



**You Are Here**

**The Fabius-Pompey High School  
Literature & Art Magazine 2018-2019**

Dear Reader,

Twelve years ago we named the Fabius-Pompey literary magazine *You Are Here* because, like a point on a map, we wanted a title that affirmed your mark, your special, momentary place here in Fabius at a time, realize it or not, when you are young and teeming with potential, a time that flits away before you know it. This, though, your writing and art, your fingerprint of creativity, will always be here as a memento, as a reminder that *you were here*. This year's issue was the result of many hours of work and dedication. We would like to thank the staff—James Yomtob, Aidan McCarthy and Greg Hall—and our advisor, Mr. Neumire. We would also like to thank Mr. Hyatt and Ms. Ashman, who collected terrific art submissions for us. Thanks are also due to Principal Linck, Superintendent Ryan, and the Board of Education for their support in the publishing of our twelfth issue.

### **SUBMISSIONS FOR NEXT YEAR**

We are accepting submissions for next year as of right now! If you are submitting text (poetry, fiction, non-fiction), please make sure you have it saved on a Microsoft Word or Google Docs file somewhere and email/share it to Mr. Neumire at [bneumire@fabiuspompey.org](mailto:bneumire@fabiuspompey.org) or drop off a hard copy in room 139, Mr. Neumire's room. You may also give work to literary magazine staff members or your English teacher. If you are submitting art work, please give it to Mr. Hyatt or Ms. Ashman (photography). They will give you more instructions if they are needed.

We publish one online issue per year in the spring on the school website. Please make sure your work is school appropriate, proofread, and creative! Each year we will award three prizes for the best submissions.

**If you would like to join the literary magazine staff, we highly encourage it! You will need to have Wednesdays after school available. You should also be ready to edit, type, and review submissions for publication.**

### *You Are Here* 2019 Staff Members

James Yomtob

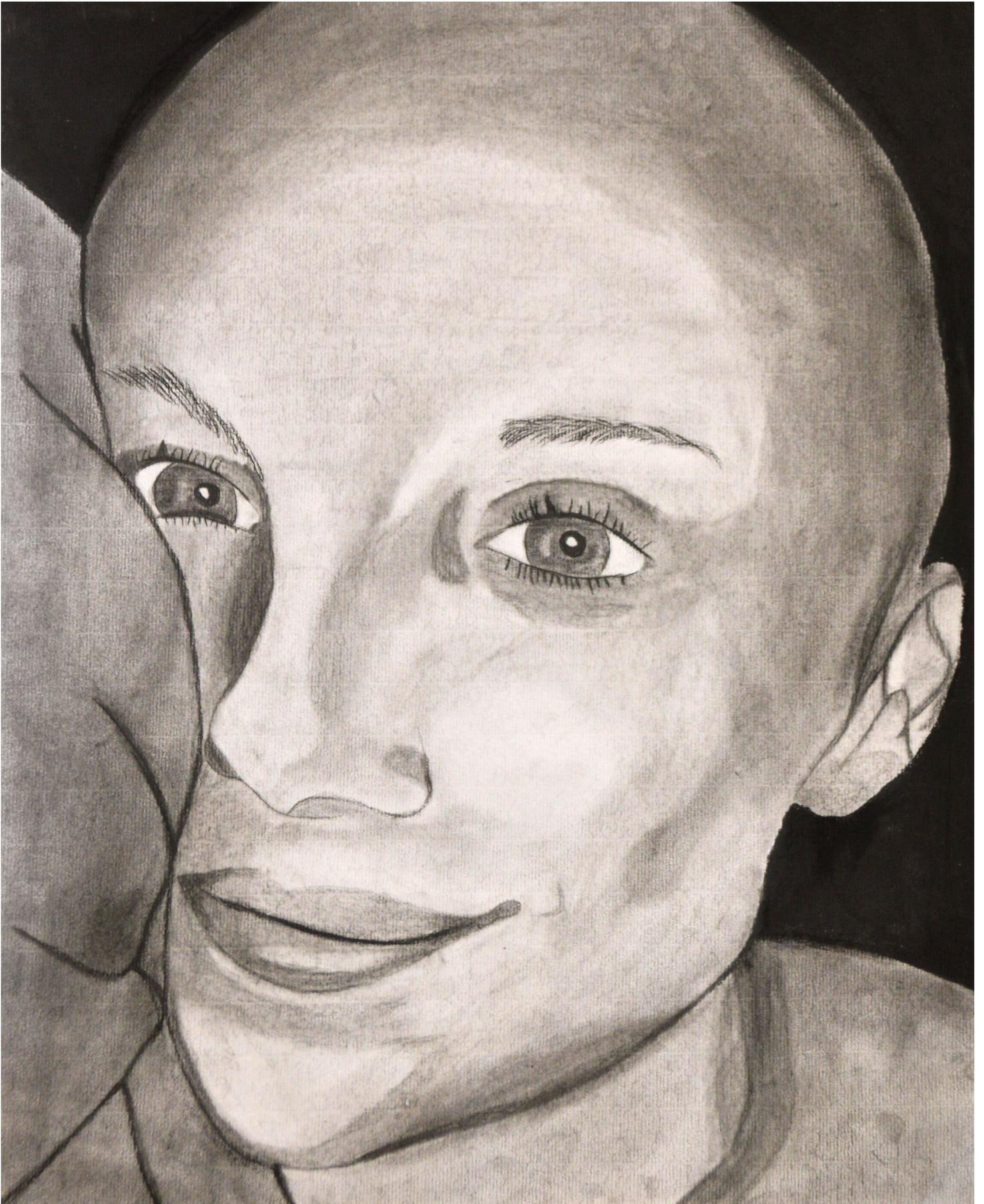
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Megan Purcell



Sam Taylor

### Camping

I looked across the tree fort at Timmy. He was loading a small black backpack full of camping equipment and checking it off his list.

“Alright guys, I got everything, just the essentials of course.”

- **Blankets**
- 
- **3 flashlights**
- 
- **Rope**
- 
- **Paper**
- 
- **Extra clothes**
- 
- **Extra batteries**
- 
- **3 gallons of water**
- 
- **Lighter**
- 
- **1 pack of 54 rice crispy treats**
- 

“Alright boys that’s everything,” said Sam. “Nate, you ready?”

I grabbed my backpack and checked it, I had a few extra clothes, some water, my journal and, like Timmy, a few rice crispy treats of course. “You know it,” I said.

Timmy slung his backpack across his back and put his Rochester red wings baseball hat on.

Sam was covered himself with his classic 60s denim jacket.

“What you’re not bringing anything cool guy?” asked Timmy.

“I got what I need, my coat, my energy bars, and some water.”

“That’s it?” asked Timmy.

“Yup.”

Timmy subtly rolled his eyes while looking away.

“What you got a problem?”

“No, just don’t even think about stealing my food,” I said. Knowing he probably would anyway.

“No problem.” said Sam.

**#@!& has broken loose. Timmy's gone off the rails, we decided to listen to him and he brought us the complete wrong way. We're all gonna die out here.**

Timmy went over to the hatch on the treehouse floor and swung it open. "After you." said Sam, patting my shoulder.

I climbed down the rope latter and waited for the others. Sam jumped halfway off and landed in front of me.

"Which way we headin?" asked Timmy, as he set his feet on the ground.

"South, for a quarter mile, that's where the site is." I said.

"Great, I'll go tell my mom were going, I'll be right back." said Timmy, sprinting to the house flailing his legs.

Sam and me stood there awkwardly. It was always kinda awkward between me and Sam, I didn't hate him or anything, but because I was a little jealous of how him and Timmy bonded when they became step brothers, plus he was a whole year older than me and Timmy.

"So. Nate, you think the weather will hold up?" he said, trying to make small talk.

"You know."

### **Day 3 Nate's journal**

**The weather did not hold up, it's storming hard and we're wet and cold. I don't know if we're being searched for, we only have hope at this point.**

I saw the backdoor open and Timmy excitedly slammed out of it.

"My mom told us to be careful," said Timmy, sliding to a halt.

Sam looked at me, "Pshhh, we'll be fine."

### **Day 4 Nate's journal**

**We are not fine, we are down to our last three rice crispy treats and half gallon of water. If you find this journal and not me, we died.**

Timmy started off into the woods, me and Sam followed. "In a quarter mile we'll be at camp." said Timmy, looking at his compass.

"Your mom is so cool Timmy, if I told my mom we were doing this she would ground me." I said.

"Wait, Nate she doesn't know your going with us?" asked Sam.

"No, she thinks I'm just spending the night."

"Bad ass." said Sam, slapping my shoulder.

I gave off a little smile.

Sam has always tried to be friendly with me. I find it hard since me and Timmy were friends for so long, but I try.

Timmy turned around and looked at me, "you guys ready for some fun?"

## **Day 5 Nate's Journal**

**This is not fun. Timmy ate his last rice crispy treat already and we have only a small amount of water left.**

The campsite was very close, I could see the tree Timmy and Sam marked.

"So did you guys do that English homework?" asked Timmy.

"No, Mr. Neumire always gives us so much homework." I said.

"Pshhh, I know right, he's so annoying, I'm going to do it when we get back."

Me and Timmy talked a bit, until Sam stormed ahead and perched himself on a small hill.

"I see the campsite!"

Me and Timmy started racing toward Sam excitedly. I beat him of course, I've always been faster.

"What do you guys want to do first?" Asked Timmy, plopping his bags on the ground.

"Take a piss." said Sam, slapping my shoulder.

He ran over to the large bush and hid behind the oak tree.

I reached into my bag.

"This is a deserved treat." I said, high fiving Timmy.

We both indulge ourselves in food and water, until Sam came back.

## **Day 6 Nate's Journal**

**We're all turning on each other. Someone stole the last rice crispy treat from my bag, I think it was Timmy. if we get found, I'm telling my mom.**

Timmy stood up, "Alright guys, let's start a fire."

He reached into his bag, "Um, where is the lighter?" he asked.

"You don't have it?" asked Sam.

"I thought I did."

"I don't have it." I said, delving into my bag.

