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I fell asleep to the sound of a songbird. The whistles softly escaping its beak slowly allowed my eyes to drop. It was pitch black, yet the whispers of the songbird made it feel like the warmth of a fireplace that had been lit within my room, and my room alone. I fell asleep to the sound of a songbird.

I felt the air around me grow crisp, yet I felt a light shining upon me still. The songbird’s anthem had faded away, yet I heard the rustling of the trees surrounding me. I felt the leaves of trees as they hit the ground, as if I were falling alongside them. I overheard footsteps from a distance, as the sound of breaking wood filled my ears. I opened my eyes cautiously, because I knew with those footsteps I was no longer home.

The scorching sun stunned my eyes, as I peered into a new atmosphere. My head was rushing, as if my eyes were stung by a thousand bees. I opened them yet again, squinting towards the towering timbers that stood
above me now. I felt a wind scratching against my cheek. As I stood, my eyes raced around as I stopped; questioning where I was, I stood up, staring into the abyss of wildlife that surrounded me. How did I get here?

The leaves fell aimlessly to the ground, floating, almost gliding through the wind that once woke me. The orange and gold of the leaves caught my eye, as I looked below my feet. The ground was covered with leaves; with the leaves that have died just like everything must.

Everything in this forest seemed awake and prosperous, yet death still did not escape the grasps of even the most beautiful places. Maybe it was the other way around. All fantastic and burgeoning lives must come to find themselves face to face with horror. So I sat, wistfully watching, as waning happiness walked away from my thoughts.

The sun that had shone upon me streaked with sullen rays of sorrow, and the trees around me insipidly teetered in the wind, as if they were ready to fall. The whistles of the songbirds returned, yet now they turned to ballads, eating away at my pain. I wandered through the thicket again, yet I did not see the life I once did. The ominous wind, that now blew cold, drove onto my skin, and sent shivers down my spine.

I fell to the ground, as if all hope had left me. I gazed, as everything around me was thrown to the ground along with myself. I close my eyes yet again, and I see the darkness that hid behind the beauty that once paraded through my thoughts, the horror and hatred of life that
takes control of all that is gracious, yet I open my eyes once more.

Next to me lay a flower, a single orchid, whose lavender haze rushed a warm feeling through the once chilled wind. There I continue to lay, look towards this flower, towards a sign of hope, as the wind comes to a halt. The sun began to place love into the heart of the woods, and the once waning hope returned to my head. It seemed as if a single ray of light lay against the lavender petals that brought light to the forest.

I glared into the wilderness once again, yet this time I saw beauty. The trees stood sturdy, watching over the life that roamed in its home. They gave home to the alluring songbirds that now sang within my head. I looked above to see that ocean in the sky that brings joy and faith to the animals that soar through its waves, yet something caught my eye.

A nightingale relaxes, quiet within its home, as the sun escaped the canopy. The light grazed its soft blue underbelly, and one may have even seen a smile break from its beak. I close my eyes yet again, and feel light in the darkness I plunge into, as I heard the lullaby of the nightingale scream through the air.

I now feel the warmth of the sun yet again brushing upon my skin, as I open my eyes just once more. I find myself looking out my window, as the rising sun peeks from the shades. I feel a shock of disappointment run through me, yet I felt happy.

The purple orange of the sunrise allowed me to
smile, for it reminded me of that hope that both flew away from my thoughts, and grabbed ahold of my wonder. I look out my window now, and see not only the pain of the orange and gold leaves, but the beauty of the lavender within the orchid, filling my world with joy as the chant of the nightingale can be heard softly in the distance.
Dirty streets, surrounded by the overwhelming stench of greasy food, gasoline, and filth-ridden alleys. The streets buzz with pedestrians and cars. People parade with their overpriced espressos and leftovers from various restaurants, which will be thrown out in a week. I could’ve taken the easy way out and gone to business school like everyone else, but no, I chose music. It brings me joy, but that joy has left me out on these unforgiving streets.

I’ll play whatever it takes to please the crowd. Ironically, for people to smile or feel moved, they have to hear something sad. I don’t understand it, but I do what it takes to please the people. Maybe if they really understood what a hard life was, they would care for something upbeat and joyful. I please the smug people for spare pocket change that they won’t miss; they stroll past with their phones glued to their ears not even paying attention to the one playing their heart out in hopes of affording a greasy burger from McDonalds. I never planned for this to happen. I was ambitious and hopeful that my music
would make it someday, but I was wrong, so I’m here on the streets of Chicago playing songs to please the people.

One mild spring day I was playing a new song I had been working on:

*Never before have I been this way*
*Never before have I felt this shame*
*I’m here on the corner, torn between two*
*The two of use*
*Two different paths*
*One of good fortune or the path of regret . . .*

The song continued. People walked by dropping in loose change and a few dollar bills here and there. It was a slow day, but that was no surprise. The day continued and then my ex-girlfriend walked up to me. I thought to myself, “Oh great.”

“So, I see you’re still on the street trying to get your big break,” she said condescendingly.

“Nice to see you, too, Molly.” I continued, “Hey, how’s that snob of a guy you call your boyfriend?”

She glared at me and said, “Charlie is not a snob, and he’s great, thanks for asking.

