Discovering the Unexpected

Blueprints Anthology

2010-2012
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Blueprints is a collection of student writing at Highlands High School in Fort Thomas, Kentucky. Each year, students are invited to submit their work for consideration. The Blueprints staff reads and selects the pieces that are featured within. This year, we considered pieces that were submitted during the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years.
Life
By: Mattie Peko

My father told me it would be okay,
Mommy doesn’t mean it,
Mommy always says things she doesn’t mean.
In between tears he tells me to breathe,
Mommy loves you,

Truth is,
My mother didn’t want me.
She didn’t want any of us,
She didn’t want any of this
She wanted out.

Mommy said she loved me today
That I was everything she ever wanted
Tomorrow, she’ll tell me to leave, go.
Don’t come back.

My brother said he’s moving out
Getting away, going away,
Don’t tell Mom.

My sister cries,
Every night when the clock’s hands point north
Her eyelids do as well,
And Mommy says she hates her.
Mommy says she never wanted this,
I hate you.

My brother didn’t shovel the driveway,
Mommy didn’t like that.
Leave, get out, she screams.
I grab a shovel and go outside,
My brother follows as time presides
Where are you going?
He doesn’t answer.

I love you,
An echo follows down the street,
I love you, too, he says to me
And continues walking.
When tears freeze,
Do you know that you’re crying?
When someone walks away,
Do you have to follow them?
I should have.

Mother comes outside,
Where is he?
I don’t know.
Get inside,
Why are you crying?
He’ll be fine.

My phone rings,
Is he home? She asks,
He called me, I was working.
No, I thought he was with you?
Where is he?

I found him the next day,
Printed on paper
The paper I always hated,
The paper that smells so old,
Ancient, even though it comes fresh
Every day, it comes fresh, new
Black ink, tinted paper,
There he was.

I never saw Mommy so hurt,
Her eyes, filled with lies, pain, regret
It was seven in the morning
She was mourning.

Mommy never said she hated us after that day,
Never said she never wanted us ever again.
It’s funny how reality strikes like a bolt,
One life taken,
One lesson learned.
I am . . .
By: Nathaniel Tippenhauer

Let the pets live in cages,
Always fed, loved and watched,
But never experiencing life.

I’d rather be free,
An eagle,
Finding my own way to survive,
Seeing the majestic sky.

They can be pet birds,
Never experiencing life,
While I fly everywhere,
Owning the world.

I would stay hidden,
Instead of seen every day.
I am free.
I find my own way to live.
I am happy,
They are sad.
The definition of fear is, ‘the feeling or condition of being afraid.’ We have all heard at some point in our lives that fear can make a man do crazy things. Sometimes this could mean betraying the trust of a loved one, making things worse with drastic actions, or, in my case, taking off running for two blocks until I reached the safe haven of home. But before I get into this story about what was most probably the scariest moment of my life, there are some things you may need to know.

First of all, it was Halloween night of 2004. This means that I was only seven when this event occurred, so I was technically still a child. I used to think that Halloween was a time to celebrate with free candy and fancy costumes. I soon found out that it is really a time of pranks and monsters and all the creepy-crawlies that small children associate with the dead of night. Most importantly, this particular year, I was being babysat by my Aunt Lelia and Uncle Andrew, who had decided when I was born that they would take on the job of being the annoying older brother and sister that I never had.

I was sitting in my living room on a tall stool near the corner, staying as still as possible while my Aunt Lelia, fifteen at the time and already dressed in her pirate costume, was doing my makeup. I was already dressed in my black-cat costume, my faux fur cat ear headband in place, my tail pinned to the back of my jeans. My outfit was completed by a long sleeved black shirt and matching black boots. Studying my reflection in the small mirror in front of me, I watched as my aunt slowly drew pretty cat eyes that I thought reminded me of a picture of an Egyptian princess I saw in my social studies text book. She painted a small black nose on the tip of my own, while long curling whiskers danced across my cheeks with the masterful touch of her thin paintbrush and black paint.

“Will you sit still for two seconds? You can see yourself when I’m done,” Aunt Lelia scolded. “Sorry!” I stated as innocently as possible. “I guess I’m just excited about tonight, since it is Halloween.” I could hardly keep the enthusiasm out of my voice as I thought about all the candy I was going to get.

“Done,” Aunt Lelia said proudly with a flourish of the paint brush she was previously using. “Looking good, Catherine,” said my Uncle Andrew, his voice dripping with irony. He was seventeen at the time and ‘too cool’ to embrace the Halloween spirit. “Ready to go so I can drop you two off at what’s-her-name’s house yet?” I realized that he already had his keys in his hand and was beginning to open the door.