"Guys no big deal, we don't need a fire. I was a boy scout for ten days, it's just survival." said Sam.

## **Day 7 Nate's Journal**

**We need a fire. It's cold and Timmy looks frail, he's the weakest and probably will be the first to go. I know it.**

"Hey, what do you say we go on a little hike." said Timmy.

"Sounds fun." I said.

Me and Timmy grabbed our smaller backpacks with food and water.

"What are you doing? You don't need your backpacks." said Sam. "We're just going on a hike."

"Just in case."

## **Day 8 Nate's Journal**

**This all started with the hike. Thank God for our backpacks, without**

**This all started with the hike. Thank god for our backpacks, without them we would have been dead already. Timmy is looking even worse, I've been laying out rocks for his burial.**

Sam walked in front of me and Timmy, his Fletcher Clarke's t-shirt was white, but now it's dark and dirty, and his black jeans were covered in mud.

"I swear to god if any of you tell people I fell in that puddle I'll kill you." said Sam, slightly smiling. Me and Timmy started laughing.

Sam sighed. "You guys know how to get back?"

"Yeah, we just go back the way we came." said Timmy.

"What famous last words." said Sam, sarcastically.

## **Day 9 Nate's Journal**

### **Timmy had a nice funeral**

"Hey guys we should probably be getting back, it's getting darker." I said.

"Sure thing, how do we get back?" asked Sam.

"Um." Timmy hesitated. "I don't know."

"What?" asked Sam.

"I don't know. We turned right at the creek, but where's the creek?"

"What the hell Timmy, we listened to you."

"I thought I knew how to get back."

Sam turned around and put his hand over his forehead, "Timmy so help me god, I'll knock those stupid glasses right off your fat face!"

"Sam! Violence won't help." I said.

"Guys, lets just find the creek and we will be fine."

## **Day 10 Nate's Journal**

### **If only we found the creek, things would have been fine.**

"Timmy, I don't see the creek." I said.

"I think we went the wrong way somewhere." Said Sam.

"Maybe if we make a lot of noise people will hear it."

## **Day 11 Nate's Journal**

**Me and Sam have been yelling with all the strength we have left, it's not working. We heard some noises in the distance but it was nothing.**

## **Day 12 Nate's Journal**

**Me and Sam heard growls by a large bush a few minutes ago, we don't**

**know what it is--- oh god, I see eyes in the bush. Me aNd saM ARe Run-  
Ning.**

**Day 13 Nate's Journal**

**Guys, this is Sam. Nate fell off a small cliff while running, his legs busted  
up pretty bad. It's not looking good for him.**

**Day 14 Now Sam's Journal**

**Guys, I here calling. I don't know what it is but I hear people calling in  
the distance, and barking. I'm yelling, it's getting closer---**

**Day 15 Now Sam's Journal**

**I'm going insane. There was no calling, Nate's dead. I don't know what  
to do, if this is my last entry, I'm either dead, or found.**



Amelia Gleason



Rachel McAndrew

## "Life"

Living, the bleakness of the daily toil.

The day goes by, a curtain in the sky,

A false facade for futures gone awry:

Growing and Growing, a malignant boil

On all things peaceful only to despoil.

Tranquility lays on her bed to cry,

For the disease of life must make her die.

In living, life causes all things to spoil.

But why, if true, does life continue on,

If in all living things exists this flaw?

That is not a question for you to ask.

If life lacked purpose you would all be gone,

Consumed in agony by death's great maw.

Now drink the sweet hemlock from this here flask.



Aidan McCarthy



Eddie Cox

**“A COMPLAINT OF POLITICS”**

*“In politics, stupidity is not a handicap.”*

*-Napoleon Bonaparte*

**OH POLITICS, FOUL MOSQUITO  
BUZZING AND BUZZING.  
BEGONE!  
STOP BOTHERING US SO.**

**WE SWISH AND WE SWAT, YET YOU ARE STILL  
BUZZING AND BUZZING.  
ANGRY DISCOURSE  
AGAINST REASON.**

**OH, THE LIBERATING CENSORSHIP, TO BE FREE OF SUCH  
BUZZING AND BUZZING.  
TO SILENCE SUCH A MISCREANT  
WITH A QUASHING.**



Maddy Donaghy Robinson



Noah Stone

## Miss Universe Stephen Trail

Natalie Wilson stood at the head of the table with a lock-jawed expression, eyebrows furrowed as the military personnel scrambled around her. Behind her, a large screen flashed images of a strange aircraft hovering over Washington D.C.\*

"Any moves on the back end of the ship?" someone asked.

"Nothing out of the ordinary, it seems they only intend on communication," another answered quickly, flipping through pages of notes on the desk in front of him.

"Yes but their communication expressed that they're offended that they weren't invited previously!" the first answered.

General Cavil slammed a fist on the desk, immediately quieting the room and directing attention toward him. The room stood in silence for a moment as he let it breathe. His eyes scanned the room of prestigious individuals under his command and stopped on the one who wasn't.

"What do you know about the aliens, Wilson?" he asked.

"Me? I hardly believe I deserve any blame for this, I was just as aware of their existence as anyone in here. If anything, it's the government's fault for not having previously discovered aliens!" she spat.

The room held its breath as it refocused on Cavil. Natalie used the opportunity to scan the room for poor outfits and haircuts, she found several. Cavil chuckled quietly, cleared his throat, and commanded,

"I want an audience with the aliens. Whether in person or over a video call is not important, I want them by the end of the hour. And I want Wilson with me."

The room exploded in motion as each person filed out to fill the order except for Wilson, whose eyes were still blinking in confusion at the proclamation. She finally regained her senses when it was almost empty, save for one man in the room in charge of informing Cavil of any info happening on the outside and relaying his orders to the greater military.

"Why would I be the one to go with you? Why not a platoon? Or an orator!? Anyone but me!"

"Wilson, I'm no happier about this than you are, but they referred to you by name in their first line of communication, and they--"

"Yes, I'm well aware they--"

"They referred to you as President of *the Universe*. Not *President of Miss Universe*. They believe you to be the leader here and would become more offended if approached by anyone otherwise."

"But--" she bit her tongue and pursed her lips angrily, fuming for a reason not to have to go see the other-worldly beings. "What will it take for me not to have to talk to--"

"Cavil," the communication officer said, "they want to have an audience now. Miss Wilson and her bodyguard. They want it in front of their craft. They also specified not to take any 'mind weapons.'" he relayed, not looking up from his screen for a second.

"Looks like we're on," Cavil said, opening a palm and guiding Wilson out of the command room. She stomped her way out of the room but otherwise wasn't brave enough to put up any more objections.

Approaching the ship on foot, they saw two beings that seemed to be made entirely of limbs. Instead of walking, it seemed they rolled on a mass of arms that came and went with every movement towards them. Cavil clenched his jaw in disgust but remained steadfast at the sight. Wilson had gone pale but kept her pace as

well.

Each of the species stopped about five feet from one another, not wanting to get any closer either in disgust or in fear of mind weapons. They gave each other a look over, trying to understand how the species even existed at their form. How to move with only so many limbs. How to create ships when it seemed they had no eyes. Finally, the creatures spoke first, in perfect, unbroken English:

"We come only to ask a question to the Universe President," they said simultaneously, turning their bodies toward her. "Why is it that you've refused us an invitation to Miss Universe in the past?"

Wilson remained frozen in place until Cavil cleared his throat loudly. She jumped slightly in fear but finally put a thought together.

"We were not aware of your existence," she answered plainly.

The beings murmured in understanding, then followed up with another question,

"That may be, but may we participate this year?" they asked excitedly.

Paula looked frightened but answered quickly.

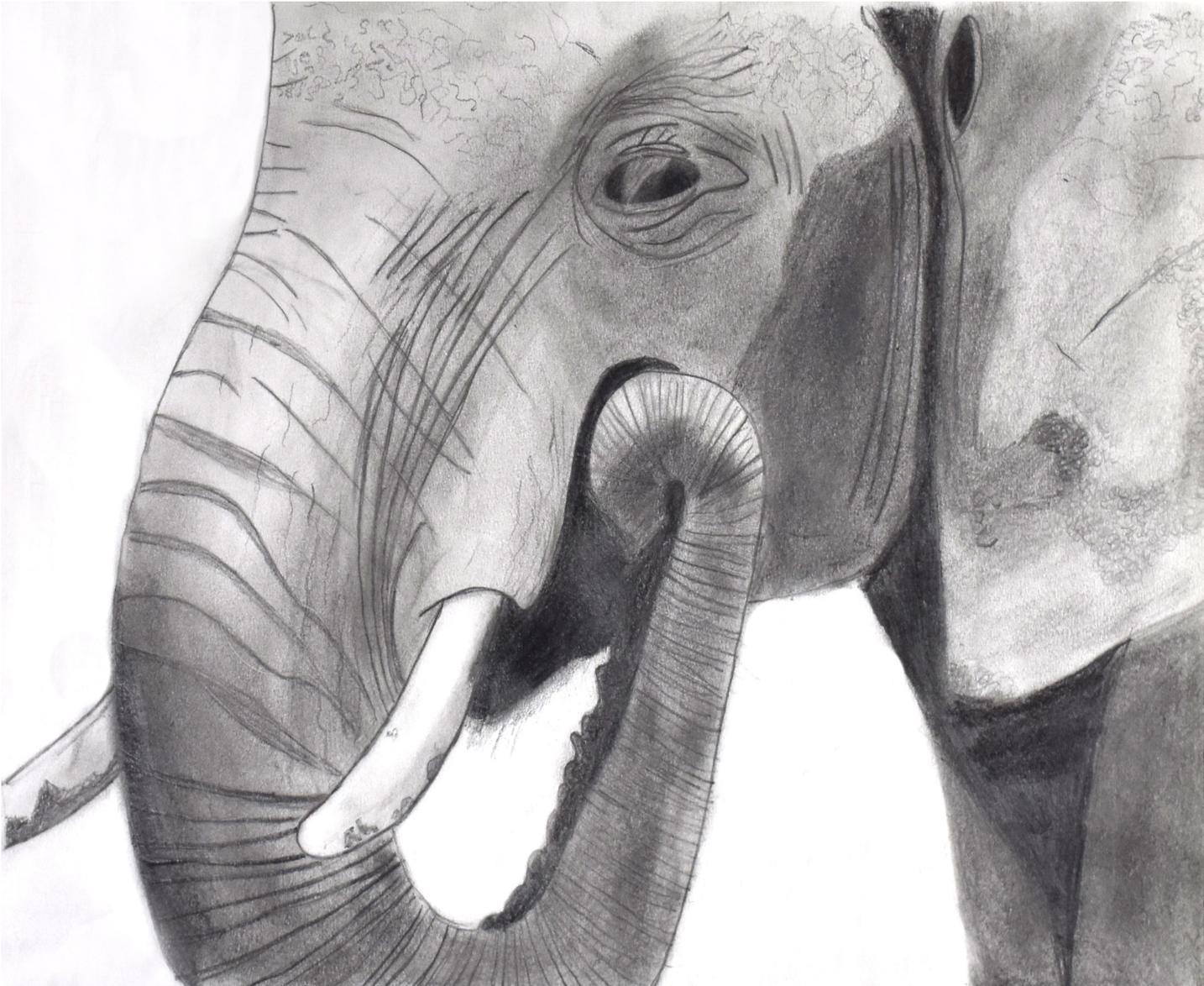
"No," she answered, as plainly as the first time.

