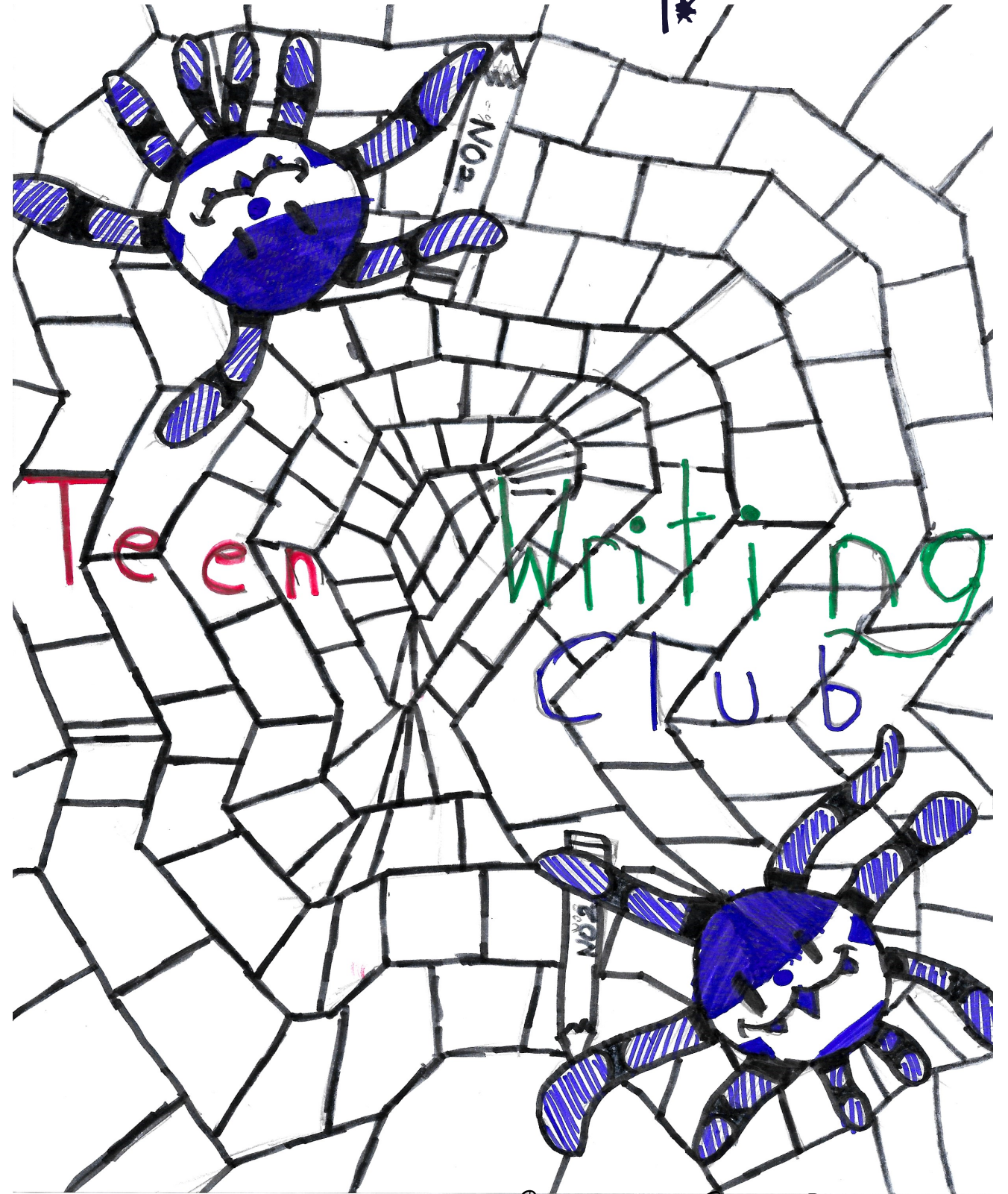


Pen to Paper



Schenectady County Public Library

Teen Literary Magazine 2021

Literary Magazine Advisor

Ms. April Fernandez

Front Cover Art

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Are you in grades 6-12 and interested in submitting work?

