You've been running from game to game all day, and I feel like I haven't gotten to talk to you."

"Well, here I am now," I smile, thankful I have such a perfectly wonderful mother.

"I saw your last game," she continues. "The one against the Tigers. Congratulations on the big win."

I tap my fingers on the table, still jittery from excitement. "Thanks. Now if we can just keep winning, we might have a shot at taking third, maybe even second, in the whole tournament. Imagine that."

"I'm sure you girls can do it." Mom reaches over to wipe a smear of

mustard from my chin like I'm five years old, but I don't protest. "Jayda seems to be in a pretty good mood this morning."

I nod and set my hotdog down. "Yeah, she is. It's been really weird. She's all energetic and encouraging all of a sudden, which is the complete opposite of the Jayda I've come to know. She even gave me a high five. And said she thought I was a good hitter. Imagine!"

Mom laughs. "I was talking to Shannon, Jayda's mom, this morning before your game. She says Jayda had a pretty rough year last year."

"Oh?" I sit up a bit straighter in my chair. "What do you mean?"

"Shannon said that Jayda didn't even want to play volleyball again this season. She said that last year Jayda didn't get along with any of the girls on her team, and felt like it just wasn't worth it. But Shannon convinced her to give it another try. Jayda says she likes all the girls on the team this season so much better.

I sit quietly for a moment, trying to fully digest what Mom had said. Jayda likes the team? It's always seemed to me that she hates us all. But maybe that's just because she's struggling to find where she fits, just like the rest of us. It seems weird for me to think about Jayda as anything but the bad guy, but maybe that's where I've been going wrong this whole time.

"Kit Kat, are you okay?" Mom peers at me curiously from behind her glasses.

I snap to attention. "Yeah, I'm good. I'm just starting to see Jayda in a whole new light."

One side of Mom's mouth quirks up. Something tells me that's exactly what she was going for when

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she told me about her conversation with Shannon.

Mom and I finish up our lunch with small talk about the games we've played and the ones coming up, then we part ways. I meet up with Livvy by the front door and we head off to our next game.

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"That's it. It's over."

Those words, sobbed out by Livvy as she collapses on the bench as the last whistle blows, send my heart crashing down to my toes. It's over.

I peek over at Natalie, one of our teammates, who's crying even harder than Livvy. Coach Zoey is quick to hurry over and wrap her up in a hug. Tears prick at my own eyes, but I blink them back. How many times had I told myself that when this moment came, when the season was finally over, I wasn't going to cry? Now, thinking about our crushing defeat, I was barely holding it together.

I plop down next to Livvy and start yanking off my court shoes. All the sniffing around me is nearly driving me insane, so I try to focus on something, anything, other than the fact that this was the end.

Sure, I'm probably being dramatic, but the feelings crashing around inside of me are real. Regret for not trying harder to be friends with the girls on my team. Frustration that we'd lost our last game. Pride that we'd played so hard this weekend. Sadness that we'd all never get the chance to play volleyball all together again.

Before I know it, the whole team is back at the loft, dropping our bags on the table and pulling out plastic baggies full of trail mix to satisfy the gnawing hunger that the long

day of nonstop physical exercise had produced.

As I sift through a handful of trail mix, dropping the nuts back into the bag and popping the chocolate and raisins into my mouth, I wonder how Jayda's taking our defeat. I look up and scan the group of girls, my eyes finally landing on her. She's sitting beside one of her friends, and to my immense surprise, her eyes are shiny with tears.

No way.

Jayda, the one who always seemed unaffected no matter what happened. The one who'd always led the charge. The strong one I'd always looked to for guidance, whether I'd admit it or not. Jayda is crying.

That's when I finally lose it. All the tears I've managed to dam up behind my eyes come pouring out all at once. I sniff and try to brush them away, but it's no use.

Livvy looks over at me from where she's sitting to my left and gives a small laugh. "We're such a mess."

I can only nod, because now I'm laughing and crying at the same time. I probably look like a major dork, but at the moment, I don't care. At least Livvy's in the same boat, a sobbing, gasping mess just like me. Her mascara is hopelessly smeared, making her look a little bit like a raccoon, but I don't say anything. From the way she's swiping furiously at her eyes, I think she knows.

Natalie scoots over to sit by us, and we all manage to calm ourselves down enough to carry on a conversation.

"It's really my fault that we lost," Livvy wails, picking fiercely at her nails. "I cannot believe I screwed up that last play."

I sigh and grab her hand, rescuing her nails from any more stress-picking. I can't deny the sickening guilt creeping up in my stomach. "Liv, it's my fault too."

She looks up at me, raccoon eyes wide. "What do you mean?"

I bite my lip. "You know I could have blocked that last hit if I'd tried. Insead, I left you to go sliding across the gym floor after the ball."