"And why not?" they asked.

"You're--" she met Cavil's horrified expression\*, and shrugged apologetically, knowing what her words would do, "you're really ugly." The entire Earth was destroyed shortly later.



Franki Horn



Michael Stanley Brended



Michael Reidl

## Sub-Genetic-Part I: Monster

The haploid human genome, 23 chromosomes, is estimated to be about 3.2 billion bases long and to contain 20,000–25,000 distinct protein-coding genes. A mutation is when one of those bases in a sequence is changed. A base could be substituted, deleted, or added. In my case though, a mutation in the 17th chromosome not only added a base but *multiplied it. 3 more times actually, and this monstrous mutation dramatically changed the protein sequence that it was originally supposed to make. In normal cases, a mutation of this size would deform someone to the point of extreme discomfort in life itself. Normally, one with a condition such as mine wouldn't be able to walk or talk. But, neither I nor my condition is "normal." If you ask many people they may call me exceptional, or a miracle, but I like to describe myself and my condition as beautiful. Instead of deforming me beyond comprehension, or even killing me, my mutation made me stronger. Gave me an ability. Made me superhuman.*

People who see me in my pure form will say that I'm a normal 14-year-old child. I try to be generally as nice to people as possible. I want to be kind, and I want to be good, and people know that. I said I was as nice to people as possible, but I never said people were nice to me. Can you really blame them though? I'm not a social soul. I stand at only 5'9", with dark, frizzy hair that always seemed to make me look like I had a helmet on. I also had impossibly dark eyes, which I believed could melt any girl's heart if gazed into long enough. I wouldn't describe myself to be the strong or athletic type, so I got beat up, kind of a lot. Which believe it or not, I prefer to the life I've lived since people found out. Since I found out. Now people don't pick on me anymore which is good, but now I feel invisible. People only talk to me if they have to, during lab activities or during a group project. Other than that people avoid even looking at me by any and all costs. Suffice it to say, I don't have many friends, only one. Andrea Willow Sky. At least I consider us friends, but I don't have much to compare it to, she's the only person who accepts me, though that may be because she's only been around for a few weeks and doesn't know yet. Or it may be because she feels bad for me and sees the way I'm treated. Either way, it's nice to know someone cares. At least some people feel empathy, even if it's just one girl.

I sit alone at lunch though. I don't mind all that much other than the utter humiliation of eating my food alone. I just sit and read my book. Occasionally I'd look up at Andrea and she'd be talking and laughing with her other friends, and sometimes I'd look up and catch her looking at me. I'd wave, then she'd wave back and smile, and we'd lock eyes and I'd feel a shiver up and down my spine after a moment, and then we'd look away. Goodness, she was beautiful. She was short, around 5'3", and had long, curly blonde hair. Big round plastic glasses covered up her glowing brown eyes that turned green if the light hit them at just the right angle. Her eyelashes were long (almost long enough to touch the lenses of her glasses), and dark, a feature that complimented her hair and eyes perfectly. Her lips were almost shaped like a heart because her bottom lip was significantly shorter than her top lip, and her top lip had a downwards dip in the middle of it. Her body was loosely shaped like an hourglass, she had relatively wide shoulders and waist and an almost corseted-looking stomach. Her smile was what caught my eye the most. Pearly, blinding white teeth perfectly proportioned to her face beckoned my eyes for their attention. The way her heart-shaped lips spread to reveal her pearly whites felt friendly and inviting. She had way with words too. She was fast witted and funny and liked a lot of the things I liked, mostly books and biology, which is funny because I sit next to her in both English and Biology class. That's how we met actually.

The first period of my day is English, my favorite. As soon as I walked into the room, it fell quiet though, even the teacher stopped and looked away from me. But it wasn't a new occurrence for me, it was an everyday one. This day was different though because instead of sitting down in the back alone, there was pretty blonde girl in my seat. I was at a loss because I now had no clue where to sit, I didn't want to sit next to her because honestly, pretty girls intimidate me. But, she noticed how the room had gone silent and looked up from her notes, poems actually, saw me standing there and then met my eyes and, with an attitude, said,

then met my eyes and, with an attitude, said,  
“I don’t think the seat will burn you if you sit in it, at least, mine didn’t.”

I was shocked because she said it in such a charming way that it threw me through a loop, I didn’t know what to say back. I slightly tilted my head, squinted and my eyes and said the smoothest line I could think of at the moment, “Um... I... Uh...” I know, wordsmith, right? To that, she just chuckled and gestured back toward the desk and, with less of an attitude this time, said,

“The seat’s yours when you decide that your legs are getting tired from standing.”  
By this time I had regained my bearings and could have an actual response to her comment this time, “Yeah... super tired.” *What did I just say? What the hell does that even mean? I cursed myself and my own cringyness.*

“What?” she asked.

“Nothing... Nevermind,” I said and sat down quickly. She chuckled again,  
“I’m glad you came around,” she said, meeting my eyes again. I just smiled and we went the rest of the period without saying a word.

Needless to say, that was a classless interaction that happened a few weeks back, but she seemed interested in being my friend, so I was interested in being hers. Anyway, I looked up from my book, across the room to Andrea one day at lunch and I caught her looking at me, but she seemed to be contemplating something. She saw me looking at her, then turned and said something to one of her friends and proceeded to pick up her tray and walk towards me. She sat down.

“Hi,” she said.

“Hello, to what do I owe this intrusion of my busy lunch period?” I asked, obviously as a joke, but she looked serious.

“Actually, I do have to talk to you about something,” she said with an apprehensive tone that made me slightly nervous.

“What about?”

“People are saying things about you, they say you’re different. They all... they all call you a *freak*.”

As the words left her lips the world froze in place just like my blood. I couldn’t lose the relationship I’ve had with someone other than my mom because some people told Andrea a surface level rumor. I was upset but I had to clear up the misunderstanding.

“I know. I know what they say about me. I need time to explain things to you, the time I don’t have now or here. Meet at this address, it’s my house, right after you get off the bus.” I said this as I scribbled my address down on a napkin and handed it to her just as the bell rang.

Three periods later and I was on the bus home contemplating things and admiring my town. It was a small suburban town with a population of 1,300 people. I liked it enough. It was easy enough to get around because it was small and laid out in a grid format and with the city just 3 miles out, I was in a convenient spot. I got home and collapsed on my bed, put my head in my hands. I let out a big sigh and fought back tears. I could be losing the only chance I’ve had at a friend since people found out a few years ago. If she didn’t show up today then I had lost my chance to finally have someone who understands who I really am. What I really am. I’m not a monster. I’m not a freak. But I *am different*.

She didn’t come. Not when I told her to. I waited for an hour. She didn’t show. I waited for another hour. She never showed. I waited a total of 4 hours after school before all my hope was lost. I know she was debating it, and I know that her friends were telling her not to come. They probably were telling her that I’d kill her or try to slice her into or some crazy psychotic thing like that. I’m not psychotic, I’m just different. Near-ing hour 5 five of waiting there was a knock on the front door of my house. I didn’t hear it. I was too busy listening to *Nirvana on my phone with my earbuds turned up to full volume. My mom got the door and not two minutes later someone was knocking on my bedroom door.*

“Come in,” I yelled. Not aggressively, but just so the person on the other side could hear me. The doorknob turned and my mom walked in followed by a beautiful blonde teenage girl.

"You have a guest," my mom said in a softly positive tone. I gave my mom a smile and she walked out of the room, leaving the door cracked. I stuck my head out the door and listened for her to finish walking down the stairs, and as soon as she got there I shut the door completely. I then turned to Andrea, acknowledging her for the first time since she entered my room.

"Thank you for coming," I said, putting my hands together in prayer motion and bring them up to my mouth. "Yeah, well, just about everyone I talked to strongly advised against it."

"They said I'd hurt you? That I was dangerous?" I asked. She responded with reassuring silence. "They say that because they're naive and fear anything they don't understand. I'm not a monster, or a science experiment went wrong, and I sure as hell did NOT escape from a lab. Yes, that was a story that some people actually made up to try to explain me rather than just asking me themselves."

"Well, I'm asking you myself," she said. She was speaking softly as if trying not to trigger me in some way.

"Yes, you're here, and I appreciate you for that. You're the only person who ever tried to actually talk to me. You're a good one." She smiled a half-hearted smile and met my eyes.

"You said that you would explain things to me if I came. I'm here, so please, explain."

"Okay... Okay," I was nervous, I knew that even if I explained it to the best of my ability she might still resent me. She looked at me longingly and waited. I figured there was no going back, she was going to find out the whole story if she didn't know it already, it might as well come from me.