Email: pentopapermagazine@gmail.com

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Today a little girl said
"It's exotic and sweet."
It's finally a new answer.
But usually people forget.
I'll be left for days and days until they remember.
I could be rotten by then or remain the same,
until I run out and they buy me again and again.
Or they'll just like me at first then later dislike me.
Once someone says their answer it becomes a memory.
I'm not sweet or bitter or horrible or exotic,
I'm just a normal piece of chocolate.

Sometimes I can't help but wonder if there's more than a
planet around me,
more than the vacuum of space.
When I stare into the sky in the middle of the day,
are the stars regarding me, or do they only make an
appearance for themselves?
I'll never know.
But I'll always wonder if they know I wonder,
that I stare into a brightening sky from
a silent school bus
and implore.
Do the stars ever look down?
Do we ever look down, or up for that matter?
Do we ever look at anything other than
what's right in front of us?
Sometimes I don't understand why
the world is so big, yet we're so small.
There are so many things going on, and sometimes I
want to get away from it all.
Sometimes it scares me, and other times it's inspiring.
It makes me want to do better and improve myself
but it's all so tiring.

Sometimes, I walk along the beach.
to feel something, I suppose.
To feel the sand falling in between my fingers,
like an hourglass, running out of time.
The ocean pushes and pulls,
but I find myself stuck in place.
Sometimes, when I look over my shoulder,
I see my footprints trailing behind me.
Other times, they're gone;
blurred beneath the tides.

Sometimes, I wish for the power of the ocean,
to simply have a little more time.
To be able to walk backwards,
watching my feet leave imprints in the sand.
If I had the power of the ocean,
I'd feel as if I could do anything.

Dear Reader,

Pen to Paper Magazine is a collection of writing by young artists in our community in grades 5-12. The writing was compiled and edited by the Niskayuna Branch Librarian with help from the library's Teen Writing Club in the spring of 2021. This magazine was published with funding from the Friends of the Schenectady County Public Library.



Sometimes

a collaborative poem by SCPL's Teen Writing Club.

Sometimes I see it as a straight line
drawn with a pencil and a ruler,
transecting the circle of the world.

Or as a finger piercing
a smoke ring, casual, inquisitive.
But then the sun will come out,
or the phone will ring
and I will cease to wonder
if it's one thing,
a large ball of air and memory,
or many things,
a string of small farming towns,
a dark road widening through them.

Sometimes I get lost in the gray
clouds of nostalgia
seared into my brain
like an endless rainy day.

The warmth of the sun
a grainy, faded remembrance,
an echo of what was.

Glimpses of it
like an impressionist painting
I saw once and never forgot,
but could never again quite
capture it's beauty in my mind.

Sometimes,
the world spins too fast.
All of the magic and artistry of
life is lost
to the unruly chaos of the street.

Cheerful greetings
and the
lively songs of the birds
dance around
in a delicate routine.

But it's all ignored
for the shouts and the screams
of the everyday things.

Sometimes it's sweet
sometimes it's bitter
and sometimes it's horrible.

They all remain different
but some remain the same.

In the Future

By Ava Kagan Ehrlich, Grade 5

I hope the future will be better than today

I hope in the future I will have so much fame

I hope in the future I will be strong and tall

I hope in the future I will be an athlete that can play without a
fall

I hope in the future I will have so much wealth

But most of all, I hope in the future Covid will be over and I will
have so much health

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A House of Clocks

By Shreejaa Senthilkumar, Grade 6

Silvery strands of smoke rose in the distance, fading slowly to nothingness in the stony sky.

The dust-coated windows obscured the view with remains of early morning mist. I sank to the ground and traced a heart into the damp, foggy glass.

The quaint yellow mansion was bare – dead brown floors and lifeless white walls. The only thing that brought it to life were the clocks and their ticking, stepping in discordant harmony with each other. Some went quick and soft, as if they were running away, deep, deep, deep into the woods, away from life and its anxieties. Others were loud and slow, as if someone were climbing the long staircase to success.

Tick, tick, ticking away, the only sound in the fields of my mind were the tap, tap, tapping of time, reminding me that these insignificant things would one day come to an end.