“Their names are Lexi and Abby. And yes, I think we’re ready,” Aunt Lelia said. Attempting to be polite, I asked, “Are you sure you don’t want to come with us tonight Andrew?”

“I’m good, I’ll be watching movies tonight,” Uncle Andrew reminded me for the third time. Before I knew it, Lelia and I were outside Lexi and Abby’s house, while Andrew headed back home. Their walkway was lined with candles and the porch was covered with jack-o-lanterns. Lexi, with her hair of spun gold, was dressed as Rapunzel, which fit her perfectly. Abby was dressed as a hippy, a perky yellow sunflower tucked behind her ear.

“See you in an hour back here guys,” Abby and Aunt Lelia yelled over their shoulders as they turned to the left and took off down the street.

Lexi and I went the opposite way down the block, and in no time we had reached the last house on our route. We began heading back to Lexi’s house, our goody bags as filled to the brim with candy as Santa’s bag on Christmas Eve.

We met up with Aunt Lelia and Abby and sat outside on the porch, counting how much candy we had, bartering with each other for our favorites, transforming us into Wall Street’s savviest traders.
We barely noticed how late it was until Lexi and Abby’s mom came out and lit more candles since the others had burned out, reminding us that it was nine thirty, almost my bed time.

In my whiniest tone I said, “I’m tired. Can we go home now?”

“I’m going to stay here. But I can call Andrew if you want and he can pick you up,” Aunt Lelia offered.

“No way! He’ll take forever,” I complained. Then an idea struck me. Looking back now, I realize just how idiotic it was. “How about I just walk over there? It’s only three blocks away.”

“You sure you won’t get scared?” I could tell Aunt Lelia would rather me wait and get a ride.

“It’s on a busy street, there are tons of sidewalks, and I’ll make sure to look both ways before crossing,” I stated in the most obedient tone I could muster.

“Ok, but I’ll call Andrew and if you aren’t there in ten minutes, then you are in big trouble,” Aunt Lelia said in a motherly tone, pulling out her cell phone and dialing his number.

“Got it,” I called over my shoulder, already halfway down the driveway, waving goodbye to Lexi and Abby. I just turned the corner when I lost view of them and turned my head to the sky. It was a magnificently cloudless night so I could easily see the full moon, a bright glowing orb suspended in the sky which was as black as coal. It spread a silver beam of light on the street, creating an equally beautiful and ominous effect. I then realized that it was the only source of light on the street, the street lamps were dimly lit, the porch lights were off, the candles blown out; inside the houses all was dark due to the late hour. The silence of the block was as loud as a firecracker. It felt too foreboding, making me feel anxious and worried as my head kept on turning to look behind me against my brain’s permission. The fallen leaves danced across the sidewalk near my feet as a light breeze blew through. It was a scene straight from a horror movie right before the main character gets hurt. Then I heard a low rumbling that made me jump slightly before I realized that it was my own stomach. I reached into my goody bag, grabbed a piece of candy at random, and popped it in my mouth.

I felt a smile finally spread across my face as the succulent flavor of a cherry Starburst exploded throughout my mouth, making my taste buds tingle with excitement. I walked on for barely two more minutes before I heard another low rumbling. I looked down and realized it wasn’t my stomach. I looked up, thinking it might be thunder, but the sky was still clear, the moon still shining. Then down that street I saw it, a tiny black car coming down the street.

‘Silly, Catherine,” I thought. ‘Scared of a little car.’ It passed by quickly and turned the corner as I kept walking. But as I was heading down the street, I realized that it was the third, fourth, fifth time that car has passed by and I haven’t seen any others.

‘Ok, time to panic,’ I thought as it passed me by the sixth time and I began to believe I may be getting followed by a creeper. I couldn’t help it, I freaked out. My flight response kicked in as I took off running down the street, trying to scream as well but my vocal cords had created a tight knot in my throat. I didn’t dare to stop or turn. Not when I felt a searing stitch in my side and my throat burned, not when I heard the car behind me, not when I realized that I should have dropped my candy bag so I could run faster but my steel grip on it made letting go impossible.

I finally reached my house and ran up the stairs, almost slamming into the door because of my momentum. I knocked on the door as hard as I could and yelled, “Uncle Andrew, Uncle Andrew! Open the door!”

After a few minutes of knocking and screaming and trying to catch my breath so the burning in my side would go away, Uncle Andrew opened the door. I raced into the house and slammed the door shut.

“Uncle Andrew!” I said as clearly as I could while I regained my breath. “You’ll never believe what just happened, I was walking home and—,” I cut myself short. I realized that Uncle Andrew was laughing to the point of tears. “What’s so funny?”
“You know that car you saw a bunch of times?” He was asking only though gasps of breath. I nodded. ‘How does he know about that,’ I wondered.