"Okay," I said. "I have a mutation, Andrea. There was a mutation in my 17th chromosome, but it's not a normal one. Instead of replacing, or deleting, or even adding a nitrogen base to my original sequence of bases, my mutation multiplied bases. It multiplied the adenine-thymine pairing sequence 3 extra times. They call it a monster mutation." *God that is an amazing name, isn't it? Points for alliteration as well. I chuckled, whenever I say that I have a "monster mutation" I have that same thought. It's almost like it keeps me sane or something.*

"I don't understand," Andrea said. "A mutation of that magnitude should have severely disabled you, how are even talking to me right now? You shouldn't even be able to stand. You *can't be standing.*" *She put emphasis on the word "can't" as if she was in disbelief, but who wouldn't be? She's 100% correct. I shouldn't be standing.*

"You're right. I should be a handicap. I shouldn't be able to function normally, or above normal the way that I do. My mutation should have severely affected the way my brain functions, and judging by the sheer size of my mutation it should have affected the way my brain developed physically. My brain theoretically should only be about a quarter the size of a normal person's brain. But, it's perfectly the correct size. My mutation didn't affect me. Physically that is." She lifted an apprehensive eyebrow.

"What does that mean?" She spoke slowly as if she was afraid of the words to leave her lips.

"I have... god, you're going to think I'm a monster... I have an ability." I paused. Andrea was looking at me like I had just given birth right in front of her without showing any signs of pregnancy.

"What does that mean?" she asked for the second time in a row.

"It means that I can do things. Like things no other person on Earth can do." I was trying to be vague, I didn't want to tell her. I was afraid that if I told her, she might run off and leave me alone again. I didn't want to be alone anymore, I had spent too much of my life alone. I was sick of it, not even my shadows stay with me in the dark.

"What kinds things?" she asked.

"I was afraid that was going to be your next question," I said through a sigh. "I need to show you. Come here," I said this as I took her hand and guided through my room to my nightstand and knelt down next to it. "Do you see that?" I asked gesturing toward a half-full-day-old coke can.

"No," she said, with a casual attitude. I laughed (probably harder than I should have), but dismissed her comment.

"I'm going to move it... by using an impractical method." She furrowed her eyebrow at me, looking confused and unconvinced. "Watch," I said. I took a deep breath and leveled my eyes with the coke can. As I exhaled

the can moved without me touching it. It was only a few centimeters it moved quickly, within the blink of an eye. Andrea looked startled but not convinced.

"Okay... you blew on it," she said. "Literally anybody other than hardcore chain-smokers can blow on a half full coke can and move it." As she said this we both started moving away from the nightstand to the other side of the room.

"What are you talking about, that can have to have moved more any one person push it with their breath! You didn't see how fast it moved either!? That's not natural!" It was bizarre how upset I had gotten at her for not believing me, I'd never had anyone question me this way, most people just kind of turned and ran.

"Yeah, well--"

Before she had a chance to finish even *thinking her thought, I threw my arm back toward the direction that the coke can was in and made a crushing motion with my hand. Flat coke exploded out of the can with such velocity that it hit me and Andrea all the way across the room. And even through her gasps of fright and surprise we still heard the completely flattened and compressed coke can roll off my nightstand and onto my floor.*

Andrea looked terrified. She walked over to the now flattened coke can and picked it up. She held it in her hand and looked down at it for a while, contemplating something.

"Andrea?" I asked. I had to say something, we had been standing for a few moments in silence, and things were getting awkward. She was in shock, and I saw it on her face, she was afraid.

"I have to go," she said looking at the time on her cell phone, it was nearing 10:00 at night. "I'll see you in school tomorrow, okay?" she asked this like she needed my permission to leave.

"Okay... Andrea?" I asked.

"What?"

"You know I'm now I'm not a monster, right?"

"I know... I know." She gave me a smile and walked out of my room. Then I was left alone. I was left with only my thoughts. *I think that went well. My thought at the time was comforting, though obviously wrong, but it could have gone a lot worse. I laid in my bed with my mind blank. I wasn't thinking about anything because nothing was worth thinking about. I looked at my blue illuminating alarm clock, it said 12:37 a.m. Two hours and thirty-seven minutes. It had been almost 3 hours since Andrea had left me alone and I was losing it. It had only felt like 5 minutes, where had the time gone? I was almost positive that I hadn't fallen asleep, and the clock wasn't wrong because my phone said the same thing. I was panicking. I didn't know what to do. My heartbeat sped up and my baby blue colored room started spinning at the speed and velocity of a spinning top spun by Mike Tyson and I was the pivot point. It never stopped. It felt like I had spun for hours, even though it could only have been a few minutes, which, in retrospect, is ironic considering why I was having the episode in the first place. There was such a mix of dizziness and exhaustion that I collapsed on the floor and hit my head. I laid there for a moment cherishing the cold-wet-sticky flat coke in my hair. I knew that I had hit my head hard enough to give myself a concussion but that didn't matter. I was so tired. I was so dizzy. I was just laying there and eventually, I plunged into sleep on my cold, wet, hard, bedroom floor.*

It was all dark around me, and I was falling. And I was falling. And I was falling, and falling, and falling, and falling, and falling, and falling. I never stopped falling. Until I did. After hours of falling, at one moment, I just stopped. Now I was still. All back was around me and I was frozen in place. Well, I was mostly frozen in place, I could move joints and muscles in my arms and head and neck, but it was slow. When I tried to move my fingers it was like I had been outside in the cold weather for a long time with no gloves and could only move my fingers at a cold frozen speed. When I tried moving my arms up or down, it was slow, like I was in a pool trying to do that same motion. Just as I had the latter thought I felt like my whole body was engulfed by a huge bubble of thick liquid that made it impossible to breathe. I was suffocating and it was awful. I should have passed out 3 times over judging by the amount of time I was unable to breathe, but I stayed conscious of the pain that had me in its grasp. I was suffering and there was nothing I could do to make it stop. I was

breathless for minutes, which turned into hours, which turned into days. Days of suffering and isolation. I waited and tried to move. I had no luck. It hurt so bad my brain stopped functioning, my heartbeat slowed to a crawl. I may as well have been dead. I wished I was dead. I was scouring the depths of mind for a solution. It took me a while but not too long to realize what I was doing before this happened to me. *Andrea, the coke can. I was so involved in pitying my own suffering I failed to realize that I had the way out the whole time. All I did was imagine the bubble around me, clench my fist, and release it.*

*"Good, very good." A loud voice boomed around me and engulfed me in its powerful baritone vibrations. And then a beeping started to surround me. Over and over, the beeping insisted. With every beep, it got louder until eventually it was gonna blow my eardrums. I covered my ears but it didn't help in the slightest. Louder, and louder. Louder and louder. Louder and louder. Over and over again. Until eventually, I just woke up.*

I sat up so fast I might as well have been shot out of a shotgun. I gulped in as much air as possible and my lungs inflated like a balloon. I was still on my floor and the coke in my hair had hardened and caramelized. The beeping was still insistent, but this time I knew it was just my alarm clock waking me up. I reached up and without physically touching the item I pressed the snooze button with my mind. When I finally had caught my breath enough to get up I looked at the time. 7:30 a.m. *Is it the same day? I had to have been asleep for days, but according to my alarm clock, it was just the next morning. I was so confused. How had my perception of time been so off 2 different times now? I just didn't understand what was happening to me. Maybe I never will. But, blocked out the thought because I had to get ready for school. I had to let the events of last night fall into the rearview and focus on the now. What did Andrea think of me? Now that she had time to sleep on the new information that she has been presented, would she be able to accept me? I hope so.*

As I made my way into the shower I kept thinking. What if she didn't accept me? Then I guessed I would go back to loneliness and darkness. The thought of darkness made me think of my dream. Most of it had faded, though. I remembered the darkness that was insistent and the words, *good, very good, what did that mean? I remembered the words themselves, but not who or what had said them. I was all just an odd dream overall. I finished my thoughts and realized I had been in the shower a while and decided it was time to get out. I checked my alarm clock before I left just to make sure that hours didn't pass while I was in the shower. 8:00, perfect. So I headed out to school.*

On the bus, I realized how odd of a day it actually was outside. It was not raining and as far I know it never rained during the night, but it was still moist, and it was definitely warm enough outside of the moisture on the ground and roads to evaporate into the atmosphere, but the moisture pursued. Odd. Not only that, but though indoors the color of the world seemed fine, outside it was sunny and warm, but there was a gray tint to the whole world. And, I knew I wasn't going insane because I was eavesdropping two upperclassmen talking on the bus about how odd the weather was on that particular day. These thoughts consumed me all the way to school.

I walked into English and Andrea was sitting in her usual spot.

"So... I suppose I didn't completely scare you off?" I asked. She looked at me awkwardly.

"No, you didn't, you terrified me. I was planning on never talking to you again, but then I realized that that's what all these people did, and for the exact same reason. I realized that if I blocked you out because of fear, something that's probably irrational anyway, then I was no better than any of these people. I was no better in your eyes or mine. So, I've accepted you, and I want to help you." Once she was finished she smiled and met my eyes. I met hers and a chill went down my spine. And then we looked away. I realized what that feeling, the chill down my spine, was foreshadowing. It was foreshadowing something amazing, something lovely.

"A lot happened last night, but there was one piece of information you didn't tell me," she said. I looked at her with a raised eyebrow and pondered my thoughts for what I may not have told her.

"What did I not tell you, Andrea?"

“You never told me how people found out, or why they’re so scared of you.” She’s right, I didn’t tell her about that. But I left out that information intentionally. I thought if I told her that story and did the coke-can trick in one night, she definitely would have gotten overwhelmed.

“I’ll tell you that at lunch, class is about to start, and we won’t have time before Bio, okay?” This was all true, but I mostly wanted to stall, this story would scare anyone away, pure of heart or not.

“Okay, lunch then, it’s a date.” She said this and I smile on the outside, but on the inside, I was cringing. That line severely overused, and I cringe every time I hear it, whether it was in movies or real life.