A CURIOUS WARNING **BY ARYA RAJASEKAR, GRADE 6**

Last night, as I was sitting in my living room, watching a little TV before bed, I heard a strange noise. It was a slow, drawn out scraping across the hardwood floor. Confused, I searched for the source of the sound, and found it immediately. Someone had slipped a small folded note under the door.

“ What the ... ?”

More curious than ever, I approached the note slowly. I knelt down cautiously and picked up the strange paper. On it were only five words, written in a messy fashion. *Get out. He is coming.* I didn't pause to consider the meaning of the note however, as I immediately realized there was something very, very very wrong about this situation: the note came from under the closet door ... Oh no ... My worst nightmare has arrived ...

OVERTHINKING

By Kendal Seeger, Grade 9

Breathe in and out ...

Close your eyes and tell me what you see

I look around and

I see four doors right in front of me

I see ten hens in the backyard

I see nine cups of wine sitting on the dinner table

I see one gun sitting on the desk

I see three trees swaying outside

I see five hives growing on a man's face

I see six sticks laying on the ground

I see two shoes my exact size

I see seven heavens right above me

I see eight skates sitting in the garage

I see zero heroes coming to save me

Where am I?

Who am I?

What am I?

Stop.

Blank Space

by Kendal Seeger, Grade 9

I sit and stare blankly at the wall

I continue to cry as I feel myself fall

I need to think happy thoughts, like going to the mall

I have friends but the group is small

I can't keep my room clean because I'm slipping into something we call ... depression

LIFE

By Arya Rajasekar, Grade 6

From the second you're in this world
they tell you what is "fair"
the questions you're allowed to ask
and the ones you wouldn't dare

Placed on the path that they've paved for you
life pushes you along
without the chance to stop and think
if it's right where you belong

But beyond your pathway's edges
is where living really starts
a land of risks and danger
and a land of broken hearts

They'll tell you that you should fear this land
that there's no good at all
as they live their lives as their taught
behind expectation's wall

But the best people you will never meet
have wandered off their track
found themselves along the way
and have no need to wander back

So forget about life's road map
follow your heart at any cost
for you'll never truly find yourself
if you're scared to get lost

afternoon and the moon had popped out; it was that sudden and mind boggling. It wasn't everyday that there were words literally in the sky. But many strange things have happened to everyone since they found out there was another magician left in the world. If you looked up and saw words that should be on pages sitting in the sky like it was the most normal thing ever, what would you do? Read them. There was nothing left for everyone to do but look up and read.

"Once upon a time there was a girl. That's me. You probably know me and have seen me around. All my life I've lived right next door to some of you, smiling and waving at you in the morning. Now if you saw me you'd look at me with disgust and want me gone. I'm the same person as before but because of one, small little difference everyone sees me differently. All just because I have magic. I can't control this and I wouldn't want to change it. Differences make us unique, and who we are. Kindness and acceptance are the key, not hatred and judging. I don't know how my story will end, but I do know how it begins and you all should too."



There was no going back. My secret was out and my fun, free days were gone. My hands glowed with the magic that seeped through them. Opening up the notebook, my hand blazed against the words, while with each touch they filled my head with vibrant images. The words formed pictures that made it seem like I was watching a movie. Pictures of me playing with my friends, sitting in my favorite tree, me writing. Then turning to a darker scene, it was me running through the woods, and me hiding from the people who hunted me like I was an animal, which they thought I was. Then the words I wrote formed pictures of all the magical humans before me, my parents included, being hunted down too, but not being able to escape. This book told the story of my life and how I wasn't that different from anyone else, until they found out I was magic. My secret was revealed and with it everything I once knew was stripped away.

My hands worked their magic and took all the words I wrote down and moved them around like they were chess pieces on a chess board. My hands glowed as bright as the sun which has now shifted through the trees and illuminated the pages. The words moved like ants and were carried. Transporting the one book into millions, then transporting to every house and book store there was. The written words moved through the sky too, lighting it up. The words were like birds flying high, everyone would see them. The words contained the story of everyone treated badly and judged because of differences, my story. I might be taken away but my story would live on forever, passing through everyone who read it.