“Yeah well, that was me,” he said and burst out laughing again.

I remember feeling livid at the time, although now I do have to admit it was a hysterical prank. Cutting to the chase here, Uncle Andrew got grounded for two weeks for scaring me on my walk home alone, Aunt Lelia got grounded for one week for letting me walk home alone, and I got a stern talking to for walking home alone. I guess I could say I learned a lot of things that night, but the most important thing was that patience really is a virtue. If I had waited for a ride that night then maybe it never would have happened. Oh well, maybe my younger sisters will be smarter than I was back then.

He Class Clown
By: Bailey Faeth

English Class.
Highlands High School.

He class clown. He
Shuts down. He

Cracks up. He
Acts up. He

Has troubles. He
Pops bubbles. He

Can disrupt. He
Can interrupt. He

April fool. He
Fails school.
We’ve lived in Miamiville our whole lives
She’s perfect
We’ve lived next door for ten years
She’s amazing
We’ve gotten everything we’ve ever wanted
But she knows
We’ve lived in fairytale suburbia
That I know
I play ball and she cheers
She smiles
I ride my Harley home and she rides her Corvette
She waves
Everything is perfect as we drive into our separate driveways
But I see
Behind the perfect wall
What’s really there
His shouts echo through the night
She screams
His banging clatters in my ear
She cries
The noises last until the sun shines
She sobs
Her makeup layer gets thicker everyday
She laughs
The hot sun beats down but she’s in layers
She’s hiding
No one else can see her pain
But me
Miamiville still thinks she’s got it all
But they don’t know
They can’t see through her bright blue eyes
Only me
They don’t see her face without makeup
She needs help
No one else sees the bruises when she swims in her backyard
Alone
She seems to be the girl with everything
She has too much
But who bothered to look
They know
How could you miss the flashing lights
The sirens
How couldn’t you see her being carried out
Now they know
They know what I’ve known all along
But they took too long
Everyone took too long to understand
Or maybe they never did.
Unheard
By: Laura Buel

Snowflakes melt on frozen lips,
Calm hands lie in pockets, with fidgeting finger tips,
Life flips around, and
With a mouth fallen silent,
There is not a sound,
But the words,
Still seem to be heard.
Without You
By: Theada Long

Not knowing where I am going or what to think now.
I only know one thing.
I know you will always be there for me.
This has made me wonder what you would have grown up to be.
This has made me wonder what we would do the next time we were together.

I no longer wish that I had you back.
I thank God you are safely held in heaven.
I thank God you are not in pain and that you are finally happy.
We shall meet again one day.
We will meet again in the wonderful place called heaven.

Photo By: Molly Bramble
The year was 2098. Technology had just taken a great leap. Flying cars had just been created, along with hoverboards, alternate fuel sources, and one of the most important inventions, personal robot assistants. These robots were unlike the robots used back at the beginning of the century in factories. These robots could not only build like the old robots, but they could also walk, talk, and perform day-to-day activities, just as humans can do! There were even some people who these robots would become superior to humans! They were amazing innovations. However, everyone was about to wish that the robots had never been created.

I had only been out of college for two years and was working as an electromagnetist when the robots revolted. They took over Manhattan Island, but luckily they weren’t able to get to the main land since the people there blew up the bridges, trapping the robots on the island. Sadly, we were trapped as well.

We citizens of Manhattan Island hid in underground caverns that had been made in case of nuclear fallout. There were tons of them, and they were all connected. They were carved out of the earth, but they had houses put into them. The caves were very large, with 100 feet tall ceilings and enough room for, well, all of the citizens of Manhattan Island. The downside was that there were only enough supplies for a few weeks, so we couldn’t survive for long. We called ourselves the Resistance. We were trying to find a way to destroy the robots. It was our second day underground, and I was allowed to present my idea to the crowd, a rough looking group of people who had been hardened by the robot uprising. I was pretty nervous. It may have been because they were all heavily armed.

“And now ladies and gentlemen, Gunner McCloud will now present his plan to overthrow the robots,” Robert announced. Robert was the leader of the Resistance. He was a powerful leader and a good man. The crowd clapped, and I walked up to the platform.

“Thank you, Robert,” I said. “As was just stated, I have a plan to get rid of the robots permanently. My plan is pretty simple. All we have to do is create an electromagnetic pulse, or EMP if you prefer. It will short-circuit the brain of every robot on the island, allowing us to take them away and destroy them.” The crowd burst out in applause. “However,” I said, “there is a downside. Not only will the EMP destroy the robots, but it will also destroy every electronic device on the island as well.” The crowd started yelling their disapproval. They were going crazy.