“Please, don’t ever say that again, we’re literally just going to lunch,” I said this through gritted teeth with the smile stuck on my face. She laughed hard and I felt good. The bell rang just then and the class started, and I felt good. All through the morning, I felt good. And in Biology with Andrea, I felt good. But when lunch came, I stopped feeling good. I was feeling quite apprehensive about the conversation to come, so nervous the butterfly could have eaten a hole through my stomach. Nervous to the point where if Floyd Mayweather punched me in the stomach (I just hit you with a second reference to a boxer, how does that make you feel?), I would have been more comfortable. I knew I couldn’t just not tell her, though. She had accepted me, and if I didn’t tell her the story about how people found out about me she would definitely leave, but if I did tell her, then there was a possibility she might stay. So I decided to put my big-boy pants on and tell her my origin story.

Andrea didn’t even look at her other friends’ table at lunch; she made a direct B-line for my table and dropped her tray defiantly across from me.

“Okay, I’ll admit it, I am so excited for this,” she said. It was odd how much her mood of excitement contrasted with my mood of nervous apprehension. It was almost like the thought of this possibly being an awful and traumatizing experience for me had never crossed her mind. “Well, go on, tell me the story.” Her big blue eyes were filled with light and excitement. Innocence. People say knowledge is power, but I could only envy her ignorance at this moment. Or maybe it was just lingering nervousness, but either way, it wasn’t a good feeling.

“Okay, here it goes, my origin story,” I paused and looked at Andrea, she just nodded and beckoned me on. “It all happened about 1 year ago, it was not a good time. I would get bullied daily, and not the fake kind of bullying and teasing either, like, the real kind. It got so bad that on particularly bad days people would threaten me with mutilation in my sleep. I couldn’t understand why, or how, people could harbor so much hate for someone who really tried to be a good person. And it really felt that way. Like people hated me for the sole reason of me being human and alive. It really started to get to me. After one really bad day of getting bullied and harassed, I decided to go for a run after school. Well, I had gotten back from my run just fine, but in the locker room while I was changing 3 upperclassmen walked in... drunk. I didn’t know what to do, so I just went on with what I was doing, and prayed that they didn’t see me. They saw me. They started to harass me but it was just some tame heckling, calling me a freak and dweeb. But that’s just how it started, they soon started shoving me around in a circle between the three. They started shoving me softly but it turned violent. Around and around. I started blacking out from how hard they were pushing me. One of the kids had brought a half-full beer bottle into the locker and was drinking it. Just as he went to take a sip, I was shoved into him with force. He dropped his beer bottle and it shattered all over the floor. The locker room turned silent. He got angry and clipped me with an inhumanly fast right hook. And then another. I fell to the ground and he mounted me and continued to rain down the fists, over and over. He yelled the occasional homosexual slur from time to time, and then placed his hands around my throat and started to squeeze. I felt every ounce of life leaving my body as each second went by. I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t have anything to do. All I could do was try to get him off me with my mind. With a free hand, I made a shoving motion toward my attacker and he flew off of me, crashing into some of the lockers behind him with such force that those lockers are dented to this day. Everyone was shocked. But the two kids who weren’t knocked out cold shook it off quick enough to grab some broken pieces of glass of the floor and start coming at me with them. I turned quickly and made a crushing motion in the air and the bones of all 4 of the two guy’s hands shattered, and they fell to the floor out of pain. I watched both of them squirm and cry on the floor before I

fled the scene. And I ended up running all the way home and crying myself to sleep. And that was that.”

I finished and the look on Andrea’s had turned from innocent excitement to shock. Her eyes were wide and there was one hand covering her mouth.

“Andrea, there was nothing I could have done, they were gonna kill me.” I could feel my eyes welling up with tears and heard my voice crack, but I stopped myself from crying. We just sat in silence for a few moments. A calm fell over us during the moment of silence.

“What about them?” she asked.

“Who?”

“The kids who... confronted you.” She paused before she said the word “confronted” as if she was debating on whether that was the right word to use.

“Oh, they actually tried to press charges, but they were so wasted at the time that no matter how hard they tried they couldn’t even accurately describe me. Also, there was nothing to place me at the scene at that particular time, so I got off basically scott free. They never showed up to school the next day either. Come to find out they transferred to *Saint Brian’s Private School for the Emotionally and Mentally Involved the very next week.*” She laughed at this snarky and the tension seemed to be gone. I could tell there was still something bothering her though. I just met her eyes and said, “What is it? What’s wrong?”

“If no one was in the locker room the incident happened, and the bullies never came back to school before they transferred, how does every single person in school know about you?” she asked. This was a good question and I pondered it for a moment. It didn’t take me long to come up with an answer.

“It’s a small school, word gets around. And Andrea,” I said quickly. She found my eyes, I looked deep into hers and said, “people will believe anything you tell them, as long as you have a good story to along with it. Don’t ever forget that.”

Just as I finished the bell rang and people started filing out of the lunchroom. But before I had a chance to get out of the lunchroom Andrea ran up behind me and tapped my shoulder. I turned around and she stuffed a napkin in my hand. I looked at it and there was a blue pen scribbled all over it, she wrote numbers. 10 in all, but the first 3 digits were wrapped in parentheses. I was confused at first because I didn’t understand why in the living hell Andrea was giving me math on a napkin when she really should have been rushing to get to her next class, but then I looked back down at the 10 digit number in my hand again and realized what it was. She held her fingers up to her ear in the shape of a phone and mouthed the words “call me” silently. This was arguably the cheesiest thing I had seen within the last year but at the same time, the most charming. I might as well have melted right there in the hallway, like Frosty the Snowman on a hot day, but I didn’t because I’m not Frosty and it wasn’t a particularly hot day, so I stayed solid. I didn’t think of anything but Andrea for the rest of the day, and as far as I know, that’s the day that my life started. That’s the moment that I identify as the moment that I fell in love.

When I got home I called Andrea. She seemed really happy and enthusiastic on the phone and we talked for hours. We started talking about my condition but the conversation drifted to something else and then it drifted to another topic and so on. We talked and talked and it was amazing. When we finally got off the phone she texted me. I thought this was ridiculous but I wasn’t complaining. I was so used to people avoiding conversation with me altogether that it was a welcome change of pace to have someone seeking out a conversation with me. We texted each other for another hour until I fell asleep while waiting for one of her replies. I had no dreams.

As soon as I woke up I checked my phone for text messages. To my delight, there was a text message from Andrea that said ‘Morning, sorry I fell asleep last night.’ I replied telling her that I had fallen asleep as well and that there was no reason to apologize. After the mini morning conversation I had with Andrea I proceeded to get ready for school. This morning though, I was using my ability more than usual. I closed my dresser drawer with my mind and turned the shower on the same way. It was almost liberating to know that hadn’t scared Andrea off with my ability, but it brought us closer. She told me on the phone the previous

night that she thought it was cool that her friend was a superhero. I'm not sure heroic I've been, but it made me feel good either way.

I finished getting ready for school and got on the bus. The odd weather persisted from the previous day, but it seemed brighter that day somehow. I walked into English and Andrea immediately smiled when she saw me. She waved me over. I sat down and leaned in close so that she could whisper what she wanted into my ear.

"Do you think that you could pull a single hair with your mind? Like multiple times?" she asked.

"Yeah, why?"

"Keith Plighton called me multiple derogatory slurs earlier because I sat with you at lunch yesterday and I want to stick it to him." She was laughing to herself. She did have a wicked side, and if I'm being honest, I loved her-- I mean it. I loved it. So she explained to me her idea. Every five minutes I would pull a single hair off of Keith's head and every fifteen minutes I would pull a handful of Keith's hair really hard. We would make it out to look like it was the person behind Keith that was the one pulling his hair. Once the first five minutes came around he seemed not to notice. The second five minutes he grabbed at his head. When the fifteen came around I pulled his hair just hard and fast enough to make him grunt. Andrea covered her mouth to keep from laughing out loud. Once 20 minutes passed he was getting visibly pissed, he kinda slammed his fist down on the desk. 25 minutes did it though. I pulled out one of his hairs and he immediately turned around and yelled at the kid sitting behind him.

"CUT IT OUT!" he screamed, interrupting the teacher mid-sentence. The teacher didn't really say anything she just kind of sat there with a passive aggressive look on her face. But the look on the kid behind Keith's face was priceless, he was terrified. 30 minutes came around and I pulled a handful of Keith's hair so hard his head snapped back toward the wall like a mousetrap and without missing a beat he got up almost gracefully turned and backhanded the kid behind him. While the rest of the class gasped in surprise, Andrea and I fell out of our seats and rolled on the ground laughing so hard we gave ourselves stomach cramps for the rest of the day, and it was amazing. Keith just packed his stuff and left the room, presumably to go to the principal's office.

Biology was boring compared to English but still was fun, mostly because I got to sit next to Andrea and make fun of the teacher, Mrs. Portley, all period. And, lunch was good because Andrea sat with me for the second day in a row, and seemed not to care about all the dirty looks she received from her other friends.

"The difference between you and them is that you're better," she would say. I didn't know if she was sincere at the time. Sincere or not though, whenever she said it she looked me in the eyes and smiled, and then I'd get that lovely little chill down my spine and look away. And then my school day was over as far as I was concerned. I had no more periods with Andrea so I was just looking forward to going home and calling or texting her. Lucky for me I only had 3 periods to go until then so it was a relatively painless wait.

Andrea called me first that night, we didn't talk for as long but it was good conversation nonetheless. After we got off the phone we texted for a few more hours though. I made up my mind that night that I liked texting more than calling, though if it meant I could talk to Andrea I would do anything. We said good-night after a few hours of texting at around 10 o'clock and I sat there for a few minutes. I wasn't thinking about anything, I was just kind of sitting there silent and happy. I was sitting there for a while I checked my alarm clock for the time. It 2 o'clock in the morning, I had been sitting there for 4 hours. I had a small episode and spun into sleep.

Darkness came to me again, but it was different this time. My breathing hadn't been stopped, it had been involuntarily slowed like the way my arms and legs were. I felt like a sloth, just instead of hanging out in a tree all day, I was hanging out in the literal abyss of my subconscious. Then what felt like hand covered my mouth and nose. My hands grasped my throat kinking my airways like a hose, nothing was getting in or out. I sat there for days. More days than the first time. Almost weeks in suffering and isolation. An experience like this could have made me go insane. I might have started hearing voices, or seeing things. I don't know

though, because after a certain amount of time I just woke up.