People gathered in front of their houses, viewing the words that now lined the sky. It was as if the sun had disappeared at 12:00 in the

Nothing Left

By Eva Meshkov, Grade 6

"Here." Virginia said and handed me a necklace. It was a silver heart locket. My face stared back at me on the polished surface. I gingerly opened it and looked inside.

There was black and white photo of a little girl. She wore a dress and her hair was tied up with a bow. Her hands were crossed on her lap. On her ears shined little pearls, and on her neck hung a fancy necklace.

"Is this you?" I asked. I held the locket in my hand as if it was about to fall apart.

"Yep. That's me." She said and flashed me a toothless grin. I looked at the photo but something was off. The girl was surrounded by luxuries and gems, but her face was cold, distant, empty.

"You look so sad." I said and looked at Virginia. She snorted.

"As if I could be happy while living with my parents. But that's besides the point. Take it. It's for you." I looked at the locket for a long time and then looked at Virginia. She looked so different from the photo. Even though she isn't nearly as rich as the girl from the photo her eyes twinkle and her smile is unlike any other. She is the exact opposite of the empty girl.

"I can't take this," I said and put it into her hand. "It's way too precious." She snorted again and slipped the locket onto my neck.

"I don't even like it. It looks good on you. Stop being so stubborn and take it."

"Are you sure?" I said skeptically. "What about all the good memories of your childhood?" Virginia laughed and looked me in the eyes.

"I have none. But thanks."

The Call of Freedom
By Maddy Kahn Ehrlich, Grade 8

The sound of horses trotting and swords clashing miles away were as apparent as the sound of his mom calling him down for dinner. "Ben Zion," he could hear his mom yell, but that was distant and far, far away. The only thing he could hear now was his thoughts and the need to escape. The night was cold and still in Kiev, Russia, while the Cossacks terrorized everyone near and far. In Ben Zion's head, he knew that tomorrow would be the time for his freedom. Asleep at night, he could taste the sweetness and happiness of the free land of America reaching out to him and calling to him. When awoken, he knew it was time to leave the home and the family he cherished for all twenty years of his life. He would miss his brothers, sisters, mom and dad, but he knew he had to go.

It was either stay and live in fear or emigrate to America where his freedom would be granted. Looking back one last time, he took his first step outside and started his trip to America. The air was frigid with fog surrounding everything, making it almost impossible to see. He shivered in his shirt despite the warm sweater he wore above it. The birds around him chirped boisterously almost as if they were warning him of both the danger of if he went, and even more danger if he stayed. Each day was like déjà vu when he came upon town after town. The Cossacks were everywhere and went after him wherever he went. They called it the Pogroms, and no one knew until it was too late that it would soon be the start of the Holocaust, except for Ben Zion. He knew there was no other choice but to get out when he still could. All alone, he walked through the towns. His feet screamed with tiredness, and he wanted to run back, but determination pushed him on. When sleep came and the pitch black night consumed all, he saw the American flag in the stars calling to him and making him push through. Days seemed like years as he traveled through and past. The Cossacks, their swords shining as bright as the sun itself while their horse's feet shook the ground as if it were an earthquake. The clouds were high in the sky above him until the clouds stopped following him. The sun shone like a spotlight on the ship that stood tall in front of Ben Zion, showing him the ticket to America.

Glowing Words

By, Maddy Kahn Ehrlich, Grade 8

"Once upon a time there was a girl..." CRAACK! I could hear people drawing closer. My hand flew across the paper as quick as lightning. Write, write, write. That was the only thought that was in my mind. Pitter patter, pitter patter, the footsteps now sounded like giants the closer they got. With each step closer to me, my time was running out to tell my story. My hand scribbled across the page, one more second, that's all I needed. BOOM! The sound of their feet against the ground now sounded as loud as a tornado drawing near, signaling my time was almost up. Setting down my pencil, the mud that consumed the ground of the whole forest consumed my pencil as well as if it was the main course at a restaurant. My once blonde hair was now dirty with the mud from the tree I was sitting under. Right now I was covered from the outside world, but in a second I would be found and there would be no hiding ever again. When you're a girl who has magic, you have to be good at hiding. Both hiding your secret from the rest of the non-magical world, who would want to experiment on you since you are the only magical human left, and good at hiding from pursuers. Now my time was almost up and there would be no hiding for the rest of the short time I'm allowed to live.