Besides, you’re the one on the street playing for pity cash, whereas, he has a real job and a bright future.”

“Whatever, now could you please go, I’m in the middle of playing my music?”

“Okay, whatever, good luck with your dream, Noah.” She dropped a quarter in the cup and turned with
one of her iconic hair flips and walked away.

I try not to count my change until the end of the day because I’d rather not be depressed while I’m trying to sing. The sun was starting to sink below the horizon so counting my change was getting a bit more difficult. I went through my container; I felt a few dollar bills and several coins, but then I felt something like a business card. I moved to the nearest lamppost to see what it was. A scratch-off ticket. *Great,* I thought to myself, *just what I need, something to remind me that only a few in this world get lucky.*

I was about to crumple it up and throw it away, but then I thought, *Well, in the past I have won a few bucks here and there, besides, what do I have to lose?* I returned to what little I had on the filthy sidewalk and used one of my coins to scratch the ticket. I began to lose hope as I got down to my last few numbers because I was getting nowhere. *Who was I kidding, someone like me doesn’t get this lucky.* I scratched the last spot and I couldn’t believe my eyes. Right before me I was looking at a ticket that had won me $5,000! Was I dreaming?

The next morning I woke up and saw the ticket under my makeshift pillow. I went to the 7/11 just down the street and said, “I’d like to cash this ticket.”

The man behind the counter looked at me with doubtfulness in his eyes; he didn’t believe it was real; surprisingly, he checked anyways. At that moment I thought maybe the ticket was fake because I didn’t see any reaction.
“Here you go sir.” He handed me my cash. Bewildered, I left without saying a word. I went to a music shop a few blocks away.

“Hey Noah, how come you’re not out there?” asked the guy behind the desk.

“Hey Jim, I was wondering if you could record some songs for me?”

He sighed, “Look, I’d love to, ‘cause your music ain’t bad, but I can’t do it for free.”

“I got cash,” and I showed him the money.

I could tell he thought I robbed someone, but then I explained. He still seemed skeptical, but agreed. We went to the back of the store where they had a small recording studio. That day I recorded eight songs I wrote myself and three covers of my favorite artists. I could tell Jim was pleased.

“You sounded great,” he said with a smile.

“Thanks, when can we make an album?” I asked eagerly.

“Hold your horses, I’ll need to talk to some people, but it’ll cost ya.”

I gave nearly all the money I won that day and waited. A few days later Jim found me playing.

“I played your demo for a few producers, and one is interested; he’s considering making an album.”

I didn’t know what to say. Maybe this was the boost I needed to get me off the street. Maybe this was what I needed to finally reach my dream. All I could do was hope for the best.
“It’s coming,” I mention to my bestest friend, Aila. A curious bird observes from the roof of my house as I wait for the signal. Drops of water begin to trickle on my head until finally Aila makes the signal.

“Now!” she shrieks, flying her spaghetti hands in the warm air. For the billionth time, we sprint right above the sprinkler, our clothes getting soggy and sticky, our feet brown and cold. When our shivering finally became too much, we flopped side by side on the spikey grass; our chests rapidly going up and the down with the beating of our hearts louder than the birds above us. The sun heard it’s cue as its rays warmed up our cold dripping bodies.

It took both of us a few minutes of listening to the euphonious birds and the faded sound of the baseball game across the street before Aila finally broke our silence.

“I dream of a world where I can always be a kid ,”
Aila spoke, still looking up at the sky. She slowly exhaled, “I love who I am right now. I don’t want to grow up.” I thought about my future: a snobby teenager, losing my imagination, thinking about how to earn money, go to college, get a job, and no room for creativity.

“Me too,” I respond, wishing there was a shooting star somewhere in the clear bright sky.

Summer.

I hear my dad pull up at the driveway from a trip to Menards. A signal for yard workday. Me and my brother helped dig holes for the three little trees waiting for a home as my dad and his friends begin to force wooden bars to the ground. My backyard is no longer a chair and a barbecue grill. It’s a backyard with three tiny trees and four long support beams. After a long day of hard work, I come bursting into my parents’ room, dropping on all floors and started to crawl under my parents’ bed.

“What are you doing under there Isabel?” my mom asks confused as she feels tiny bumps from her mattress which was my head banging the metal beams underneath.

“Have you seen Mr. Teddy? I played with him today, but I can’t find him now.” I muttered underneath the bed, still hoping he will magically appear in front of me.

“Aren’t you too old for Mr. Teddy now?” My mom softly asks. I don’t respond as I kept searching like a pirate who has forgotten where her precious treasure was buried. My mom and I stayed up late at night looking for him. I wouldn’t find him until a few years later when I didn’t need about him anymore.
Another day comes and the cold creeps in. Before going outside, I look through my window, looking at the beautiful leaves dressing up in red, orange, and yellow.

Fall.

I bring out my fuzzy sweater and head to my backyard. By then, the pergola was finished. The nails were holding the wooden planks together and the brown paint was protecting the wood from battles with the elements of nature. Two of my friends arrive, just in time for pumpkin carving. After we carefully cut the stem, we began yanking the guts until it was tidy and spacious inside. We put the light in our scary-yet-cute pumpkins and apple bobbed until the apples felt pimply with scary teeth prints. The doorbell rings. “Trick-or-Treat,” they greeted with their bags raised open and high. I didn’t trick or-treat that night.