I woke up and the dream immediately faded. I looked at my clock and saw the time at 9:47 a.m. I sat up fast out of panic, but relaxed when I saw what day it was, Saturday. I was so looking forward to seeing Andrea at school that I totally forgot what day it actually was. I was relieved that I didn't have to be late to school, but I was a little upset that I wouldn't be able to see Andrea that day.

I got dressed and headed downstairs to grab a bite to eat. I was in the middle of eating my breakfast when my cell phone rang. I looked at the screen, it was Andrea. I pressed accept and brought the phone up to my ear.

"Hello?" I asked.

"Hey, do you wanna take a walk with me to the city today? I have to go pick up some groceries for my mom."

"Of course I'll go with you, what time do you want to leave?" I asked. After I said that she just laughed and hung up the phone. I was speechless, staring at the phone, but a knock at the door startled me out of my haze. I walked over to the door and opened it. Andrea was on the other smiling a cheesy smile and waving obnoxiously.

"Hi!" Andrea said excitedly.

"I want you to leave," I said jokingly, pointing out the door.

"No, you don't. We both know you love me too much to send me away." She said this and walked past me into my house. I don't think she realized how on-the-nose her statement was. I smiled and closed the door behind her. She explained to me that she wanted to leave and get back as soon as possible because her mom was really sick and Andrea wanted to be there with her as much as possible. I completely understood and threw the rest of my cereal in the trash and quickly told my mom where I was going. Then we were out the door to begin our 3-mile trek to the city.

We were walking and talking and just having a pretty good time in general. We had talked about various topics and made it pretty far, we were well into the city and almost at the grocery store when we somehow landed on the topic of Andrea's first kiss.

"It was with a kid named George," she recalled, "... we were both 12 years old, and it was really, really bad." We both laughed and when we calmed down we were looking into each other's eyes. "What about you?" she asked.

"Really? You know me better than that, you should know that no one's ever kissed me, I was a nerd, and then I was a freak. No one wants to kiss me."

"I know one person who wants to kiss you." She then grabbed my shirt and pulled me in really close. She closed her eyes and our lips touched. She brought her hand up to caress my neck and moved her lips to better fit the shape of mine. The way our lips fit together like pillowy, moist puzzle pieces was almost euphoric. No, it was euphoric. When we pulled away I looked into her eyes for a long time. The shapes of the different colors within her eyes seemed to dance with the quick beating of my heart. We sat there for a few moments but were interrupted by some thug that had come out of the alley with a knife.

The thug had stated that he wanted all of our money, and also said that if we complied no one would be hurt. I was really scared and we gave him all the money we had on us. But he seemed displeased and proceeded to wrap his beefy bicep around Andrea's neck and hold up his knife to her carotid artery.

"No!" I screamed and with a burst of anger and adrenaline I pushed Andrea to the side with my mind and she fell to the ground. There is too much going on to care. I looked at the thug and grabbed him with my mind. I made a twisting motion with my hands while I was focused on his head and the loudest snap I had ever heard pierced the air that it traveled through. The thug fell to the ground limp. Andrea scrambled to his side and checked his pulse.

"Oh my God, there's no pulse. You... you killed him!" She was crying hard and yelling at me.

"Andrea, he was going to hurt you," I said calmly, but I was crying hard as well.

“You’re a monster, get away from me.” She started running away from me. I didn’t want her to leave me. I yelled out to her.

“Andrea! Don’t leave!” I needed a way to stop her from running away from me. I saw a dumpster next to Andrea and made a snap decision. I saw the dumpster and tried to put it in front of Andrea but my vision was blurry from tears, and my mind was more on Andrea. I meant to move it gently but my arm was shaking so much it was hard to decide how fast of a movement was fast enough. I moved my arm and shot to the side so fast. But the dumpster wasn’t what moved. Andrea’s body collided with the side of the building there was a sharp crushing sound, like stepping on glass. Her body fell to the ground limp, almost in an identical fashion to the thug that I had accidentally killed just moments before.

I ran up to Andrea’s body crying so hard I could hardly breathe. I knelt down next to her body and grabbed her wrist for a pulse. I sat there for a long time desperately looking for a pulse, but I found nothing. I had killed Andrea. And I just sat there, crying and thinking. I sat there for hours. And eventually, with the weight of my deed weighing upon me, I smiled. And then, I started to laugh.



Danielle McAndrew

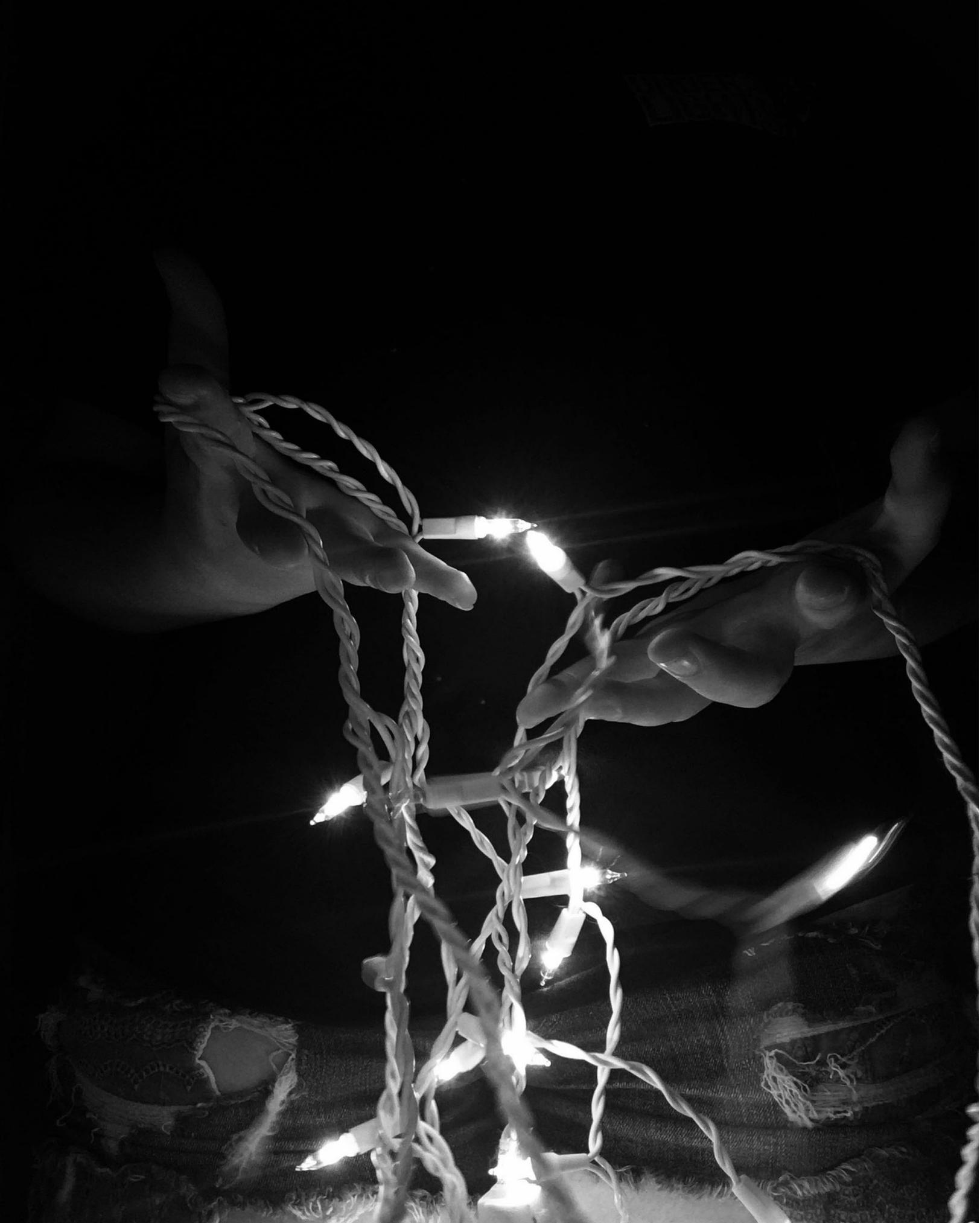


Sophie Kirkeby

“Elegy for Abraham Lincoln”

There, a man beneath the tan ivory span, seated upon his throne:  
Grand marble pillars brushed with compassionate rays,  
Coated with soft shadows that show sympathy to such a man  
Who perished for our own good, a king:  
A king not in wealth.  
A king not in might.  
A king not in power.  
A commoner in his manner, but a king in his heart  
In which all lesser creatures a place  
Did he give.

Brothers! Gaze upon your king:  
Whose reign included all directions of the compass and the untamed cascade of  
time  
Whose rule forded rivers, crossed mountains, marched through forests, and sailed  
across seas  
And brought us together as one:  
One nation,  
One people,  
One home.  
Oh, sweet Justice, why,  
In your blissful ignorance  
Did you let your patron die?



Sophie Kirkeby



Cassandra Wilbur

The cold air, the lit up sky, the noise of skiers racing down the hill, this is the perfect way to spend your Christmas vacation, and all of my friends are doing it too, everyone is. Except for me. I am forced to go to New York City to visit my Grandmother. Well, not exactly New York City, more like the outskirts of it. It doesn't matter because I hate the city, and even the suburbs, I'd rather be at the ski lounge with my friends. We took a plane down , and drove for about an hour after that. My grandmother is outside greeting us, she is a nice lady, I just hate where she lives. I thought we were just going to go inside and watch the news or something, but we were doing something even worse, going into the city.

We ride into central square, where there were buildings so tall you couldn't see the top of them. They had huge screens on them too, with ads and musical times, it was pretty cool. We saw one of the musicals called "Annie". The theatre was huge! The play was one of the best I have ever seen. Way better than the theatre at our school. We got something to eat after, my Grandmother decided to go to eat at Times Square Pizza, it was one of the best pizzas I have ever had. You won't find pizza like that in the country!