Black was the color of the blueberries I loved to eat, black was the color of my favorite shirt, black was the color of words on pages and now black was also the color that represented the agency that was hunting me down. My mind calculated the time I had left before they would find me hiding in the bushes like I was a cat hiding from a dog. Sixty seconds. The countdown began in my mind like it was the final seconds of a basketball game I used to watch when I was younger.

The Message

By Arya Rajasekar, Grade 6

Don't dismiss this outright as the work of some lunatic. There's some sense to this story, if you'll just hear me out.

Look, we all wonder if time travel is possible, right? Well, let me tell you something ... it is. I'm from the future, actually. I know you're not going to believe that, but seriously, I'm from the future. It's a really great thing, getting to see the past, watching events unfold ... stuff like that. We know more now than we ever could.

Behind all the fun, though, there's a more serious aspect. We aren't supposed to go in our own lifetime, and we never are allowed to contact our past selves. Let me tell you, I'm breaking that rule right now. Yes, kid you're talking to yourself. Your future self. I'm going to be executed for this, but you know what? I accept that. I'm preventing something by talking to you that is worse than death. I can't tell you outright what to do, because the filters would catch it. This is the closest I can get, trust me. I can, however, send a little message.

You should probably read the first word of every paragraph, now.

The ship creaked and ached with each trip it took. It was rusty and old. Even the smallest wave seemed it would break it into bits and pieces, but what other choice did he have? People were all around, and all the voices made everything sound like a blur. His mind was in a rush and almost without knowing, his feet moved him onto the boat, past the humongous crowd of people and onto the ship. People were walking around the boat, just like cows graze at a barn. Even though it looked nice up here, Ben Zion knew that his area for traveling was elsewhere. Passing person after person, the stairs appeared, steeper than a mountain, deep as a trench and as dark as a cave. It looked endless. Thoughts of turning back disappeared right away when images of Cossacks appeared as vibrant and real in his mind as the real thing. The first step down turned into another and continued endlessly. The only thing that signaled he was at the bottom was the smell of mold and rust that hung in the air.

At the bottom of the ship, Ben Zion arrived at steerage. Where it usually stored animals or food now stood people, with Ben Zion among them. The air was heavy and it felt like water was going to come through the floor at any moment. When the boat took off, it shook him in surprise as if the whole earth was shaking. With the first bump, when the boat started moving, Ben Zion knew that soon he would be in America. Sitting on the floor, it was cold and bare. Time flew by as fast as if the clocks had been pushed forward. When his stomach growled, the only food available was nothing more than garbage and scraps. The bananas were brown while the cheese was green. Imagining the taste of freedom fed him more than the few scraps eaten.

The days were long with sea sickness, while the boat shook and turned. Days passed, and finally, on the fifteenth day, the air seemed to change and the smell of hope filled Ben Zion's lungs. When the boat stopped, he knew he was there. As fast as lightning, he seemed to glide up the stairs and off the boat. The sun shone, and the grass was greener than he ever saw before. Taking a breath and his first step, he stepped onto Ellis Island and into America.

Star Just

By Kendal Seeger, Grade 9

We are all stars

We are so beautiful and bright

We are so far, but we can come so close yes, we might

When one of us dies there is not as much light

When something comes for the earth we cannot fight

We sit in space, as still as the night.

Alone

By Eva Meshkov, Grade 6

I am mortified. I want to fall through the floor, and with my balance I might as well. The room spins, my hands too sweaty to grab onto something. A muffled scream tries to exit my lungs, but nothing but a throaty gasp comes out.

Falling

Falling

Falling

I try to stay away from memories. Burying them deep, where I can only pray that I will never find them. But right now in this small, purple room with peeling paint, everything comes flooding back. The dams that were holding my memories burst, releasing a strong feeling of nausea and pain.