Before Livvy can answer, Natalie lets out a loud breath. "It's not you guys' fault. It's mine. I played awful."

I open my mouth to assure her that she's not to blame, but then I stop. This is something the whole team needs to hear. Me included.

I push myself to my feet. "Hey!" I bark out sharply, and everyone's eyes fix on me.

I take a moment to look around at the faces of my teammates. Boy, do I wish I'd tried harder to get along with them. Especially Jayda.

I swallow another mouthful of tears before I can speak. "We all need to quit blaming ourselves for what happened out there," I say, glancing back at Livvy and Natalie. "Let's be honest. We all played pretty lousy."

"What are you trying to say, Kat?" Jayda's friend narrows her eyes at me. I tense slightly, my eyes flicking over to Jayda, expecting the same reaction from her. But Jayda's only sitting there, looking intently at me. In fact, it looks like she's actually waiting for me to continue. So I do.

I'm trying to say that. . . that it takes a whole team to win, but it also takes a whole team to lose. It's not on any one of us alone. It's on all of us, together."

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Livvy nods enthusiastically. “Kat’s right.”

I give her hand a squeeze, a silent thanks for backing me up. The rest of the team nods along with her. I even catch Jayda cracking a small smile as she pulls the scrunchie out of her curly dark hair, letting it fall to her shoulders.

Maybe we didn’t get the big win. But honestly, I think we jumped an even more important hurdle today. We pulled together, played together, and I was determined to make sure we finished together. Maybe I’d missed a lot of chances to reach out to Jayda over the last three months, but the season wasn’t over, at least not yet. Time is running short, however.

I watch as Jayda slings her purple duffle bag over her shoulder and starts down the stairs. I jump up

and hurry to follow her, but she’s way faster than I am. Soon she’s swallowed up by the crowd on the main level of the sports complex. I know she’s headed to the entrance, so I continue towards it. She’s just pushing open the exit door when I finally reach her.

“Jayda, wait,” I call, and she turns towards me. I’m breathing hard from chasing her, but I focus on what I’m saying. “You did great today.”

Jayda gives me a small smile, her green eyes lighting up. “Thanks, Kat. You did too.”

Something flutters in my stomach at her words, but I quickly push it down. “I just wanted you to know that I think your encouragement today really helped the team pull together. We couldn’t have done it without you.”

She blushes. “Thanks.” She starts to leave, but then turns around to face me once more. “And for the record, Kat, I think you pulled the team together this season more than I did. They all look up to you. And maybe I do, too.”

And then she’s gone. The glass door swings closed behind her, and I’m left standing there, staring after her, confused by what she’d just said. Jayda looks up to me? No way. I’m having a hard time believing that. But maybe. . .

“Kat?”

I turn to find Livvy looking at me curiously. Thankfully, she doesn’t ask any questions. “There’s a game between Linden Grove and Oakwood starting,” she says. “Do you want to come watch it with me?”

I smile. “Sure.” 🏔️



Reindeer—Audra Preuss, 15

Oak Leaf

Bethany Loewen, 15

An oak leaf falls down,
But caught by the wind it soars
'til the wind is gone. 🏔️

Toad

Bethany Loewen, 15

A very large toad
Hopping among all the rocks
Was caught and then freed 🏔️

BEAVERS

Joyous Teoh, 9

Anna was going to see live beavers making dams! She and her family would have a picnic there. The milk, hamburger, sandwiches, bacon, pickles, and eggs all went into the picnic basket. They all got into the van, which was parked in front of the garden. Anna brought her cap and sweater, for it would be cold in the jungle beside the river.

As the van drove into the jungle, rangers appeared. The van stopped. Mom took the basket and helped Anna out. When the van was locked, a ranger led them towards the river, walking quietly. He started to talk about the beavers and their dams, saying how amazing they are. They stopped and sat down beside a bush. At first Anna saw nothing, but slowly a beaver emerged from the water. The ranger pointed to a beaver who was cutting down a tree. When the tree fell, the beaver cut it in half. Then it pushed a half across the water. Then it jumped into the water and started to gnaw a hole from beneath. After that, it went down into the deep water, taking up mud with its tail. Then it put the mud on the dam, using its big flat tail to spread it. Then it collected sticks and put them on the dam. Finally, it carried stones and filled in cracks. Anna drank some milk, bit into her sandwich, and cut her egg. She looked in awe at the dam. So fast! They hadn't even finished their food when the dam was built! They looked at more beavers at work. Time passed quickly, and it was time to go. The van drove out of the jungle and the rangers waved.

That night, Anna thought about the beavers. They are so amazing! Anna decided that she would go back next summer. Before she went to bed, she wrote a letter to her aunt,

Dear Aunt Rosa,

Today I saw a live beaver at work! Beavers make dams. They have long, sharp front teeth that can cut down trees. They are amazing! I have decided to go back next summer and write a book about beaver making dams.