“Quiet!” Hunter yelled. The crowd immediately went dead silent. Hunter was my twin brother. He was a Second Lieutenant in the Marines at the time, and was on leave for a little while. Sadly, he came to visit me just before the robots revolted. He was a tall, very strong man, much like me. He came up on the platform with me. “Would you people rather lose your lives than your electronics?” he exclaimed. “The electronics won’t be wiped off the face of the Earth, just Manhattan Island. After this is all over and the robots are destroyed, then we can have more electronics shipped over. But if you choose not to go with my brother’s plan, your precious luxuries won’t do you any good if you’re dead!” The crowd was listening intently by then. “So I say we use the EMP and remind these robots who created them! Who’s with me!?” The crowd was silent for a moment. Then a clap or two broke out, followed by more and more until it was a thundering applause. “Then I guess that’s settled.”

“Thanks bro,” I said, “I couldn’t have done this without you.”

“Don’t mention it. These people just need to get their priorities straight,” Hunter said.

“I’ll say. They’re not the brightest people ever. But even if they disagreed, I still would’ve used the EMP. It’s almost set up, so all I gotta do is correct a few settings and it’s done.”

“Nice. Go get started. While you’re doing that I’ll...”
Before he was able to finish his sentence, the door, a giant chunk of six-inch thick steel that weighed at least a ton, got hit and went flying through the room. Thousands of sleek, shining, silver bodies stood in the doorway, their eyes glowing blood red.

“Oh no,” I said. “They found us.” Immediately, every single person in the room pulled the guns off their backs and started firing. A rain of bullets fell upon the robots. The robots charged. Time began to slow. Whenever a robot fell, another immediately filled its place. As I watched, I saw so many people get killed by them. It was a horrible sight. Blood was everywhere. There were people being cut up, decapitated, and even worse. I turned away. I thought that I was going to throw up.

I was finally brought back to my senses by Hunter’s yelling.

“GO!” Hunter yelled to me. “USE THE EMP NOW!”

“I’m on it!” I yelled back. I ran for the control system about fifty yards behind me. Suddenly, a robot appeared in front of me. I pulled out the pistol on my belt and put a few rounds through the robot’s head. It fell down, twitching with sparks flying out of its head, and I kept running. I made it to the control panels and started hitting the buttons furiously, preparing the EMP. I was almost done, when suddenly a robot tackled me away from the controls. I lay there on the ground, dazed, the robot standing over top of me, preparing to deliver its final blow, when out of nowhere a large figure slammed into it. I slowly got to my feet and saw Hunter rolling on the ground grappling with the robot.

“GO!” he yelled.

I ran back to the controls and finished setting up the EMP.

“AHHHHHHHHH!” I heard a blood curdling cry of pain. I turned to see Hunter with a metal rod through his stomach.

“NO!” I screamed at the top of my lungs. What happened next is still a bit of a blur to me. I was filled with rage, sadness, and hatred. I ran at the robot and tackled it as hard as I could. As soon as we hit the ground, I grabbed the robot by the head and pulled with all my might. The head came off with a few cracks and a lot of sparks. I turned and saw a robot charging at Robert. I threw the head at the robot as hard as I could. I hit the robot directly in the chest and destroyed it.

“GUNNER, GO USE THE EMP! IT’S OUR ONLY HOPE!” Robert yelled.

With tears in my eyes and hatred still in my heart, I ran the controls.

“DO IT NOW!” Robert screamed.

I slammed the fire button. A giant pulse wave was sent out of the machine and sent me hurtling back about thirty feet. It felt like I had been hit by a train. All the robots immediately stopped in their tracks, and stood there, frozen. I looked around, wincing at the pain in my chest from the EMP blast, at all the robots and people. I saw several robots frozen about to end people’s lives. I suddenly remembered Hunter. I ran over to him and knelt down by his side. I could tell that he wasn’t going to live much longer. There was blood everywhere. I fought back tears. I grabbed his hand.

“I’m here, Hunter, I’m here,” I said. Hunter, laying there on the ground in agonizing pain, summoned up the strength to turn his head and look me in the eyes.

“Is that you, Gunner?”

“Yeah bro, I’m here.”

“Come closer. I gotta tell you something.”

“What is it?”

“This is one crappy vacation.” And with that, he expired.

It’s been twenty years since then. I went back to my job as an electromagnetist. Hunter was given a Medal of Honor for his courage in the battle, even though at the time of the battle he was on leave. Not a day goes by that I don’t miss him. The robots were destroyed and the new versions have a fail-safe so they can never revolt again. I don’t own a robot, and never will after what they did to Hunter and hundreds of other innocent people. Manhattan Island is back to the way it was before, but no
matter how much time passes, we will never forget what we learned that day: humans will always be superior to the machines we create.