“Ready?” I mumble behind my thick, cozy scarf. My brother was yanking his boots under his black snow pants to make sure no warmth escapes his body. He puts his knitted hat on and waves his two big gloves towards the door.

“After you,” he announces. I slide the door, revealing the glistening blanket of white snow and I froze, hesitating to disrupt its beauty, even though the snow was urging us to mess it up.

Winter.

I charge right into the frostbite air, face planting on a comfy pillow of fluffy snow. I flop onto my back, sticking my tongue out to catch snowflakes swiftly falling from the sky. As I wave my arms and legs to make a snow angel,
a ball comes hurtling at my face. I instantly sit up pushing the snow off my reddened cheeks. “Oh it’s on!” I declare, carefully coming to my feet since my snow angel was perfect like Da Vinci had created this sculpture. Just before my brother runs for shelter, I scoop a handle of snow and chuck it right at his back; the ball misses by centimeters. I grab another handful of snow and chase after him with my heavy boots and snow pants. I didn’t know that was the last time I’d play in the snow with my older brother.

I wake up to notice darkness behind my curtains. When I peeked outside the backyard door, I saw rain clouds surround the sky and drops of water begin to cool my skin.

Spring.

I check through the backyard window, each tree starving for water, thanking mother nature she heard their plea. Instead of staying inside and watching the rain trickle down the window, I dash upstairs to call with my friends and paint my nails, ready to blast music in my room. I chatted with my friend until late that night until finally falling asleep.

Every time I step into my backyard, I remember who I was. Our trees growing higher than our house, our little grave where our fish Vixen lays, the spot on the pergola where my new dog likes to sit, the grass near the hose where I caught frogs, the fence where I jumped over to get my volleyball. Yes I did change, my appearance and my personality. But my heart will always be the same girl in the Summer, Fall, Winter and Spring.
Don’t make the same mistake I did. Get some good friends, not terrible ones like I had. This happened when I was around 10. I had two friends who lived on my street, both older than me. I will call them Friend 1 and Friend 2. It was a beautiful day, and I was outside with Friend 1 and Friend 2, walking down the sidewalk towards Friend 2’s house. I live on a cul de sac, so we were walking from my house on the cul de sac to his house down the street. They were talking about an airsoft gun, which I did not know what it was at the time.

“Dude, wanna see my airsoft gun?” Friend 2 asked.

“Sure!” I replied excitedly, but a little skeptical of the situation.

Friend 2 was home alone and Friend 1 was with me, outside. We continued walking until we reached his house, about five or six houses down from mine.

“Wait here,” Friend 2 disappeared into his house. He reappeared in what seemed to be his bedroom window on the second floor.
“Look!” He stuck out a big black rifle, “Cool, right!” he exclaimed. He then pointed it out the window and aimed the barrel at me, looking through the big round scope.

“Whoa, ha ha ha,” Friend 1 exclaimed at the sight of Friend 2.

That’s cool, but why is he aiming it at me, I wondered in my head. Just then, it hit me. No, literally, his airsoft pellet hit me square in the right eye. I screamed more out of fear than pain.

Friend 2 was outside in a matter of seconds.

“Oh I’m so sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry! I didn’t know it was loaded-” Friend 2 apologized as I ran down the sidewalk to my house still yelling. Even though it was loaded, the safety should have been on. Why would he pull the trigger in the first place, anyways? They chased after me until I reached my house, yelling at me to wait and calling my name the entire time.

“Dude wait, wait!” Friend 1 called after me. I ran inside and slammed my door, still clutching my eye. My parents looked at it and I calmed down after that. We went to the eye doctor and I had an eye patch on for a month or so, getting eye drops every day. It comes to show how people can betray your trust that quick. About a month or two later, he moved away. I eventually had trouble reading things due to my deteriorating vision. It started out small, but now I can’t read words on my computer without glasses. I believe the airsoft gun situation could be one of the main reasons my vision is this bad and still getting worse today.
There was nothing better than summer. Sleeping in, eating ice cream faster than it can melt, sporting flip flops all day long, and wearing swimsuits acceptable as outfits were just a few of the highlights of summer. You are finally freed from your hectic everyday and nonstop life.

Summer was a perfect excuse to spend time with all your friends and family. Every summer our family had get-togethers. We would gather on my grandma’s back porch and catch up on each others’ new and exciting lives. It was a special time to connect with all of my cousins and relatives and feel like one big family. The fresh breeze moving our hair, the beaming sun kissing our cheeks, and the welcoming smiles of all my family was the true definition of summer. Summer always brought back good memories, but it wasn’t the only thing that did.
Ever since I was a young kid, summer meant grandma’s strawberry kouga. The sign on my refrigerator even said so. Everyone in my family adores it. The kouga in a way unites our family and brings us all together. I was very young when my grandma would serve the dessert at our family parties, but even I remember the familiar taste of her homemade dish. Each summer, I’m on cloud nine when she tells me she’s made it. We all can relate to it and have a common bond with it. The recipe originates on my grandpa’s side of the family. His mom, who was German like the rest of us, originally made the dish. Even before my grandpa passed away, my grandma fell in love with the mouth-watering dessert. She thankfully brought the dessert into our family. The kouga is also nostalgic because it reminds us of sentimental times when my grandpa was alive.