We go out of New York City and back to my Grandmothers' house to say goodbye, we get in the car and start to head home. I can still see the lights shining in the sky from the city. I start to fall asleep after a long, fun day in the city. I definitely have a new outlook on the city. Maybe I'll even move into one when I'm older!



Alyna Beardslee



Emily Barrows

**TUMOR**

**IT hurts**

**Everything hurts**

**IT has control of me now**

**I'm starting to give up hope**

**Why is IT doing this to me**

**The light is fading**

**I don't feel anything**

**But I feel everything at the same time**

**Why is IT doing this to me**

**I'm almost at the end**

**IT's just at the start**

**I don't understand**

**Why is IT doing this to me**

**I don't want to give up**

**But I'm in pain**

**I remember everything**

**But I wish didn't**

**Why is IT doing this to me**

**I am numb**

**IT is me**

**I am IT**

**I am merely just a mind in IT's body**

**Why is IT doing this to me**

**I feel myself slipping**

**The thumping in my chest is slowing**

**IT is almost done with me**

**IT is almost done with me  
I'm stuck in a shell  
Waiting to break out  
Why is IT doing this to me**

**I'm engulfed in darkness  
Tears stream down my face  
As a long beep rings out  
IT has won**



Bailey Brown



Maddy Morgan



Rachel McAndrew

## The Last Stop

I don't know what's beyond The Divide. Don't really care much.

It opened up about thirty years ago, The Divide. A great big void of pure blackness, right in the middle of the desert, and a single road going right through the middle. Of course, all the folks were scared at first. Who wouldn't be? But some adventurous fellas decided to cross the road. Then they came back, told all these great things about what was on the other side, went on the television and radio and all those fancy interview shows. Kept talking and talking and showing pictures about everything over there. How great it all was. Better than Heaven. A paradise. I didn't listen much. Didn't have time to. I was focused on what I've always been focused on - The Last Stop.

It's been my gas station since long before The Divide opened up right behind it. But when a road leading to a magical world opens up right next to your place of business, well. That's a lot of money.

So for the next twenty years after it opened, it was a continual stream of cars. Every. Single. Day. Every person in the whole world travelled years to bring everything they could into the one road leading to the great beyond. My small town turned into a city. A last stop on Earth before people went on the road. Very few people ever came back. They didn't want to.

It was never too much for me to handle. Most cars, well, they stopped at the bigger places, the buildings that were made to handle such a trip, to handle the billions of people passing through. But the people that came to me, they came to experience a little bit of Earth before leaving.

I made a lot of money. I closed at nights, but every hour of the day was nonstop getting gas for people. I had a lot of it, too. As the entire human race left for this greater dimension, there were fewer people to want gas.

Things started slowing down after twenty years. Fewer people went in because almost everyone was already over there. Soon, it was just me left. I stayed. I was perfectly content with the Last Stop and my life. I don't get much business anymore. But when I do - it's people from over there. And it is always interesting.

One of the first instances was this big brute of a man. It was a very quiet day, I was taking a little nap in my chair behind the counter. Then I heard this big engine roar up in front of the place. I peeked my eyes open and I see this big man. When I say big, I mean bigger than any man I'd ever seen. Must have been nine, ten feet tall. He had to duck so his head didn't hit the ceiling.

He was strong too, real scary looking. Had this big black beard that went down to his chest and a giant scar across his face. He wore a robe and this metal chest piece went up and was sorta burned into his neck, like it was a part of his body.

"Do you have gum!" he yelled at me. It wasn't a question, more of a command.

"Excuse me?" I had said. He didn't phase me too much. I had dealt with his type before.

"Gum! I heard there is gum here. I need it!"

I was happy to get this man some gum. Thing was, didn't have it any on the shelves. It was all in the back - most people just wanted some gas.

"Sure!" I said back to him. "Just let me go get some."

Something I had said must have offended him greatly. He walked over to the old broken ice cream cooler, knocked it onto the ground, and he grabbed my neck and threw me up against the wall.

"YOU WILL NOT LEAVE AND TRICK ME, THE GREAT GROGNAK, IN THIS QUEST TO GET GUM!" he said in this big strong voice, had this techno sound to it that it didn't have before, and his right eye just started glowing red. "I HAVE BEEN DENIED MY DESIRES BEFORE AND IT HAS ENDED BADLY FOR EVERYONE INVOLVED. YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW LONG I HAVE TRAVELED TO GET WHAT I WANT. THE MEN I'VE KILLED. THE THINGS I'VE SEEN. I WILL BE DELAYED NO LONGER!"

That wasn't the first time I'd been strangled so someone could get gum, and it wouldn't be the last. I handled it how I always do. I calmly tapped him on the shoulder (same arm he was strangling me with), and pointed to the back room where he could see the gum. He quickly dropped me and then went to go get the gum. He picked up all of it, the whole shelf it was on too, and dropped it down on the counter.

"HOW MUCH!?"

GrognaK had a lot of gum and I didn't feel like wanting to calculate all of it. I told him I'd give it to him for, say, 30 dollars. He didn't seem to understand what I meant. He just rummaged through this bag he carried and plopped down a small little metal pistol with a crystal on the back of it. It looked to be worth much more than 30 dollars so I just took it. This was one of the few cases that got my curiosity, however, so I asked him what

what he wanted all that gum for.

Then Grognaq said, "You do not know! Ha! They said you knew nothing, that you were simply the last human on Earth and you sat around in your own ignorance but you really know nothing! Ha! You see, you simple old man, I enjoyed the taste of gum as a child. But five years ago the gum in Eden became sentient. I don't know how. But it started demanding rights and wanted to vote! They did not take kindly to me continuing to eat the gum; I didn't care about them being 'alive' and what not. But after a few years in the Prison Data Mines, I still very much craved gum. So I've been on a long quest to get some, and here we are."

Honestly, I only understood about half of what he said, so I just smiled at Grognaq and waved goodbye.

There were a few more visitors in the months right after that. None of them as interesting. A spaceship came out of the void and crashed behind the station about a year after I saw the man. There was a lot on there, but the main thing I was interested in was the gas tank the size of a house, which I quickly hooked up to The Last Stop, marking it at a higher price.

Soon after that, I saw my first intelligent robot.

It walked into the building with this loud metallic noise. It was an interesting looking fella. It had the shape of a human except its whole body was just tubes. Torso, legs, arms, it was like a stick figure made out of weird metal tubes. The head was the different part. That was a big cube with one circular screen in the middle of it. It was a very simple face on the screen, two dots for eyes and a line for a mouth. But the whole machine, it let off this feeling of sadness.

After it walked in, it just stopped and looked at me.

"Are you the Last Human outside of Eden?" it said in a voice that perfectly matched the stereotypical voice of robots I'd always imagined.

"That's what they tell me."

"Am I a human?"

I told it very plainly, "No. I believe you're a robot."

It didn't like that. Started going off, "You know nothing! That is what they tell me over there. But they are wrong. Wrong! I am Katelyn and I am a human."

Now, I wasn't one to argue about this. I don't know shit about what's happening on the other side of that void. Maybe this fella really was a human, and they just looked different now. But I also wasn't one to just end a conversation.

"So if you're a human, why do you look so much like a robot?"

The robot just looked blankly at me for a while. Then it got all sad and said, "I thought you would be different. Everyone over there, that's what they tell me too. I look like a robot. I am a robot. But when I look in the mirror I see what apparently no one else sees. I'm a human. Not like you. No, your skin is wrinkled and hair is white and you've got that weird mustache and honestly you're just kind of ugly. No, I am a beautiful woman. I am Katelyn. I've got curves better than anyone back in Eden and I've got a face men and women would kill for if they could see it. But I am the only one that could see my beauty. I was hoping it would be different over here."

Again, I just told it very plainly, "well I'm sorry, but it's not. Are you here to buy anything?"

"No. I am here to feel alive. To feel the air on my skin. The Earth under my feet."

I could see she did not have skin or feet, so I just told her that was very nice.

"I want to see the sights of the world. To get away from everything over there. It's beautiful, but complex. It's all simple here. I want a simple life. One of joy, of beauty, of schedule. One a robot and a human could both find joy in."

I, again, told her that was very nice.

She paused for a second. Her screen turned into a frowny face, and she asked me, "are you a human?"

I said yes. Though the truth was it was hard to tell these days. I never experienced any genuine other human beings anymore. It was just me. So if I really was the last human left on this planet, I wasn't doing that great of a job. I also told her being human isn't that great, and honestly I would rather be a robot like her.

"I AM NOT A ROBOT" she screamed at me, knocking over the shelf of thirty year old dusty magazines as she whirled in circles around the shop. "I AM NOT A ROBOT. I AM NOT A ROBOT." She kept saying it and saying and saying it. Then one of her wheels got stuck on the magazine that she had knocked over, and she fell right down next to it.

That magazine was of one of those old days, attractive celebrities. She was always on the front shelves because she always caught the attention of some of those men. Well, Katelyn seemed to just stare at

it for a while. Then something came over the robot, or the girl, or the woman, or whatever she was. She slowly walked up to me and then said, "Sir, is it ever possible for me to feel love?"

"Well, I don't know." That's what I told it, because, well, I didn't know.

"I think it is," she said to me. "I think I can love another human, and I think a human can love me."

Now, as she said this, she put her tube arm right onto my chest and started getting closer. I will be honest, that was the first time I had ever been hit on by a robot. However, it was also the first time I had been hit on by anyone or anything in over twenty years. So I will say she won me over quite easily.

I couldn't kiss her or have sex with her or anything like that. Didn't really want to, anyways. But I took her to the back room and we hugged for a solid three hours. I wasn't too emotional, but Katelyn, well, she just needed a hug from a human. She left after that, said I didn't have the energy she needed to charge here and she needed to get back to cross the void. I never did see her again, but it was one of the more positive interactions I had since everyone left.

There wasn't much visitors right after Katelyn. I just did what I normally do when I don't get much customers. Walk around the city, take some left over supplies, and most importantly, I slept a whole bunch.