Photo By: Allie Diehl

Dependency
By: Melanie Schoepf

They are mice.
Small,
Timid,
always scared by the most silly of things.
Always living in massive hoards.
Weak.

I’d rather be a wall.
Tall,
Powerful,
Strong,
Alone,
Supporting.
Holding up the rest of the world
For these mice.
These house mice who live in walls
Who depend on me.

I’d rather have these mice living inside
The sturdy structure
Then to have them exposed
To the rest of the world.

The walls have ears.
And I hear their whispers.
The mice’s squeaks and secrets.
I know everything.
But as a wall I cannot speak.
I am forever silent.
Holding their secrets,
Their memories,
Anything they say.

I do not mind.
For I am a wall.
Who has mice depending on me.
To keep their secrets,
And support them.
Like a wall should.
Illusory
By: Laura Buel

No entrance,
No need to lock
No need to hide,
No more holding,
The truth inside.
There’s no pain,
There’s no fear,
What nobody knows,
Nobody will hear.
If there’s nothing to notice,
Then there’s nothing to change.
Just what people want,
Just what people say, It’s what people do.
Not a person alone,
But a person that’s you.
Illusory.
Waiting for Something More
By: Ellie New

A snake is unpleasant,
Unappealing to my eye.
It slips, slides, and slivers,
Zig-zagging through the dirt,
And the dust.

The sound of his hiss.
Hateful.
Full of despair and emptiness,
Like the emptiness of my heart.

A bird flies high,
Gliding through the air.
As if hovering,
Waiting for something more.
A bird sings the melody of
A bubbling brook,
Catching the tune
Of a love story.

I would rather be that bird,
Though small and weak.
Its hollow bones, not made
For war.

I want to be free
Like that bird.
Not bound to the
Earth.

A snake cannot stand.
Cannot hold itself up
To see the world around him.
It cannot be free,
Like the bird I wish
To be.
Found on the Streets
By: Laura Buel

I feel like I'm on top of the world,
When it all starts crumbling down,
I feel like I'm king of all man,
Until I fall and hit the ground.
What am I to you?
Am I the world and king?
Or just another person found on the streets.
This doesn't feel right; I know exactly where I should be,
But here I am, just another person found on the streets.
I am fifteen,
and I'm losing my grandfather.
I'm losing him through a phone call a day
because my mom is watching,
and I am listening.
Everyday she asks if I'm okay
I say yes.
I'm being strong for her,
but I cry
when no one's watching.

My dad walked in the room,
and I could hear the words
before they were spoken,
I knew what was coming
and I braced myself.
Tears soaked my sister's face,
I just nodded.
My dad said I didn't need to be so strong
which made me act stronger,
but I cry
when no one's watching.

There are no words between cousins
at the funeral,
but I find comfort in the silent communication
the conversations hidden in stares,
the words float between Kelly and me.
She says this isn't fair
I tell her I'm here for her,
her eyes start to water
and she asks why mine are still clear.
I wonder if she caught the whisper
before I dropped my eyes
but I think she knows I cry
when no one's watching.
Veneer
By: Abby Sparks

The drip of the cold sweat seeping into my shirt, shorts, and heart feeds me. The green, the orange and the red are rainbows of wholesomeness that fill my stomach. The blaring of my dub step creates a focus tunnel for my energy that was so generously given to me by that rainbow. Three things: sweat, nutrition, and drive. When my legs get tired, I run with my heart.

The rigid corners of the flat, smooth plate remained under my feet. The dragging of the scale from the closet to the flat ground resonates in my mind as I place my feet on the chilled scale from the closet...the icebox that held the very deceptions of my mind. As the bite from the scale hit my feet, I read the numbers that had haunted me for such time and the numbers pierce me like the wind from a fresh blizzard. It’s like the numbers I read are a thousand times greater than they truly are. The numbers—my enemies—glue to my eyes. Although the others may not know the number, they are professionals of ignominy and hatred. Claims have been made that I am fat, chunky, heavy, big-boned, and all the other names in the book, but the truth remains in the numbers: sweat, nutrition, and drive...health.

I am (it just so happens) slightly attached to my scale. I guess it has become a psychological situation here. The grades I’ve completed are like the numbers, too, but give a flashback to my mind of the opportunities I so easily ignored in elementary and middle school. For the longest time, my life lingered upon the words that were said, instead of the reasons why. The numbers on the tape measurer from costume fittings haunted my hips and thighs. When friends who restrained criticism wanted to go swimming, I would have rather just stayed inside with my worst enemies: my numbers. The times I wanted to catch some sun and jump into the ice cold water in the beaming sun were restrained by my fear of being judged. My health is my scale. The sense of fear of being ridiculed has been replaced with intentions of control. I decided to walk with my scale, instead of running from it. I knew I could not do it alone.