Strawberry Kouga is a traditional summer Volga-German dessert. It is similar to a coffee cake pastry. The strawberries are fresh picked and add a sweet component to the soft “bread-like” base. Whenever I see my grandma make this dessert, she looks like a professional baker preparing one of her most famous dishes. She is full of energy and is hopping around the kitchen grabbing hundreds of ingredients. A patch of white covers the table full of flour, and she forcefully rolls out the hot dough. The loud and obnoxious noise of the blender rings in my ears. She also chops up the sweet strawberries the way a professional chef chops up vegetables: quick and precise. My grandma sprinkles sugar over the dish and strategically
places strawberries all over the dessert. She has always had a special place in her heart for cooking and preparing things for our family because she knows how much we love it. As soon as my grandma finishes preparing the dessert, she enthusiastically declares, “I made strawberry kouga!” All of our faces light up with excitement, and we all run up and grab a slice. Enjoying the treat together as a family is what made it memorable. It just wasn’t summer without it.

As we are all older now and have chaotic lives, we don’t always have time to enjoy the kouga together, but my grandma never fails to make a summer delivery and drop off the delicious sweet-treat. The strawberry kouga brings back memories of more simpler and fun times together as a family.
Church is about to start so I go sit down next to my daddy and put my head against his arm. I'm too tired, but I had to come anyways because it's mass. I wish my mommy was here but daddy says she's still sleeping; I don't blame her. The entire world is here including my friends and family. Everyone is all dressed up as usual but they're all matching with the same color.

As the Father walks closer to the stand to speak, everyone sits down to listen.

Then he begins.

“Welcome everyone. We gather on this fine day to remember what accomplishes and dreams mean in life. We've all dreamt about nightmares and hope that they don’t turn into reality, but in some situations, we can’t control them because they’re put in the hands of God. God will let you know when something special or bad is coming. Coming to either challenge you physically, mentally, or to help you. You help him out without even knowing because
you will deny that it’s real.”

I start wondering: How do we help without knowing or without praying every night before bed, and before supper like my mommy and daddy have told me? What exactly do we do or say to help? Why don’t some of us know?

The Father continues.

“Real as it is, your mind leaves a door open. A door where the Lord can walk right through and tell you himself what he has planned for you. You’ve all had this happen to you whether you believe it or not. And it ain’t just to the smart, or the poor, or the hard workers, or adults, or babies, but to all who live and walk on this earth.”

“Wait, what?”

“Shhhh. Keep it down Cassie,” my dad whispers into my ear.

“But how does He do that?”

“Shhh.”

“But, Dadyyyy.”

He sighs very quietly, but not like he’s mad, or disappointed in me like other times. I can’t quite figure it out but I think it’s sadness with a touch of something else.

“He’s capable of doing just about anything sweetheart, that’s what makes Him so powerful.”

“Is that why everyone loves Him, Daddy?”

“They love Him because anything He does for someone will eventually have a positive benefit for them.”

I don’t get it.

“Daddy, has that ever happened to you or mommy?”
He pauses for a second.
“Well Cassie, there was a time when your mom dreamt that she was going to have a baby, and here you are now.”

“Where you happy when you found out about me?”

“Well of course! We learned how to become parents, our bond between your mom and I grew stronger, and our lives overflowed with joy because you were our very first child.”

My smile stretched across my face as I grabbed my daddy’s arm and hugged it tight, not wanting to let go. But I still don’t know how our mind leaves a door? Is it like magic where we think of something and it appears in real life?

“Daddy, how do we leave a door for God?”

“Cassie, we leave doors open for God when we’re asleep.”

Every inch of my body froze as I looked straight ahead. There’s no way we can do that. That doesn’t even sound possible. It sounds more like something made up in TV.

“I can tell by the way you’re staring off into space that you don’t understand, but it’s ok.”

“But I want to understand; I’m a big girl.”

“Listen to the Father and hear what he has to say about it.”

“God has different paths for everyone and that’s a fact. One can be born an artist. Another can become the
first person to ever cure cancer. A 12-year-old girl can have the capacity to develop such loud and powerful voice that can change the whole nation. Even a 50-year-old man can have the strength of 10 men to protect a school from a shooter. The unfortunate part is the amount of time that we have on this planet, varies between every individual. One can live to be 105 years, while a baby will never have the chance to open their eyes and see the light from the sun. Let me ask y’all something: Who thinks that they’re currently living in the reality world right this second?”

Every adult raises their hand, except for the kids because they don’t understand what he means, and neither do I.

“She’s the fascinating thing: We’re not in reality. We’re in a crystal ball where we can see every possible outcome that can happen in our future and decide which one we want to go for. I bet that some of you have dreamt about having unlimited power to do just about anything. Well, you all have that power because nothing is impossible. God is telling you that there will be many opportunities open. Many of which that will make you happy, and others that will leave you in the dark, until the time is right for you to sprout. At night when your eyes close, and it doesn’t matter how long, He’ll be there every step of the way, informing you what to expect until your time comes to enter reality with Him.”

“Daddy?”