Love,
Anna



The Author's Starry Masterpiece: A Legend

Lia Nicole, 17

In the beginning was The Author, and The Author was without hope, and The Author was starry-eyed. This Author loved stories full of adventures and romances, with hobbits and lions, and magic and colorful things that shone in the darkest moments of life. Yet even with all her books, candy, toys, and good things in life, even having published two books and multiple articles, The Author was unsatisfied. She longed for something more, but anything she tried to experience left her more empty than before. Reality could never fulfill her deepest desires and dreams. And so she would sleep at night, gazing out her window, studying the dazzling lights in the sky, wondering if perhaps they wouldn't mind coming close to the earth for once so she could reach out and touch one. Though she greatly desired it and used all her might and wishes for a small escape from the dullness of life, that wish never came true...

One day, The Author became so full of remorse that she threw herself upon her bed and sobbed until the pillow leaked the tears she shed. Why did life have to be predictable and unexciting? Why was it that the only time The Author felt accepted and fit in was when she embarked on the adventures of the pages? It wasn't fair to know that somewhere far away, someone was living a life so full and magnificent that it was a perpetual happily ever after. If fairy tales were real, and this The Author believed with her whole heart, then she deserved to live them as well and live the life she knew she needed.

At a loss for how to cope with this overwhelming sadness and despair, The Author decided to pour her heart and soul into one final masterpiece before laying to rest. So The Author picked up her pencil, and the symphony began to play.

At first, nothing happened as The Author waited and stared at the stars she loved to admire and wish for. Then a ray of starlight seemed to tap her silver locks and spark within her heart. So she swirled her pencil around, then paused once more.

As she looked upwards to her nightly friends, they seemed for once to acknowledge her presence and lightly tap her as if to show their concern. And each time they did, The Author would swirl her pencil without thinking, creating lines and circles in the sky.


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Very soon, the stars seemed to be raining their light upon The Author so quickly that she hadn't a moment to rest her pencil and see what she was creating. It just happened out of her control. But something about this, perhaps the newness, the spontaneous, or the excitement, filled her heart with joy. For once, she felt content. When she did take a moment's rest, the happiness fled so quickly that The Author nearly fainted from the loss of the fresh creative air.

So on she went, all night long, continuously swirling and moving her pencil, feeling the light of the stars greet her so gently. And soon, she had created a whole new world with unique animals and people and exotic trees and flowers. It was full of adventure and romance, little people and noble things, and whatever else flowed from The Author's heart.

As the hours ticked by, The Author's happiness, may I dare say, her life, ebbed away, as if she was literally pouring her very self out for the sake of the pleasure of the stars. And at dawn's first light, The Author was nowhere to be seen, for she had faded away, having completed her final masterpiece...

A world where people are loved. A world where adventure is always around the corner. A world where dreams come true and reality is nothing but happiness. A world where things are exciting and new, full of life and hope. A world made just for The Author.

And to this day, The Author dwells among the stars, sending her light upon her fellow writers to inspire them to create the story they've always wanted and compose the song they need to hear. She gently nudges them to truly reach for the stars and come dwell amongst them One Day... 

Opening Words

Meredith Leaverton, 17

I am a terrible communicator. If anyone asks me a direct question about my ideas or emotions, my brain shuts down and I don't speak. It's a terrible habit, and one that I don't recommend, but it has shaped the course of my life so that I can only thank my silence for driving me to express myself with words on paper. I always have loved a good story.


One of my earliest memories is lying on my stomach on the smooth grey chaise lounge, a block of afternoon sunshine on the mottled linoleum kitchen floor of our town house, listening to my mother's voice read to me from E.B. White's *The Trumpet of the Swan*. When I got a little older, my younger sister and I would pretend to be Mary and Laura in our postage-stamp-sized back yard, re-enacting Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* books. On walks I made up rhymes about anything interesting I saw, chanting them aloud to the rhythm of my feet.

Our house was full of books. I read them all as soon as I could, and then again and again. I was eight when I tried story writing for the first time, when I wrote my first story down on blank printer paper with a blunt stub of pencil, sprawled out over the scratchy brown carpet that gave me a rash in the flood of sunshine that slanted through the school room window. The pencil went through the paper a few times into the carpet, but when I pulled it out again, I had written my first story. I remember very clearly the pride I felt at having created something.

I'll never forget the day I decided to become a writer. I was ten years old, and I had been curled up on the old brown couch opposite our beloved bookshelves for most of the day.

I was reading L.M. Montgomery's *Emily Climbs* for the second time, enthralled by the magic pictures the words presented to me. Suddenly I put my book down and sat up. It was dark outside, but the street lamp outside and the little light fixture in the middle of the ceiling lit the room glaringly. I looked at the picture of black-haired Emily clutching a book on the cover of my book and stared into space. If Emily could write, why couldn't I? I'll do it, I thought. I found a black-and-white composition book and began my first journal.