My mother, my rock, needs me. I need her. Weight loss and becoming healthier people proved a reciprocal relationship of a need. The day we made the decision to change became the day that I made a new friend. Enemies had formed throughout my life of bitterness and jealousy. Was it the numbers? Coming to the conclusion that three numbers controlled my life made up my mind. It was the numbers. Looking in the small square rectangle for the three numbers became a whole new animal. I grasped the numbers instead of pushing them away. The toll the numbers had taken over on me had to stop. I had to stop. I had to stop worrying about the numbers and start worrying about how I could sweat, what I could eat for dinner that was like the rainbow of wholesomeness, and how I could repeat. I put myself on repeat.

I blamed the response the scale gave me on other people, when really...I was avoiding the truth. I allowed my intentions to block the real reasons: sweat, nutrition, and drive. By allowing the scale and the numbers to become my friends instead of foes opened up the closet...the closet that had held my fear, my pride, my anger, my patience, my envy, and my perseverance. When I did things for other people, the intentions I built up were too unclear. Realizing that who I am without my weight is who I’ll always be, regardless of a number.
Chasing Reality
By: Caroline Christian

Suburbia is poison
Rotting pastels clog my vision
The incessant hum of car engines
Rings endlessly in my ear
I need out
These people are mannequins
Lifelessly haunting me
I crave something real
I am starved of the pain
Others feel so freely.
To sow the earth with my bare fists
To kneed to ground until my hands
Grow callused and rough
I desire to feel the fiery inferno
Of passion in my soul
Passion that is powerful like a high note
Echoing through a silent room
I dream of getting away
From this maniacal assembly line
Its repetition will bring me to death
I have to escape to a place
Where I can experience excruciating pain
Without boundaries
I long to work until my hands leak blood
To sweat onto the loving earth
And watch beauty sprout out of my labor.
You are a Frown
By: Sarah Owen

You may live as a period
never asking questions, never starting something new
but the most used punctuation point.

I’d rather be seen as an exclamation point,
rarely used, though when it is,
it brings joy, excitement, or enthusiasm.

To bring emotion to writing
is better than being constantly used, but meaning nothing.

I am a smile on a child’s face, you are a frown.
I am sharp, you are a dull.

You are like a blank piece of paper, expressing nothing,
while I am like a romance novel, giving out so many feelings.
Strong Hand
By: Anna Fennell

A blaze of untamed flames unite and scorch
the remaining ashes of opposition to their cause,

and for once the catalyst of our flame for autonomy
steps out onto the edge of the cliff and prepares to jump,

declaring with his overused mouth that we shall be free,
that the corrupt hand of Britain shall strangle our voice no more,

shall no longer quench the emanating fury of a movement,
shall no longer bind our wings, for we shall soon fly free,

and scorching the blaze of patriots, his every word fueling
their starvation for the promise they have long longed for,
and pivoting around to grab the messenger of independence,  
the diplomatic flat fibers of fervor for freedom

as a coward, a vapor tries to quench the flame,  
but the roar of passionate fire drowns him,

and the spark’s hand escalates, reaching, grasping at the soul of  
sovereignty that the vast, enormous sky possesses,

and he extends his arm, grasping the pen that holds the ink  
of his death, and he extends a foot, preparing to jump into the abyss,

if only for a moment he can fly,

but losing the balance that steadies his confident stride,  
trembling like the Earth he is about to shake,

his hand expanding in strength and prying that of  
The Royalty clear off his mouth,

finally jumping off the cliff, swiveling his pen to see, “Thomas Jefferson,”  
inscribed perfectly on the literary heart of the new nation.

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Silky Coarse  
By: Natalie Donnermeyer

Smooth are these lips:  
That enslaved my soul,  
Swallowed it whole,  
That wrung it and hung it out to dry;  
That could hardly reach me because I was too high.  
Why do they taunt me?  
These lips that were once mine.  
They have become so dry,  
barren,  
a desert,  
They chap and chip.  
And now,  
They are rough.
The Wind
By: Autumn Geerer-Vignes

Sometimes I cause The Wind,
As I run away from all my problems,
And as my feet thump against the ground,
The Wind starts up around me.

It spreads up and back,
I run faster.

The faster I run,
The greater The Wind grows.

Faster, Faster,
Larger, Larger,
Until there is no longer just The Wind,
But in its place The Tornado.