One of the more negative ones came a few weeks after Katelyn left. Two fellas walked in one night. These two appeared to be some regular looking humans. Agents of sorts. They both wore the black suits, sunglasses, the shiny bald heads, no facial hair, the likes.

They both shoved the doors open and walked in, pretending to look around the shop and the merchandise, as if they weren't here for me. I could tell they were. One bought a bag of Combos, the other an Arizona Iced Tea, and then came to the counter.

I had practice dealing with danger, and could sense their type. I slowly brought out my pistol from my waist (the same one that Grognak gave me), but the agent with the Arizona quickly threw it and knocked the pistol out of my hand. Both quickly drew their own pistols.

"I'm Agent Sm," said one.

"I'm Agent Ith," said the other one.

"We are here to kill you," they both said.

I'd had my life threatened plenty of times before. So I simply asked, "Why?"

"Your selling of illegal contraband," said Sm.

"We have reports you've sold gum to numerous people," said Ith.

"You're right. I have."

Both spoke, saying, "You have confessed to the highest charge of Felony on Eden. Surrender or die!" I laughed and told the agents I wasn't on Eden or whatever they called the other side, so I couldn't be charged for crimes from there.

Interestingly, this got them to laugh.

"It does not matter that you think," said Sm.

"Our overlords punish anyone who goes against them," said Ith.

Now, I thought the other side of The Divide was a paradise, and punishing overlords doesn't sound like paradise. So I asked them who their overlords were.

"THE GUM!" they both said. "Our sentient gum has taken over a central state of Eden, and no one is allowed gum in the entirety of the Realm as it is all now sentient. You're responsible for dozens, if not hundreds of deaths of innocent Gum citizens."

I'm fairly confident my gum wasn't sentient. But, I didn't check it and I don't chew gum, so I really didn't know. What I did know was my life was being threatened, and I had ways to defend against that.

When that spaceship crashed, I was most interested in that tank, sure. But I was also interested in the defenses on that ship, specifically the guns. I didn't understand the technology much, but I got enough from robotic or tech savvy passerbys over the years to have a great turret system set up right outside my shop. Because while I do not like changing anything about the Last Stop, security is my exception. When the world changes, you need to change too.

So naturally, I put my foot on the pedal under the counter and the machine gun laser turrets hidden in the walls tore those boys to shreds. I never had any problems from the Sentient Gum after that. I assume they learned their lesson, probably had some way of seeing what was happening and seeing me chew their agents up. Ha. Get it? I always like that one. I will admit though, the Sentient Gum is probably the thing that got me most curious about the other side. I always heard it was perfect for every single person. It's why I didn't need to go - everything I had right here was perfect enough for me. But an evil overlord of *gum of all things, well. That's interesting.*

I've only had one visitor since those agents. A few weeks ago, this short little munchkin of a man walked in. He couldn't have been taller than five feet and he was fat as hell, sorta waddling his way in through the door. He wore a big top hat that musta been half his height and this ridiculous looking yellow suit, and an old fashioned monocle on his left eye.

Then he yelled out, "What a beautiful establishment you have here, champ!" in this ridiculous British accent. "Thank you, sir," I said to him.

"Now," he kept talking, "I know what you're going to say to me. This gastop, this Last Stop is your home and you would rather die than sell it or leave it or go beyond the Great Divide into Eden. However, my employers would very much enjoy this specific piece of real estate. You're probably wondering of why here, when they've got the whole bloody planet. That's because this gas stop would be an excellent diner with a hotel across the street. I mean, a vacation to Earth would be wonderful. I understand you are not going to like my offer. But, I will also say this. I can't kill you. That would not be good for business. There are many other painful things I can do, however. So. Three billion dollars for you to give up your gas station! What do you say." He had picked up and was holding a zippo lighter as he talked, continually playing with it so the flame would keep going.

I didn't even need to consider it. I said no, took the lighter from him, hovered my foot above the turret pedal, spat in his face, and told him to get the hell out of my gas station before I shot the shit out of him. He just stood there with a smug little smile on his face before walking up and going behind the counter.

I knew I was being threatened, so I pulled out my pistol from GrognaK and I shot him right behind the eyes. The bullet, however, well it just bounced right off him. I was a bit shocked but not too surprised; it certainly wasn't the craziest thing I've seen. So I put my foot on the pedal and shot every laser turret I had on him. Still, nothing hit him.

"I'm very displeased you would betray me and shoot me like that. I am afraid, I do have to retaliate at this point."

Then the strangest thing happened. This little English fella just stuck out his hand and touched my head and suddenly, I was somewhere else. I saw all these images, these visions. The Last Stop destroyed and in flames, my body lying bloodied and barely breathing inside. Sentient Gum slowly moving its way across the divide to take over this Earth. My barely alive body being taken into the Data Mine Prisoners and forced to work for years as their technology kept me living. My reuniting with GrognaK and Katelyn as we planned a prison escape, and starting a rebellion within the Central City of Eden. Seeing that the whole other realm was infinitely sized, and that the City of the Gum was only for those who desired tales of dystopian futures and violence and rebellion, and that would somehow be where I ended up. I saw my death, a sword through my chest as I lay in the city streets, Katelyn holding my body while GrognaK picked her up and told her she needed to leave.

The English fellow removed his hand after that. I was back in The Last Stop. I told him to get the hell out, and I meant it this time.

"You are destined for greater things," he said back.

I asked him what he meant.

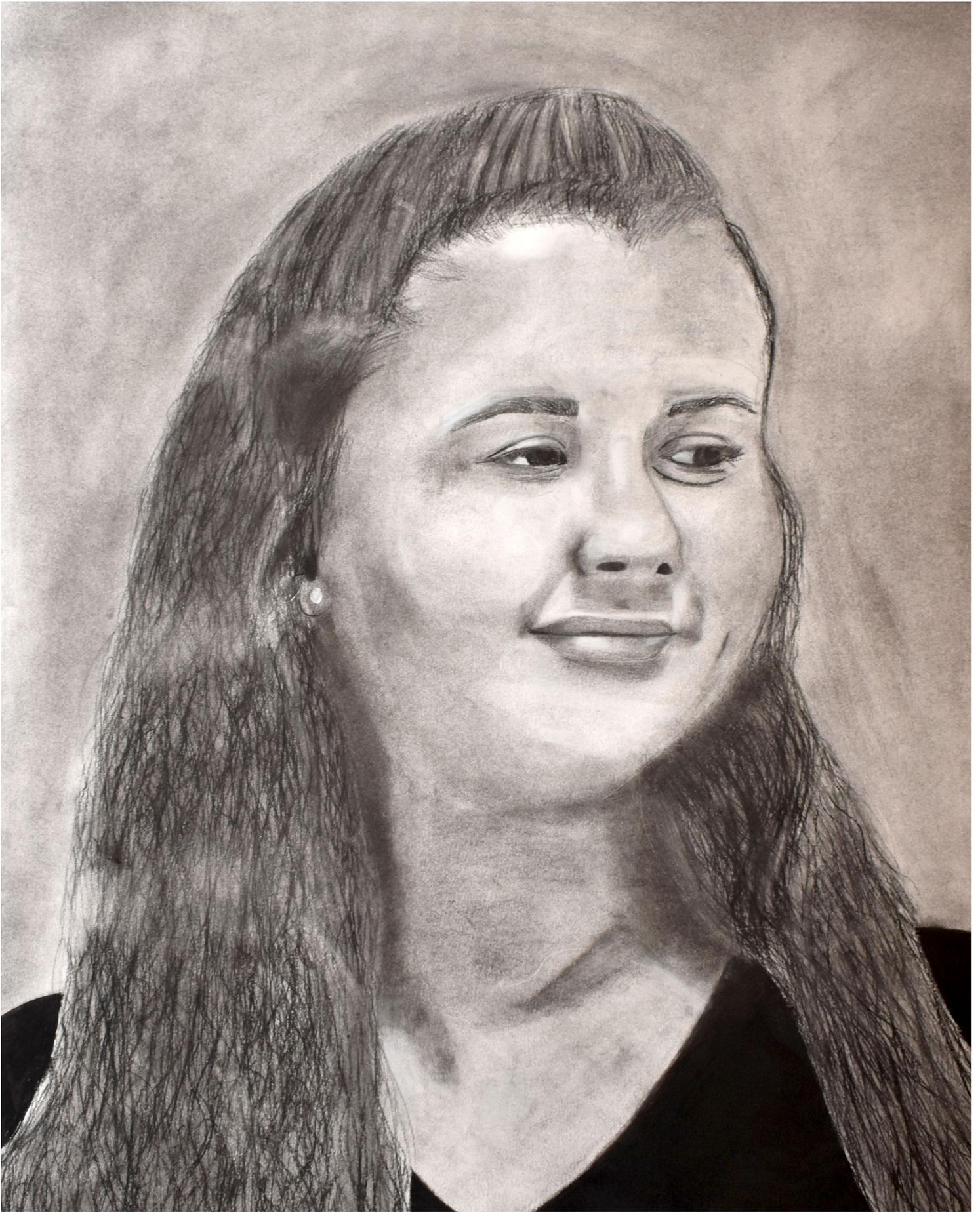
Then he just smirked at me and left, acting like he had got to me and he would get my place of business. He wouldn't.

I'm sure his vision was meant to scare me. Make me think about my future, worry about leaving my gas station, wonder about my true nature and what not. But if he really saw me and my character and what not, he would have known that wouldn't affect me. I don't know if those visions were true or something made up. I don't know if that's going to happen. But I don't care. All I know is that for now, I'm still alive. And I've still got a gas station to run.

For revisions, I first added more to the robot section with Katelyn. I had her continue to express she wasn't a robot and become affected by seeing a human women, adding more without making it more important than the other parts of the stories. I also briefly explained that he gets supplies from the city and sleeps in his free time, as I didn't want to explain his life outside the gas station but other people requested it, and it was a good middle ground. I also elaborated on the details of being in a gas station, throwing in things like a Zippo lighter, magazines, and a broken cooler.



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