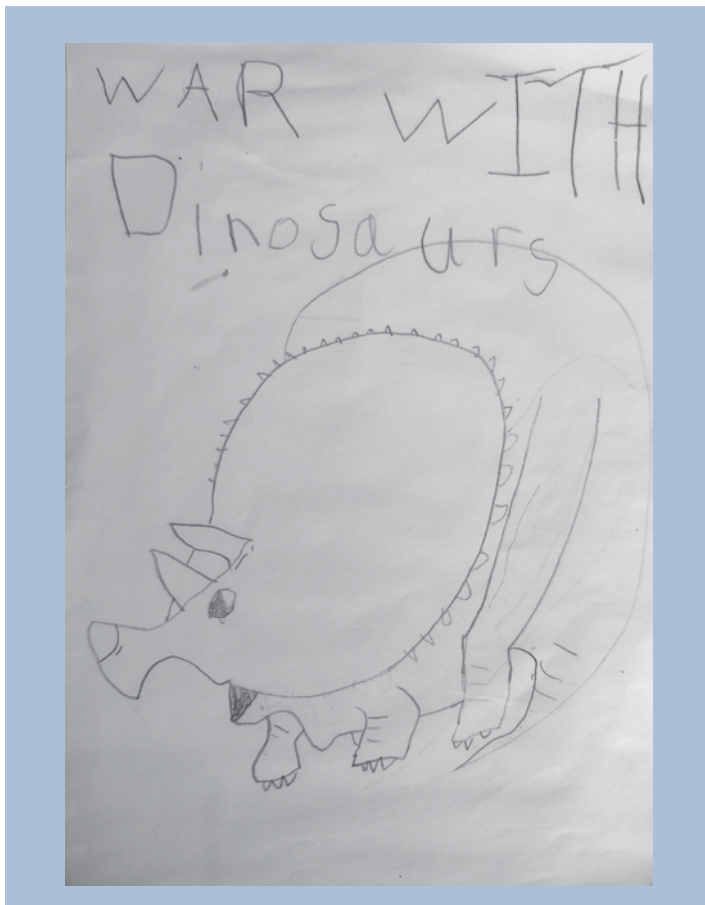
That was seven years ago now. I'll admit, it hasn't been easy. The level of self-doubt one can experience is amazing. There are days when all I can do is write screaming angry poems because the words won't come. But I've stuck with the journey, and been blessed. I haven't stopped reading. I live in the country now, in the very place I always wanted to write about, and I write at a desk in a bedroom full of hundreds of books, yes, even stacked on the floor. I graduate from high school soon, and I have hopes of entering the career I've always dreamed of. It is still hard. But I have met up with great and helpful books and people along the way, and I haven't grown out of wonder about everything in life. I still tell myself stories, and when I'm bored with everything else I write nonsense poems about generals that look like goats.

To me, writing is life. It has helped me illuminate the world when everything seemed impossibly dark. It's part of my witness that as we humans were created, we can also create, in a small way. The stories just keep coming, and come to find out if you put words on a page, you're like an explorer on a journey. It never ends. 

War With Dinosaurs

Fredrik Loewen, 6

Once upon a time there was a beautiful place. And the dinosaurs lived there and they were fighting over land. And some parts of that land was beautiful, so they were fighting over those places. The land has really nice palm trees, though there wasn't much food there. But there was one place that had much more food than the other, and that's what the dinosaurs were fighting over. A bunch of Allosaurus's are trying to stop the war. The Pterodactyl are on one side, and the Allosaurus's are having big rocks dropped on them by the Pterodactyl's. The war was longer than World War 2 and World War 1 combined. And then, the war ends. A meteor came and hit the Dinosaur World and many dinosaurs were killed. But there was only one dinosaur left on the team that had the most food in his half of the world. Many more dinosaurs on the other team were still alive because they worked really hard to build a hideout that was basically indestructible. So then those dinosaurs survived. And they fought against the one dinosaur who had more food than they did. And the team that had the least food won, and they got much more food. And much more land that they ended up sharing. 🏔️



Impossible

K. E. Keseman, 17

This is not the way I wanted things to be.

This very morning I listed all the things I hoped for since being engaged to Mary. Chief among them was a family of children, whom she would care for in her motherly way while I built the furniture for our house. And I would teach the boys not only how to use saws and hammers, but to appreciate the satisfying thump of a mallet and the transformation of rough wood being sanded, so that when I grew old, they would be glad to take over the work.

Now all those dreams are in shambles.

I toss in my bed, throwing off the covers and pulling them up again over and over. I try to shake from my head the image of the bump beneath Mary's sand-colored robe, but without success.