The Tornado,
Wreaks havoc on all,
On everything.

As I slow to a stop,
As I turn around,
I walk back through the debris of my anger.
Red
By: Natalie Donnermeyer

Is the dawn coming like a fire being lit.
The twilight over the beaches,
Like the skin on peaches.

Is the blood that boils and curdles.
The passion and anger of love and hate.
The Vampire’s lust of late.

It’s the rose that strikes men down,
With a frown
And a broken crown,
Like Jack’s red heart broken by Jill.

It’s the flaming fury felt by the furious fathers
Of pregnant teenage daughters.
The color of your cheeks,
When he kissed you on your first date.

The pens on school work disappointing so bright you can’t help but cry
F-all three lines sharp as daggers, cutting you while it bleeds

The invisible cape of the hero who watched his comrades die.

The color of that stop sign and the truck that he just didn’t see,
All he saw was

Red.
Reach
By: Autumn Geerer-Vignes

As I reach,
You get further,
Oh, dangerous dream.
As I fall,
Yet even further still.
A forgotten thought,
Tossed out the window.
They tell me,
“Reach for the stars,
Follow your dreams.”
But how can I do that,
When they don’t
Really believe?
So still
I keep on,
Head held low,
While deep inside,
I’m still reaching for you,
Oh, Dangerous dream.
And one day,
I’ll catch you,
Like I used to catch butterflies
When I was little.
Though,
I won’t need a butterfly net,
Or a bright sunny day.
All I need to do is
Reach.

Ruined
By: Kira Bushman

My mother sat on the old chair in front of the television, her nails clenched between her teeth, her eyes unmoving from their position on the screen. The room was dim, except for the blue, melancholic glow from the TV. She looked older than she was, maybe because of the lighting, or maybe because the pen of worry had been etching lines in her face ever since the war had started.

The channel hadn’t changed in what seemed like forever; the news had been on for weeks. Today, the newscaster was frantic, and his Italian was rapid. Behind him was an approaching army, weighed down with high-tech weapons and appearing to multiply with every step they marched. “They are just north of Rome now, and the city has just announced the possibility of drafting soldiers…” he said, continuing to ramble on without pause.

“Momma?” I said from the doorway. She jumped at the sound of my voice, and almost fell out of her seat.

“Yes, Aria?”
“Are you okay?”
“Yes, darling, I’m fine. Just worried, you know. Guerra è inferno.” War is hell.
“I know, Mom. But we’ll be okay. You’ll see.” She smiled sweetly, looking at me as if the naiveté of my youth had never left me, even though I had grown.

“What did you want before, caro mio?”
“Oh, I just wanted to know if I could take a walk,” I said with a shy shrug.
“In the heat of the summer? At noon? In this humidity? Hm… is this so you can see that Giovanni boy?” Her previous smile grew into a sly one.

I blushed, my ears radiating heat. “Yes, Momma.”
“Oh, dear, I don’t think I can allow you a walk then,” she said, a spark of laughter in her eyes.
“Momma, I know you do not disapprove of him. Please?” I said, failing at my attempts to suppress my amusement at the face she was making.

“Yes, dear, just be back for dinner. And say goodbye to Papa and Mimi on your way out.”
“Grazie!” I said, turning and rushing to the front door, my feet pounding against our rough floors. I stopped when I got to our kitchen, where Papa was sitting at our dusty, worn out table. A cloudy stream of light flooded in from a window behind him. In his hands he held a crisp, new newspaper, with bold headlines that shouted at me with details of the war. They didn't seem to affect him, though. He didn't notice their voices. Instead, his countenance reflected the mellow calmness that everyone knew him for.

“Hello, Papa,” I said. He looked up, and upon seeing me, set his paper down. His thick reading glasses gave off a slight glare, and the eyes behind them were warm.

“Hello, Aria. How are you, my dear?”

“I'm all right.”

“Well, perhaps Giovanni will turn all right into amazing!” I laughed at the over-exaggerated tone in his voice, and he joined in. His laugh, deep but boyish at the same time, was something that had always comforted me. I rushed over to him for a hug. After a quick embrace, he cupped my face between his hands, still flour-caked from working at the bakery.

“Have fun,” he said, and kissed me on the forehead.

“Grazie, Papa,” I said, and again, I headed for the door. When I reached it, my hand went straight for the doorknob, but my head turned to see Mimi sitting on the living room floor. She was filling in a coloring book with a very serious look on her face, her auburn ringlets bouncing as her body shook with every marker stroke.

“Mimi!” I said, reaching her in two big strides and lifting her up into the air.