There is nothing in this room that would catch someone's eye. The chipped, pale purple walls have wall stickers with the alphabet stuck to them. They're yellowing and peeling, half of the stickers already on the creaky wooden floor.

A wicker basket sits in the corner, old laundry overflowing from the top. The clothes are torn and full of spiderwebs. They used to be bright colors, pinks, blues, purples, but now they are faded and tinged with yellow. A deflated red balloon hangs on a hook by the door, it's rubber sagging, almost as if it's melting. Nothing stands out, it's all plain, dirty, and faded.

Nothing but wisps of what it once was. Except for one thing. I kneel down and stare at it. A red guitar pick. My dad would sit by the bed, playing his guitar and singing made up lyrics that had nothing to do with whatever song that he might be singing.

"What is that?" I had once said and pointed at his guitar pick.

"This?" He laughed, "It's a toothpick!"

"It's too big to be a toothpick," I had said. "And I would know because I tried."

Dad had looked at me long and hard and then asked, "Did you really put this in your mouth?"

We had both burst out laughing and started tickling each other.

But it was all gone.

All. Gone.

No one was left. It was just me, alone, in this big empty world.

BE A

By Ava Kagan Ehrlich, Grade 5

Be a jellybean nice and sweet
Be the winning team that can't be beat
Be the ball that bounces around
Be a ninja that can move with no sound
Be the blanket that keeps people warm
Be the clouds that decide when there's a storm
Be the safe that holds all the money
Be a bee that gives everyone honey
Be the book that makes people smart
Be the kid that has a kind heart

A Memory...

By Kyra Choumarov, Grade 8

*A memory that disappeared,
why'd you have to go?
My heart drops at once because I truly know.
You're gone without a goodbye,
you've moved on from this life.
For you this town tore like a knife.
You would talk about your dreams that never mentioned me,
my eye catches a person with little resemblance to you.
Why'd I almost think you'd come back?
This old town was horrible for you.
Back when you had no choice,
should've treasured our time then.
If the machine rings again,
I hope it's a message with your name in view.
A memory that disappeared,
why'd you have to go?
But deep down I really know,
all the truth lies inside.*

Untitled Short Story

By Ian Clark, Grade 10

The waitress walked over and whispered in my ear, "You have to leave. Your life is in danger."

I turned around. She was gone in a flash. Two sharply dressed men in black trench coats and fedoras started walking towards me. The information I had regarding the moles within the KGB was too important for me to get captured. They slowly walked closer.

"You are coming-" Somebody interjected and grabbed me.

" - with me Fredrick. How is it going?" He whispered in my ear, "Play along."

"Um ... yeah Spielman ... hi!"

The man was baffled. We lost them in a crowd outside the diner but they weren't far.

"Who are you?"

"Maxwell, MI6, I was told to find you here. Do you have the information?"

"Yeah?"

"Good" he said as we entered the subway. The men were right on us, but we managed to duck into a security office.

"Look here, lad, your information is top priority to MI6. The KGB is hot on our ass so get to the rails and wait. Somebody will ask you what your favorite Latin phrase is. No matter what you have to say this, 'Et oratione dictatoris, Cadunt.' If you say this, he will smuggle you into West Berlin."

The KGB agents were close. Too close.

"Say the bloody words man!"

"Um ... Et oratione dictatoris, cadunt?"

"Good. I'll distract them for you to escape. Now go."

He ran outside straight into the agents and was promptly taken away. I snuck out and blended into the crowd. I managed to reach the rails, but after a few minutes, local police started coming. I laid low, avoiding them. Somebody sat next to me and ripped a letter open.

"I have a love for Rome. The Colosseum, Caesar, Latin, it was all perfect." He sounded like a Bavarian. "Speaking of Latin, you got a favorite phrase?"

"Y-yes." She stepped closer to the woman, so she could see her. The woman raised an eyebrow.

"Ah, you're suddenly so brave." She glanced at me and then back to Liv. "Let me guess, Milo's help?"

"No, he's not fighting for me." Liv stated with more dominance in her voice.

"Then let's fight." The woman held up her sword in an intimidating position.