“Yes.”

“He said it doesn’t matter how long you close your
eyes for, right?”
“Uh huh.”
“Um, since Mommy will sleep forever, will she dream forever? Will God tell her what’s going to happen? And what about my baby brother, is it the same for him?”
“Actually they’re not sleeping, they have awakened; we’re the ones who are dreaming.”
I put my head down in defeat and stare at the floor.
“I still don’t get it.”
“Don’t worry sweetheart, you will—one day.”
“My people, we should not be sad, for we should congratulate Cassandra Anderson and her baby boy for entering reality.”
He takes a short pause.
“Amen.”
“Amen,” responds the crowd in unison.
“Get down here right now Blake!” Steve yelled from downstairs.

“What do you want from me?” she responded sarcastically.

“You are not going out tomorrow night. You have school the next day, and we do not trust this boy alone with you. No buts, end of story or you’re grounded,” Steve responded.

“You’re the worst dad in the world! I hate you so much!” Blake yelled as she ran upstairs to her bedroom.

This was just a typical night in the Sherman household. Steve was a very overprotective father to his only child. He had a job in the World Trade Center, so they lived just outside of New York City. His wife worked for a business that required her to travel outside of the country
a lot, therefore leaving Blake home with Steve for long periods of time. Blake loved her father, but sometimes just got aggravated about the rules he had while her mother was gone. She knew that he was only doing what was best for her, but it was hard for her to see it in the moment. Karen had left on the Friday before this argument went down, on Monday September 10, 2001. On this day, Blake had gone upstairs to bed upset and on bad terms with her dad, Steve.

The next day it was September 11, 2001 and Blake didn’t know that this day would change her whole life. It was just another normal day in her house, Mom was gone and Dad had left for work at 6:15 in the morning. Every day, he would yell,

“Blake, time to get up for school!” as he walked out the door.

She never saw her dad in the mornings, but she didn’t care on this particular day because she was very upset with him. She woke up about 15 minutes later, got dressed, put on some makeup and ate breakfast just until her bus came at 7:05 to take her to high school.

Her first period class was a study hall because she had a free period in her schedule. In this period, Blake would do some left over homework or go on her iphone. Study hall was from 7:45-9:00. At 8:56, Blake received a notification from the news stating that American Airlines flight 11 was hijacked and crashed into floors 93-99 of the world trade center. A million thoughts rushing through her mind. What is going on? Is this real life? MY DAD IS
IN THERE!!!!! In pure shock and disgust, Blake bolted out of the school and ran to a big rock that she went to just to be alone. She had named it think rock and no one knows about it. The location of this rock is just outside of school property, so it wasn’t hard for her to get to.

When she arrived at think rock, she chucked her backpack to the ground and jumped on top of the rock to sit down. Tears streaming down her face, she was yelling at God,

“WHY?! WHY HAVE YOU DONE THIS TO ME?”

She was a very strong Christian, and now she was upset with God. She was an only child, her mom was away for the week and on top of that all, her dad was just killed in a terrorist attack. On top of all that, she left on bad terms with her dad and she will never forgive herself for that. The last words she said to him were, “I hate you.”

Each night she cried herself to sleep, and put on a fake smile for the day ahead of her knowing that nothing will change. Her dad is gone, and things will never be the same, but she needs to learn to move on. Eventually the pain lessened, but she still regretted what she had said to him the night before. Luckily she had good family and friends who were there for her through this hard time. She had learned that things won’t be the same and her dad won’t come back, but she definitely did grow from this. Treat everyone as if it is your last time with them, because you never know when someone’s time will come to an end.
Marchella walked down the lonely and dark corridor of the orphanage. Today was her twelfth birthday, but it felt like just any other day. Miss Curtin, the headmistress of the orphanage never celebrates any holidays or birthdays, and the young girl’s hair was never meant to be kept down. Life at the orphanage was dull and boring for Marchella, for when her parents were still alive she was the most curious little girl, and always got into trouble wherever she went. The children at the orphanage also weren’t allowed in the west wing of the huge castle-like building, although being Marchella, she always went and was never caught. She always went when every living soul in the building was caught in a heavy slumber.

One night when Marchella was in a huge, dark, and magical library, she noticed something she hadn’t seen before. It was a small door right near the fantasy books. Marchella loved to read, and she knew that when a small little girl in a big orphanage found a small and strange door,
something magical was going to happen. Marchella was the youngest of the girls in the orphanage, so she was always by herself. Slowly and as quietly as possible, Marchella walked to the little door. As she got closer she realized that the little door was locked. “Awh, shucks!” Marchella pouted. She ran her hand gloomily over the fantasy books, going back to the reading area so that the moonlight could shine her way and get some light for reading. All of a sudden, as she tipped some of the books, she heard a small click. She immediately stopped and pulled the book that her hand was touching out. Behind the book, she saw a small door that was open. She reached her hand in and she felt a small, cold, and mysterious shaped item in it. She pulled it out and to her surprise, it was a little golden key. Quickly she ran over to the little door and clicked the key to the place. As the little door gradually opened, Marchella peaked in. What she saw was breathtaking, stunning, and extraordinary. White and tall peaked mountains, glowing, flowing, rivers, shining apples on trees, rainbows in the sky, birds flying high over the land, deer grazing in the distance. It was like a fairyland.