She is the last person I would suspect of unfaithfulness, but the evidence is clear. She has betrayed me. I have no choice but to let her go. Because I still love the rest of her, I must find the quietest way to do it. How could she do this to me?

I sit upright in the darkness of early morning. My dream comes back to me in vivid bursts, each more surprising than the last. I have read of angels in the Scriptures, but I never imagined them as bright and imposing as the one in my dream.

“Do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit,” the angel said. What on earth does this mean? The Holy Spirit? Is it possible for an ordinary woman to have a child from God?

I have seen Him do impossible things before.

“You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” This is even more confusing. I would be amazed enough if the angel said He would save His people from the Romans, or from a war or famine or disease. But from their sins? How is it possible?

I have seen God do the impossible.

Then the rest of it dawns on me at once. Mary will be my wife after all. More than that, I will raise her child... her son, Jesus, who is from the Holy Spirit...

It was only a dream. Likely I imagined it all in my anger and distress.

No. I did not imagine it. Nothing my finite human mind could invent, even subconsciously, could compare to

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a child coming from God Himself and saving us all. It is too ridiculous to be false.

A smile spreads across my face, and the first ray of sun floats into the room.

“Isn't He beautiful?” Mary is sitting on the dry hay beside the manger, her dusty face fixed in awe at the tightly wrapped infant lying there.

“Mary, you need to sleep now,” I say for the tenth time. I put a hand on her shoulder and gently nudge her toward the pile of hay. “I won't let the animals kick Him, if that is your worry.”

She relents at last, kissing the sleeping newborn once more before she lies down.

I keep watch for hours. The night grows cold, even in the hot stable with its smelly air, but I cannot rest, not when the Son of God is resting in my care.

A loud bray from the donkey behind startles me out of my thoughts. The infant's pale eyes blink open, and He begins to cry. I scoop Him up into my arms and speak softly, but His howls still drown out the scuffles and snorts of the animals around us. Writhing and kicking inside the swaddling cloths, the God of my ancestors cries like every other infant on earth.

It is impossible. 🏔️



Inspired by the song Curses—Bethany Loewen, 14

Sammy The Squirrel

A poem for Grandma and Grandpa

Hunter Loewen, 13

I saw Sammy the squirrel today,
Up high in his treetop home,
Chattering the day away,
And he was all alone,

Where are his chipmunk friends,
To laugh and play with him?
Are they off stealing cookies,
Like Sammy did on a whim?

Sammy much regrets it now,
To honestly tell the truth,
He didn't know they'd be so offended,
To share their cookies in sooth,

He thought he'd save up winter fat,
Or keep it in his stores,
Though after the chaos that ensued,
He's never wanted more,

He much prefers his seeds in peace,
Than a cookie and a yell,
In his quiet woodland home,
In his beautiful dell,

The leaves are turning orange and red,
The air: becoming cool,
Sammy's stocking up on nuts,
He's certainly not a fool,

I saw Sammy the squirrel today,
Up high in his treetop home,
Chattering the day away,
But he was not alone,

What's this?
Sammy's friends are back,
And they have food to spare,
They're making a banquet in the trees,
They're making a feast up there!

The chipmunk cheeks bulge,
They stuff themselves as full as they dare,
Later, as Sammy settled in to sleep,
He thought: autumn's fair! 🏔️

The Beginning of the End

Madeline Wray, 13

As my family and I sit around the tv, I notice that my sister Ingrid is playing another video game that mom probably would disapprove of. Oh well. "What time is it?" My other sister Ceci asks. "Why don't you look at that ever-so-convenient clock not eight feet from your head?" My dad suggests, not looking away from the tv. Sighing, Ceci glances at the clock. "And now Irene Shortwitz with global news," Ted Mallor, our local news anchor, says. Irene came on the screen, and I couldn't help but notice that she looked somewhat disheveled.

"Well, Ted, everyone remembers the excitement and scare of the J55 comet, which was supposed to pass over the east coast about a week ago. For those of you who don't remember, J55 was not your average comet. J55 was the size of a dwarf planet, and since it was scheduled to pass over the earth, NASA was worried that its size might affect our atmosphere. We were all relieved when the famed Haleys comet, which passed over the planet a year early, crashed into J55, destroying the comet. When hit, J55 broke into quarters, two heading into deep space. The other two headed towards the sun, but no one worried, for we thought they would just float off. Instead of floating off, they remained on their earlier path. At 2:16 this afternoon, one-quarter crashed into the sun, causing many to feel a sudden burst of heat. The crash has caused the sun to dim, and it will continue to darken." I was so engrossed in Irene's statement that I didn't hear mom pull into the driveway. As she began speaking, I noticed that Irene had tears in her eyes. "Folks, I never thought that I

would be the one to say it, but ..." Right then, mom ran through the front door and said at the exact time as Irene, "The sun is dying."