“Sissy, I was coloring! Put me down!” she said, trying to look angry.

“I know, but I just love you!” I said, spinning her around. Then I brought her face closer to mine.

“And maybe Momma told me I had to say goodbye.” She giggled at this, and I set her down.

“What are you coloring?

“Look!” She thrust the coloring book toward me, the pages open wide in her arms. “It’s a girl waving out of her window. Her true love is in the army down there, leaving, see? It happened in a story Momma read to me.” I was silent for a moment.

“How nice…” I finally said, my voice soft. “I like the girl’s dress. Your art skills are improving.” I knelt down and handed her the book, then kissed her on the cheek. “I’ll see you later, bella!

Our old wooden door creaked as I opened it, and I stepped outside into the rustic sunshine. The streets had fewer people than usual, but I barely took notice. I let my thoughts wander, and my feet followed their usual route. I was startled when I finally heard Giovanni’s voice.

“Hey,” he said, and kissed me on the cheek. The old Roman ruins around us seemed to cut us off from the rest of the world, and I loved it. Just like I loved him. He brushed a stray hair from my face, and we smiled at each other. We sat in the shade, leaning into each others' arms, kissing and talking for as long as our mothers thought a “walk” should last.

Later that afternoon, the streets were deserted. It was eerily quiet for this time of day, and I felt ill at ease. My pace quickened, and when I reached home, wailing was all I could hear. The pained cries, barely muffled by the thick walls, frightened me more than any army could.

“Momma! Mimi!” My voice cracked in my alarm. For the second time today, I rushed through the house, but fear had replaced my previous joy. I found them in my parents' room, lying on the bed, curled up together. When Mimi saw me, she jumped up and ran toward me.

“Aria, they took Papa! They took Papa away!” Her little face was red, stained with tears of shock, and her clammy hands grasped tightly onto the hem of my shirt.

“Momma, is that true? What's going on?” After a few more shuddering sobs, she sat up on the bed to face me. Her graying hair was sticking out in all directions, and her eyes were so puffy that I could barely see them. She took a slow, deep breath, and spoke in a voice void of emotion.
“They are drafting soldiers, cara mio, and they are being harsh about it. Your father is gone now.” My breath stopped for a moment, and I felt as if my lungs were caving in. Although it may seem selfish, my first thought was of Giovanni.

“How old do the men have to be?” I asked urgently.

“Sixteen. You do not have to ask, just go. Do not feel bad. I understand.”

I could not think of anything to say, so I just nodded. I took Mimi’s hand off of my shirt, and squeezed it lightly. Then I turned and bolted back the way I came, running as fast as I could manage in my panic. The door was ajar when I got to Giovanni’s house, so I slipped inside, my breath shallow. I was now face to face with my boyfriend, but behind him was a policeman, with heavy hands bearing down on his shoulders.

“You cannot take him!” I yelled in the policeman’s face. “He is too young!”

“I’m sorry, signorina, but he is sixteen. The city needs soldiers, or the invaders will destroy too much.”

“I don't care! He will stay!” I yelled, as I tried to yank the policeman’s hand from one of Giovanni’s shoulders. His hand barely budged, but the look on his face was losing its composure.

“Aria, be calm. I will go. I’ll be fine, you’ll see,” Giovanni said with a somber smile.

“No! You are mine and you will not be taken away to fight in a childish war!” Again, I tried to remove the officer’s hand from his shoulder.

“Signorina,” he said, grabbing my wrist with such force that I cried out in pain and went weak in the knees, “I advise that you step out of the way, because the other options I have for a girl like you are not very pleasant.” I let out a little whimper as he released my wrist, and my eyes started to sting. I looked to Giovanni for help, but his eyes were cast down, and would not meet mine. I slowly stepped to the side, and watched as the two of them walked out of the door and into the streets, joining the growing stream of men. I leaned against the door frame, then looked back into the interior of the house. Giovanni’s mother sat at the kitchen table, looking almost exactly like Momma, and I couldn’t take it.

I turned away from the crowd and ran again, past all of the mourning homes, trying to ignore the brokenhearted howling they emitted. I only stopped when I was back at the meeting place in the ruins. I sat and hugged myself, the pain of my losses causing my body to convulse. Finally, I started to cry. My cries echoed in the silence, and the tears blurred my vision and wet my face, and shirt, and all of the many other places they chose to fall. I remained like this for what seemed like hours, until the twilight had streaked the sky with a dark blue. When the tears refused to come, and my emotions numbed, I looked around me. The rugged stone had long since tumbled, and moss was growing everywhere. So much destruction had happened here, and the people of this grand city had probably never seen it coming. “I know how you feel,” I said aloud, “I know how you feel.”