Marchella loved an adventure and if there was something that could get her out of the cold, dark and filthy orphanage, she would grab the opportunity as quickly as a child would snatch a piece of candy when trick-or-treating. She ran out into the grass, her eyes widening at the glory. She breathed in the sweet-smelling cidery air. Her cheeks steadily gave off a rosy glow, her face started to shine, her smile widening by the second. She heard a little
twinkle, turning her head to a big oak tree. Surprisingly the middle of the trunk slowly opened, and a light began to form through the crack. Marchella shielded her eyes with her hand from the bright light. Slowly as it was a picture camera, out of the trunk came out a woman, or, at the very least, what appeared to be a woman. Her pale skin glowed in the darkness of the tree trunk, her flowy blue hair was like a sea slowly starting to rage, her hands were delicate like a white handkerchief. Her eyes were wide and a beautiful shade of gray, gleaming in the sun. She wore a white dress that covered her feet, sashes were laced around her, her cuffs were a beautiful lace, flowing off of her body. Her dress seemed to float off the end of her body, which seemed that she didn’t have any feet. A blue sash covered her arms, and white and glowing doves flew around her as she was a goddess. Marchella’s eyes slowly widened at the sight of her. This woman didn’t seem to be human to Marcella, for she has never in her life ever meet anybody as beautiful as her. Slowly the women made her way to Marchella. Face to face, the women spoke up first.

“Hello, Marchella,” she said in the sweetest voice.

Marchella gasped, “You know my name!”

The women slowly nodded, “of course I do,” she said, “Everybody in her dream realm knows you, Marchella. You are the source of our existence.”

“The source of your existence?” Marchella questioned.

“Everything that you see here is from your imagination and dreams that you’ve had over the years.”
She said. Slowly Marchella took a good look at the mysterious women. Her eyes widened.

“You’re Yuri!” she said, “The ruler and queen of all flying creatures,” she said. “I created you when I was 6! I remember! You’re a greenling”

Then her excitement slowly drained out of her body. “Wait,” she said, “This is also a dream and I’ll wake up any moment now, right?”

The woman only smiled at her. Marchella quickly pinched herself to realize that this really wasn’t a dream. The greenling women slowly started to fade.

“Wait, don’t leave me,” yelled Marchella. But the greenling woman was already gone. Marchella sighed. She started to walk with no certain destination to head to in mind.

After what seemed to be an eternity, Marchella finally worn out, came upon a funny looking creature. It looked like a lion, with zebra feet, gazelle horns, and fangs from a gaboon. The funny looking creature came up to her, sniffing her as if to see if she was edible.

“Please don’t eat me,” Marchella begged.

“Eat you!” said the creature as it was the funniest thing it has ever heard. It laughed swinging her around like she weighed nothing. Letting go Marchella flew and, landed in what seemed to be back in her bed. Marchella looked around.

“It was just a dream, “ she said with a sigh. She put her head back down dreaming of greenlings, and funny-looking creatures, hoping to meet once more.
THE DESIRING DREAM I HAD

By Nicole Tchorz
Middle School - Second Place Tie

Dreams. One word. Different meanings. I had a dream. A kind of dream that normal people wouldn’t understand, at least in my school. Ever since last month people have been looking at me like I’m some kind of monster, just because I expressed my thoughts and feelings about the word in English class. Everyone believed that a dream is the kind of dream that you have in your sleep. They’re not wrong, but I have another definition of the word. My dream is to become a superior, famous, athlete. It’s not that kind of dream I have in my sleep though, it’s my passion and thought. I’m just a bit annoyed that people find me weird just because of it. They also make fun of the way I play sports. I usually brush off their negative comments, but it gets harder when people start to become harsher for no reason. Everyone says that my “dream” is impossible
to accomplish considering they’re judging me just by my cover. I know I’m not the greatest athlete right now, but I have the speed, agility, and determination to do it. Unlike some people, I train hard to be the best I can, having A’s in school, practicing my skills, and trying to get along with others, even though they see me as a parasite. I know that people don’t understand MY dream, but I believe that they will soon.

“Sarah! Sarah! The bell already rang! You’re gonna miss the bus!” screeched my classmate. I quickly grabbed my bag and ran outside onto my bus. Whew, that was a close one. I almost missed the bus. Once I got home I got dressed into my uniform and went to basketball practice. I was dribbling the ball with both of my hands, but I was getting better at using just one hand. My teammates just gazed at me wondering why I’m on the team. I’m here to get better and achieve my dreams. But little did they know was that tomorrow I was gonna do something unexpected at our school assembly.

At my school assembly, I presented a slideshow based on our school safety from student council. But I changed the plans about showing that presentation, to show my dream presentation instead. I showed something that I hoped all of the 8th graders remembered. It was based on dreams, I explained what it meant to me along with pictures to help them understand. The pictures that were shown weren’t just regular, old, boring ones though. They were pictures that had a meaning. On one of the slides
there was a kid with a thought bubble, and in that thought bubble the word “passion” was shown. Passion was shown a lot in the presentation, because my dream is kind of like a passion. In the end, everyone stared, frozen at me as if they fell under a magical spell that I had put upon them. A week later everyone tried to become my friend in the hallways, and I didn’t sit alone at lunch anymore. Something that I noticed though was that there were still people who didn’t quite understand me, and still hated my guts, but I didn’t care. I never did, because I always tried to look on the positive side and follow my dreams.