"Here." I tossed Liv my sword that had been in the sheath on my hip. She caught it and gripped the handle, the glittering jewels digging into her skin. "Follow my lead."

She let out a breath. "Okay."

The woman swung her sword and Liv blocked it, the metal scraped against each other as she lowered it.

"Aim for the heart." I told her as they fought. "You can do this."

She swung and blocked, sweat beading on her forehead. She was good, but the woman was good too.

The woman got close to piercing Liv's skin, but Liv didn't give up. Swinging and blocking, over and over again, I kept guiding her.

"I won't let you hurt me anymore." Liv muttered as the woman blocked her swing.

"You are just a girl." The woman responded.

"I may be a girl, but you are nothing more than a coward."

"No, I'm not."

"All you do is try to hurt me. To hurt Milo."

"I have a good reason."

"No, you just want to be powerful. You will never be anything."

The woman faltered, not believing what Liv was saying. Liv took the opportunity and stabbed the woman in the heart. Blood pooled on the floor and she dropped, her petrified expression still etched upon her face.

"I did it!" Liv exclaimed as she dropped the sword. She engulfed me in a hug.

"I always knew you could." I responded, hugging her back. I could smell the sweat on her scalp, in her hair. "Come on. Let's go home."

We spent the next few years living without the monsters in the dungeons. Sipping on milkweed and eating tart berries. Swimming in the lake and sharing kisses.

Until she met Luke.

Luke was a boring boy with boring parents and a boring name. He lacked any excitement, But Liv still fell for him. I watched as they shared kisses, whispering to each other, just as we did. I watched as they grew up and got married. I watched as they had children and grandchildren. I watched as she forgot about me. For the dungeons were her schools and the monsters were her peers.

And I was no more than a figment of her imagination.

She.

By Abigail Cohen, Grade 11

She slammed her bedroom door, the white paint on the ceiling cracked and splintered into tiny fragments on the rug. She slid down, her breath quivering and uneven. Tears stained her pale face and soaked her purple T-Shirt. The mascara she put on quickly in the school bathroom that morning smudged under her eyes. She put her head in her shaking hands, wondering why she was like this. Why she was so harshly bullied over her reservedness. Why she lived in this boring town with her boring parents and her boring name. Olivia Miller. That was the name she was born with; but it never seemed boring to me.

I walked over, making sure I was gentle, so as to not startle her. I bent down so I was eye level. She looked up at me with those big brown eyes that looked like pools of honey in the sunlight. She beamed and wrapped her arms around my neck. She buried her face into the place between my chin and shoulder. I whispered into her ear, telling her that it would be alright. That all of this was just a nightmare.

“Do you want to go on an adventure?” I asked after a while. She left my neck and stared into my eyes.
“Yes.”

The next day, we ran through the forest, hand in hand, giggling as if we were children. She jumped over streams and touched low branches as we passed. We got to the clearing; a meadow. Thousands of flowers of every color sprinkled the ground. I told her to rest. We had a long way to go. She lay down in the grass, her white dress blowing in the sweet wind. The sun glittered in her eyes. I lay with her. I whispered sweet nothings into her ear and tucked daisies into her hair. She kissed my lips gently, as if it were forbidden. After a while, I told her that we were going to be late, that she needed to get to the dungeons to defeat the monsters of our world. She hesitated but ultimately agreed. I held her hand as we walked to the cold and dark place where the monsters were kept.

“These monsters will do anything to harm you.” I told her as we got to the entrance. “Stay with me. I will be your guide.” She nodded and we entered.

Only a faint light from a torch lit up the tunnel. I grabbed her hand as to tell her to not be scared. I couldn't see her face but I knew she was staring at me. She gave out a soft squeak.

“Don't be afraid. I am here.” I whispered. She grabbed my hand tighter and I could feel the sweat pooling in our palms. We kept walking.

We got to a lighter room with more torches, but it was dirty, and the smoke from the fire got into our lungs. She coughed.

“Breathe shallowly.” I uttered. “Don't let the smoke get into your lungs too much.”