"What," my dad said with a bewildered look. "That's impossible." Mom, who had been running around the kitchen looking for something, stopped and turned to glare at him. "Frank, have you forgotten just which one of us works for NASA," mom asked through gritted teeth. Dad opened his mouth as if to retort, but I quickly shook my head before he could. If he had said whatever was in his head, it probably would have caused something akin to Nagasaki. "Holliday," mom says, her voice hard, "go check on your sisters, please." "Yes, ma'am," I reply, quickly heading to the living room. I walk around the couch and scan my sisters, youngest to oldest.

At four, Prairie was oblivious, coloring in her book. Ceci, the poor middle child at nine, was staring at the tv, a look of shock still on her face. Lastly, the oldest of the three at eleven, Ingrid, was still on her computer. Sitting down beside her, I ask gently, "Ceci, what's going on in that head of yours?" Swallowing, she asks me, "Holli, what's the word for the world's end?" "Uh, is it apocalypse?" She nods. "Why do you ask?" Suddenly tears form in her eyes. "Is that going to happen?" I freeze, not knowing what to say. Part of me wanted to say no, that everything would be fine. The other part knows that that's not true. Still unsure, I go with the best thing I can think of. "I don't know, maybe, but mom and dad have it covered." Ceci nods quickly and goes back to drawing. Standing up, I walk toward Ingrid and stand

in front of her for about a minute without looking up. Annoyed, I debate which way to get her attention. I could put my hand in front of her face, but that would be boring. Or I could turn off her computer, but on the off chance that she's working on school, I don't want to run the risk of messing it up. Finally, I settle on flicking her on the forehead. "The heck was that for?" She asked, rubbing her forehead. Instead of responding, I smile and settle on the couch beside her. I looked at her computer and was grateful that she was oblivious. "Jerk," she muttered, going back to her game. "Holliday," mom called, "get your shoes; we're going to the store."

In the car, the silence was deafening. "Why are we going to the store," I ask. "When people figure out that the end of the world is upon us, the first thing they're gonna do is buy food." Oh. That makes sense, I think to myself. "What's the next thing they do," I inquire. "Stock up on gas. I made your dad go to the local gas station to stock up." "Holli, how were your sisters?" I don't respond; I just stare out the window, lost in thought. "Holli," mom says, her voice urgent. "Sorry, Prairie and Ingrid were oblivious, and Ceci is freaked out." Sighing, she nods. "Just how can one measly comet kill a star?" Suddenly, I am furious at the galaxy, the universe, and mom. "Honey, that was no measly comet; it was the size of Pluto." I clench my fists and continue to stare out the window. "When part of the comet hit the sun, it caused a massive explosion. Then part of the sun started to collapse." I glare out the window, unable to look at her. How could she be so

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calm, talking like a sun in a school solar system was broken, not the one keeping us all alive? “Eventually, the sun will fizzle or burn out. Then, the sun will completely collapse and be sucked into a black hole. Once that happens....” I cut her off before she can finish. “Jeez, mom, I get it. The sun dies, we all die. No need to keep on kicking me while I’m down.” She looked at me, startled, as we pulled into the parking lot. “Holli....” Again I cut her off. “How long do we have anyway? A day, a week, two weeks? I don’t know why I’m even asking, seeing as NASA’s track record is so crappy.” She swerves into a parking space and turns to stare at me. “Holliday Louise McCormick, I get that you are fourteen and are going through a tough time, but that is no excuse. You know better than to talk to me or anyone like that. That aside, where did that comment about my job come from?” I snort. “Did you forget that NASA said the quarter would go into deep space? If they were wrong about something so obvious as that, how am I supposed to know that you are right about how long it will take to die?” We stare at each other for a full minute before she looks away. With that, we walk into the store.

“So, what are we looking for,” I ask stiffly. “Canned food, rice, pasta, things that will last a while.” Nodding, I grab a cart and walk toward the canned food aisle. “Look for bargains. It doesn’t have to be a name brand. Tomatoes are tomatoes, no matter the brand. Here, take the canned food list.” I glanced at the list and muttered got it before walking toward the aisle. “Peas, corn, tomatoes, beans. Jeeze, this is long.” I say, shaking my head. It takes me nearly five minutes to finish the list. It was then that I realized I had no clue where mom was. I proceeded to look around the store for a while

before I found her in the frozen food aisle. “Done with the list?” She asks, not looking at me. “Yep.” That’s the last thing we say to each other till we get to the car.