Even though I’m 38 now, have a family, and quit my job as an athlete it doesn’t bother me. As a kid I always wanted to be an athlete and for people to understand me. Don’t get me wrong here, but I was a great athlete, actually one of the best if you ask me. I did play sports in my 20’s, with big professional sport teams all over the world. However, that wasn’t my passion anymore, I wanted to show people more meanings in life and become a speaker to the world and community. I traveled the world to speak out to people about dreams, and life, as well as to how to have a different meaning in things. This dream came to be at the school assembly in the 8th grade. And something that I learned was to always follow your dreams, even if some people don’t understand, or don’t like you, try to make that difference, try to get your dreams going, try to be different because different isn’t bad.
Snip. The ribbon was cut. Cheers came from every direction and the sound of clapping and footsteps running; a bell rang each time someone entered. The excitement in the air was contagious. The best part was the compliments flooding to me such as “You’re so talented” and “This is stunning!”

I awoke to the beeping of my alarm. I groggily lifted my head and reached for my alarm to stop the beeps. I extended my arm, feeling around, and sat up, grasping my cane. Then I heard Mom’s footsteps.

“You really should just set it next to your dresser,” Mom said.

I sighed and said, “Okay.”

Later, the bus arrives. I feel my mom’s eyes on me as I walk to the bus stop. I tap my cane left, right, checking for obstacles.

The day was going fine. Gathering my binder and
other supplies, I made my way to English. After waiting for a bit, I finally hear, “Okay everyone, we’re going to read a short story today. Jamie, will you pass the books out?” Mrs. Maroon said. I heard a thump on my desk. My fingers grazed over the book feeling the ridges.

“Here Emerson, you can listen to the audio.”

I wish I could read words, but I wish more to write. Story ideas flood to my head and I ache to get them on paper. Of course, a blind person can’t type on a regular computer. I can’t even find home row! I’ve had dozens of dreams of opening my own store and people all over the world buying my books. I sigh and plug in the headphones to Mrs. Maroon’s laptop after fumbling for the hole. The story was about a boy who rescued a dog that became a service dog. The town noticed and started contributing. Later on, he owns the biggest and best rescue pet shelter. The story wasn’t too long, but of course, mine had the comprehension questions such as what is the theme of this story? Very entertaining. Finally, I found the pause button (thankfully). I heard Mrs. Maroon’s footsteps and the sound of the laptop being picked up. We had a class discussion. I might’ve spoken once or twice, but it was more than before. It was time to leave, and then I then heard Mrs. Maroon’s voice.

“I’m glad you participated in our class discussion today, Emerson.”

“Thanks,” I responded.

“Also, I’m not sure if you’re interested but there’s a writing opportunity going on. You submit your story
and the people hosting it pick the best piece. The winner is featured on the news for our area,” she explained. “I was planning to give it to the other students later but I think it would be easier if I told you now. Here’s the paper containing the rules. Someone can read it to you,” she said. “Opportunity? More like competition!” I said, grinning. “So are you interested?” asked Mrs. Maroon. “I am!” I chirped. “It might be a little difficult for you to write it . . .” “Won’t bother me.” “Well, I look forward to your submission!” I left class with a huge smile. After school I told my mom I was entering the contest and handed her the rules. “Sounds interesting!” she said. She turned on the computer. “Should I type it for you?” she asked. I hadn’t really thought it out, but I got an idea. “Isn’t there a tool that you speak into the computer and it types it for you? I asked. “I didn’t think of that! It’s a great idea!” she said. I could tell she was happy for me. I already knew the story by heart, and eagerly spoke the words, making sure to sound clear. My mom had to do the editing and occasionally finding things like “pomegranate” instead of “pause a moment” which gave us a laugh. She told me how impressed she was with the storyline, which made my hope spark.

I had a dream that night. I was at school just walking down the hall, still tapping my cane. All of a
sudden, I heard a voice. “Emerson? Is this your story? I love it!” they squealed. “I’m really surprised that you wrote this,” said someone. “We need more!” came another voice. Compliments flooded around me.

I woke up with optimism inside me. I had already been working on it for a while but it was that morning I had to turn it in. Once at school, Mrs. Maroon said she had a basket where we would place our papers. My heart beat fast, thumping in my chest, yet I was confident with my piece. I gently set the paper in the bin and sat back down. The day went on as normal, but the conversation of everyone’s story suddenly popped up.

“Hey Emerson, I noticed that you entered the writing contest,” someone said. I recognized the voice; it belonged to Stella Peterson. “What’s it about?” she asked.

I hesitated, but decided to tell her. I went on for about a minute until she spoke. “That sounds…” she started. “Really cool!” she said with enthusiasm. “Now I want to read it!” she giggled.

Weeks have gone by. The judges picked a winner. Our school was planning to say who won on the announcements. I was shaking in my chair. Finally, it came.

“Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, this is Mr. Sherman with your daily announcements. Today we will have volleyball tryouts after school. But I think we’re all eager to hear who the winner of the writing contest is! Now, remember it could still be someone from a different school. Now drumroll, please!” There was a pause.
“Emerson Marlin!”

I stood frozen in my desk. Surely this was not happening. Out of all the people that won it was me? Then, out of nowhere there was clapping.

“You won!”

“Congratulations!”

“Can I read it after this?”

“Which channel will you be on?”

From that point on, it was clear. Dreams come true.
Ezra went outside to get the generator to power the lights upstairs and then went to get the newspaper from outside and the front headline read POWER OUTAGES INCREASE. He sighed and thought how lucky they were to have gas to power their generator.

“Dad,” Ezra shouted. “How long ago did the virus start?”

“One hundred years since 2018, when the virus started,” Dad said.

They had taught about it in school, how in 2018 the world’s pollution made a virus that ate up oil, electricity, and fossil fuels so that eventually most energy sources were gone. But luckily scientists found a way to contain the virus in a lab, but have yet to find a way to destroy it.

“Ezra,” called Dad. “I need you to fix the generator. It’s broken again.”

“Why do I need to fix it?” complained Ezra.
“Because you’re good at tinkering and fixing things.”
“Fine, but you owe me five bucks.”
“Deal.”

So Ezra went upstairs to fix the generator, then he went to his workshop in the garage. He was messing around with his stuff and decided to go to the junkyard to see if he could find something new to play with.

“Hey Ezra.”
“Hi, Mr. Ash, anything new?”
“As a matter of fact, a truck just came with some old TV’s and stuff.”
“What’s that?” asked Ezra. “It looks like a weird swim cap or some sort of torture device.”
“It’s an Electroencephalogram.”
“What’s that?” Ezra wondered aloud.
“An old device that can pick up brain waves and measure the various sleep patterns.”
“Cool, how much for it?”
“I’ll give it to you for $30.”
“Okay.”

Ezra went home and fixed the Electroencephalogram before he went upstairs to take a nap. Feeling refreshed, he got back to work, deciding to try and use the electroencephalogram to track his sleep that night. When he woke up the next morning, he saw a paper with lots of scribbles on it. When he went to turn the machine off he got shocked!

“OUCH,” he said holding his hand, “that hurt.”
But, it made him wonder if he could find a way to make brain waves into electricity.

“No,” Ezra said aloud “that’s impossible.”

But when he got an idea, Ezra read up on it. He found out that in 1941 Hans Berger made the first Electroencephalogram and it had caused an electrical burn on his patient, just like what had happened to him. So that got him excited about this actually working. He went downstairs to tell his Dad, and he was excited too! Ezra’s dad told him to ask his friends if they wanted to help him work on it with him. He went to ask his friends, but only one person wanted to help him, Brian.

Ezra and Brian started brainstorming the next day. When looking at the Electroencephalogram papers, they saw that when someone was in light sleep the waves were small and when in REM, or rapid eye movement sleep, they were big since that is when the brain is the most active because they are dreaming. They decided to call their project Electrophorus Electricus (EE), the scientific name for an electric eel.

When Brian’s Dad came to get him, Brian told him about what they were working on. When Brian’s dad heard the idea, he told them that he had a friend who worked at MIT. He hoped his friend would get them some time in an MIT engineering lab where they would be able to work with professionals and really get the ball rolling.

They worked for almost a year until they got it to work. Of course, they could only test it when someone was asleep. In fact, they discovered that they could collect the
most energy when the person was dreaming during REM sleep. Once, when Ezra had a particularly active night of dreaming, he awoke to see he had generated 30 kWh, almost enough to power his house for a day!!

Only a few more tweaks and they could start to market it. Ezra’s Dad said he would help find a manufacturer. It was going to be a major breakthrough, as the energy crisis had gotten even worse throughout that year. When they went to the manufacturer, he welcomed them and said, “I can help you mass produce it, but you should get a patent so no one else tries to copy it.”

“How much is a patent?” asked Ezra

“$5,000.”

“Okay…”

Ezra’s Dad said he would loan him the money, the patent fee to be repaid when they sold the EE.

They had to go to a website that said to get the patent. When they got it they went back to the manufacturer he told them he would have it mass produced and selling on the market in a few months.

On launching day, they sold 25 million EE’s and made a fortune, and even the government was buying them!! About a week later, the front headline was ENERGY CRISIS SOLVED. Ezra smiled and thought, “A year ago, I could only have dreamt of solving the energy crisis, and now my dreams are solving it.”
Contest judge Robin Kacel is a tenured Professor of English and Fine Arts at the College of Lake County, where she teaches Creative Writing and oversees the Visiting Writers Program. Prior to that, she taught at DePaul University in Chicago. Ms. Kacel earned her BA in English from the University of Illinois and her MA in English Literature from the University of Chicago, followed by an MFA in Creative Writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts. She has been on the editorial staff of several journals and enjoys reading the work of aspiring writers.
The Village of Mundelein Arts Commission, established in August of 2016, hosts a biannual writing contest for Lake County residents. Winners and Honorable Mentions are featured in an issue of the *Mundelein Writes* publication. If you would like copies of the publication or are interested in participating in a future writing contest, please visit the Arts Commission website at: www.mundelein.org/mac for more information, or contact:

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