“Is that you, Olivia?” A woman stepped into the light. Her auburn hair hung carelessly down her back and she fiddled with a silver sword in her left hand.

Liv looked to me, her eyes filled with fear. “You can do this.” I told her.

I'm trying to learn, so can you help me a bit?”

This was the moment, and this was the informant. I kept it cool and said the words, “Et oratione dictatoris, cadunt.”

It was a cool, crisp late spring day. The KGB lined apartment was absolute crap, but it was warm during the winter months. The apartment was on the fourth floor right across from the KGB headquarters of East Berlin. No matter what, an eye is always trained on me.

The routine was the same everyday. But going through the metal detector today, something felt off. There were more soldiers around than usual. Something was going on. Moving through the office, I arrived at my cubicle.

“Credentials, now!” A firm voice asked behind me.

I turned around in my chair. It was a soldier.

“What? Credentials?”

“Hand them over or I'll clean my boot with your face.”

I hastily fiddled around with my jacket and handed them over to him. He looked through my papers very thoroughly. I tried not to sweat.

“Good job,” he said, as he threw them back at my face.

He walked off to the next cubicle. Just as I breathed a sigh of relief, someone tapped my shoulder. It was my friend Alexi.

“Mr Pawlowski, please come with me.”

His face was somewhat pale, like at the metal detector. Something else was wrong, I could tell.

“You can just tell me Alexi, I don't mind.”

“No, no Jan, it's important, come with me now!” he whispered.

I quickly followed him to the breakroom. It's near empty, aside from some tired souls sulking in their chairs. His hands started shaking vigorously as he started to remove his glasses.

“My name is not Alexi.”

“Yeah right. What is this? Some prank?”

“Listen, my name is Steven O'Malley.”

My jaw dropped. His nearly flawless Russian accent dropped to something straight from America!

“I am a spy for the CIA. I have gathered a list of conspirators and defectors that have information critical to the KGB.” I stumbled back in disbelief but he

kept throwing words at me.

“My position has been discovered. You are the only I can trust.”

“What? How can you-”

“I know somebody who hates a commie as much as me. Now listen up.”

I leaned closer to his mouth.

“You carry the codename Kaiser. There is a diner called Kellerman’s. Go there. An informant will greet you. You need to go.”

“But how will-”

“Just get going, Kaiser, now!”

He sped away as he was pushing me. I felt something. It was something stuffed in my shirt. A note. All of the people Alexi was talking about.

As I debated whether I should hand this in to the commies or Westerners, I heard a scuffle. Alexi was being apprehended.

Soldiers began to yell, “EVERYBODY WILL BE SEARCHED!”

I started to walk at a brisk pace toward the exit. Guards and workers started to scramble around the hallways. I kept my focus on the exit.

“Where are you going?” a guard questioned.

At this point my head could only think RUN! And that's what I did. I started to dash for the street.

“HEY! STOP!” soldiers yelled at me.

I ran outside. Traffic stopped for me and my pursuers to run right into the alleyways. I started to put my street rat skills to use, throwing down obstacles to stop the pursuers. I found a fire escape on top of a dumpster, jumped on top of it, grabbed the ladder, and started to climb up.

Suddenly I heard soldiers running around. I quietly lay flat on the stairs hoping they wouldn't see me. All I thought about was Kellerman’s. That's where I needed to go! I was a regular, surely they would help me.

When I got there I had to duck inside, a waitress came over to me.

“Do you want to be served?” she asked kindly.

I was still a bit terrified but I obliged. She guided me to a table and I hid my face behind a menu.

Suddenly the waitress leaned close to my ear and whispered, “You have to leave. Your life is in danger.”

A New Start

By Arya Rajasekar, Grade 6

*I have wiped the slate clean,
no more reminders from the past.
Memories of what I have been,
have vanished at long last.
I look forward to my future now,
where the territory is strange.
Soon I will be among the few,
that plans their life at long range.*

*I see my life laid out at my feet,
like a map that's about to be drawn.
New friends shall accept my call,
at this welcoming ball.
Soon all the memories will depart,
of a past left well behind.
I will get off to a new start,
and wave bye to the past,
and welcome the future.*