On the ride home, I can’t look away from the shadows on the side of the road. The darkness makes me wonder, when the sun does die, will the earth look like that for all eternity. As we turned onto our street, I noticed a light coming from Ceci’s window, almost like a flare. “What is she still doing up? Her bedtime was an hour ago.” “I guess Frank decided to lean on the rules,” Mom said, shrugging. We walked inside and began to unload the groceries. “Holli, go and get ready for bed.” “Yes, ma’am,” I whispered and began tiptoeing upstairs. I head toward my room, only to get distracted by another light coming from Ingrid’s room. Puzzled, I push open the door. “In-

grid,” I whisper yell, “your trashcan is on fire!” “Huh,” She whispered back, confused. I quickly ran over and poured her cup of water over the flame. “How did you manage to catch your trashcan on fire,” I question, still in shock. “Must have been a stray spark from my robot.” She whispered. “Try to keep the trashcan fires down, please.” “I’ll try,” she whispered.

In my room, I find myself staring at my ceiling. Who knows how much longer we have here on earth. One thing I hope is that I live long enough to see the sun die. But knowing my sister, I’ll probably die in a fire caused by a robot. My obituary would say I was killed in a devastating fire caused by her sisters’ robot. The end of the world may come, but my sister will always cause a fire. With that oddly comforting thought, I fell asleep. 🏔️



Art by

Lake lady—Audra Preuss, 15

God's Love

Emily Roberts, 15

God's love is a never-ending fountain.
He is always merciful and shows love first and wrath second.
It is only when you think of how he came to earth and died on the cross,
For sins he had not committed.
That we realize how much he truly loves us.
And how whilst we don't deserve his love or mercy,
He gives them to us, without ceasing, through all of the blessing we get.
Praise God! For he is great and loves us for all eternity. 🏔️

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Quiet

Amelia Johnson, 18

Some hurts remain,
Some tears aren't shed,
Some lives aren't lived without regret.
Some fights cannot be fought
When hope is lost,
They must be given voice.
What is a fight if we can't speak?
What is a life if we can't teach
Others light and truth?
What is suffering without hope,
And how can you dream without waking up?
After pain,
After the storm,
If you are saved,
There is more.
I want to spend the rest of my life
Thanking You,
Because without You,
There would be no life,
No hope,
No healing.
You are the only life and peace,
And You saved me from the deep.
When no one understood,
You knew.
When I was hurting,
You hurt with me.
When I could not speak,
You were my voice.
When I was overwhelmed by the darkness,
You drove it out with light.
Now, I wonder,
Who am I,
To be graced with a Friend who never leaves?

Who am I,
To be saved
And then to walk away?
We were given voices
That we may speak,
We were given horrors
So that we could see
That others have lives
And others can breathe,
Others have hearts that ache
And eyes that see.
Our lives are such a mingling of bitter and sweet,
Sometimes it's hard to see the difference.
Look to Him,
Hear Jesus's voice,
In Him, we all have a choice.
In Him, we have such a beautiful Word
To keep steady by our sides,
A weapon sharper than a million swords
And a weapon full of strength
To aid us in our fight.
Remember,
In your darkest hours,
Youth or age,
Dark or day,
Easy or hard,
Peace of mind or suffering,
We can always count on
Jesus Christ.
We can always count on the truth
That never shakes,
Even when lies have filled our lives
We always have the strength to
Fight,
And to not stay quiet. 🏔️

Tennis Balls

Charlotte Crowell, Age 17

It was freezing cold at Summerfield Farms, again. I shivered and rubbed my forearms, hoping to generate even a little bit of warmth.

Scott, my rowing coach, stood in the center of the barn, describing the evening's workout. Never one to be still, he rocked back and forth on the heels of his tennis shoes as he spoke. Suddenly, he clapped his hands together and smiled brightly.

"Alright! Let's get started."

A brief warm-up, and then we shuffled over to the rowing machines arranged into sloppy rows at the back of the barn. I chose one in the last row, strapped myself into the foot stretchers, and picked up the handle. It was thick, like a navy bratwurst, and felt cool and vaguely sticky in my hands.

"Ready... go!" Scott called.

And so the workout began. I straightened my legs and pushed myself backwards, feeling a tingling gush of blood flow through my nearly-frozen thighs, and hinged my upper body behind my hips. I rocked forward, bending my knees, and pushed back again. Back and forth. Back and forth. In its simplest form, rowing is merely a combination of these two movements.

Halfway through the workout, Scott placed a kryptonite-green tennis ball under the chain that connected my handle to the machine.

"Don't let your chain hit the ball," he instructed.

I nodded and immediately hit my chain on the ball, causing it to spin madly in place like a miniature planet rotating about its axis. Perplexed, I tried and failed again. After some experimentation I real-

ized that I had to sit with my spine straight and my shoulders shifted behind my hips in an intensely awkward position. Even then, the chain would just barely slide over the top of the ball.

By the end of the practice, I had made another realization: I hated the tennis ball.

Yet I could not escape it. From then on, the ball followed me wherever I went, grinning at me from its perch – a mocking, round little gremlin. Every time my chain brushed it, it would spin wildly around, laughing at me. Soon, I wanted nothing more than to seize it and throw it into the sun, where it would explode in a satisfying shower of golden sparks.

However, as time passed, I began to notice a change. My back no longer felt stiffer than an old Triscuit after practice. My movements became more fluid, my speed increased, and Scott joked that I had won "most improved by tennis ball." Slowly, the tennis ball became a friend.

Two months later came the dreaded 2k day. On this bleak day, coaches force their entire team to row 2000 meters as fast as humanly possible. It is a massacre that leaves even the most seasoned rower sprawled on the floor, barely conscious.

"How are you feeling, Charlotte?" Scott asked, bounding over. The amount of enthusiasm he managed to maintain during such a grim time was astounding.

"Nervous," I admitted.

"What's the plan?"

For the next minute we discussed race times and goals. He smiled

once again and turned to leave. "Sounds good, Charlotte."

"Hey Scott, one more thing."

"What's up?" He spun back around on his heel in a fluid motion.

"Do you think I could have the ball?"

I sat at full attention, waiting for Scott's call.

"Ready... go!"

Rowers begin a 2k at breakneck speed, trying to build as much momentum as possible in those invaluable first few seconds. After this rapid frenzy, I quickly settled into the speed I would need to hold in order to break my record. The dreaded effects of the 2k set in rapidly: by the halfway point I was starved for breath and a fiery sensation had penetrated deep into my thighs and lower back. As I came into the final 500 meters of the race, my face was completely numb and every breath I took cut into my lungs as if the air was serrated. The last 100 meters, I broke loose into a full-out sprint as rolling dark clouds began to gather around the edges of my vision.

As soon as the monitor hit zero meters I let go of my handle and crumpled sideways. My vision seemed to be buffering – the entire barn was jiggling like Jell-O – and it took all my willpower not to curl up in the fetal position on the cold stone floor. My senses slowly began to work again and I glanced at my monitor. The time read 8:27.5, almost a second under my previous record. As I stood up and my teammates formed a mob to congratulate me, a glint of green caught my eye. There, under the chain of my handle, the tennis ball sat proudly, as if it knew it had helped me succeed. 🏔️

Seasonal Poem!

Hanna Law, 12

Spring

Spring is such a splendid beauty!!
Buds and shoots do mesmerize me.

New life and new shoots, bringing hope,
Corona? Tornado? Nope, nope!

Picnic by cherry blossom trees,
Enjoy sparkling juice with cookies.

Spring gloriously wonderful spring,
Bringing my heart a new song sing.

Summer

Sweltering hot, I love summer?
Even though I melt like butter!

Summer's excuse to eat ice cream,
Sweet, fresh and cold, just like a dream.

Kids on beach build castle with sand,
Adults sun bathe for nice dark tan.

No school!!! Holiday brings us rest,
Family trips, excursions, quests!

Autumn

I truly always loved autumn,
Let me tell you why it's awesome.

Walking down the path that's narrow,
Pretty leaves orange red yellow.

Dry crunchy leaves I step in track,
Exciting sound crinch crunch crick crack.

Wow, autumn is a special thing!
Best memories autumn will bring!

Winter

Winter brings us snow that is cold,
Scenes of kids playing snow unfold.

Every nook and corner shows white,
Sometimes even the cold dark night.

Fireplace warms home nice and cozy,
Drinks hot cocoa resting snugly.

Days drew short, while the nights grew long,
Young pianist plays a peaceful song.

Reality

So much to say about season,
Love to imagine and reason.

Tropic Malaysia where I live,
Has zero seasons I believe?

The only weather sun and rain,
Either Sunny? Rain? Sunny? Rain?

So, what do I know 'bout seasons?
Spot mistakes? You know the reason! 🏔️

Lobsters

Charlotte Crowell, Age 17

There's an ink-black mark on the third stair to the top of the stairwell. To me it always looked like a lobster claw, poised and ready to clamp viciously around my sluggish foot. Like the lobsters in the warm southern waters. They look nothing like the northern lobsters that drift amicably in the big aquarium tanks at the supermarket like half-empty soda cans. They are monsters, half sea urchin. Large, sand dune color, covered from head to jointed leg to plated tail in long, arching spines.

You never liked those lobsters. You would crawl on top of me, trying to get away from the spines, from

the claws, from the dripping, waving antennae. It would writhe, you would scream, but I stayed silent, secretly flattered.

At night you would sit with me, bare legs crossed, spinning stories from invisible glowing threads with swift fingers, the gentle gold light washing over us both. I would watch, my own voice dormant. After you were gone I would sit alone, running my feet over the cool, pocked stone tile again and again and again. Shadows ruled the walls – scurrying and circling, running and twisting. 🏔️