Write Now
2013 anthology
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The writers and artists:
Georgia Bishop
Nicole Miller
Faith Blake
Tamika Kehl
Shyanne Burckett
Brooke Lloyd
Lorren Cianci
Thomas Kong
Isabelle Cianfrone
Kathleen Mullen
Emily Doan
Izik Nehow
Rachel Ferguson
Yen-Nhi Nguyen
Aimen Haider
Jordanne Pelligrini
Josh Hansford
Samantha Pinnington
Alex Haynes
Nicole Remillosa
Krystal Humm
Tegan Sabine
Nguyet Huynh
Emily Verhurst
Shaylee Inge
Cindy Ly
Kathleen Mullen
Courtney-Jade Williams
Kimberley Kean
Curtis Woods
Christine May

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Introduction

Lucy, the protagonist in Renee Miller’s ‘A Different World’, finds it hard to speak to others about the journey she has made to another world because she is conscious that ‘no-one had changed’ in the way she has. The experience of editing this anthology has made me sympathise greatly with Lucy. Compiling this volume has been, for me, a transformative journey through many lands. Some have been terrifying, others wonderful; some have proved beautifully strange, others unsettlingly familiar. However varied the terrain, each of the landscapes portrayed in this collection is vividly rendered and compellingly real; so real, indeed, that I now find myself reflecting, since returning from my wanderings, if ‘reality’ itself is actually a lesser kind of existence than that which can be lived in the world of the imagination.

The empowering nature of the imaginary world is an idea that is voiced repeatedly, in many intriguing and different ways, throughout this volume, which takes as its theme ‘A Different World’.

Many of the pieces show an understanding of the liberating power of creativity. As the protagonist of ‘As the Sun Expands’ puts it, ‘I wrote my own stories, with their own logic, their own history; things were how I made them.’ The richness and originality of the prose in this volume suggests these young authors have spent many fruitful hours dwelling in the worlds of their own minds, as well as honing their powers as ‘creators’. Many new realms have been forged in the fiery crucibles of powerful imaginations; other authors have created dystopian futures or re-imagined troubled histories. Equally compelling are the ‘real’, yet altered, landscapes depicted in this anthology: the streets and school-yards of suburbia where monsters masquerade as friends and carers; the homes where magic, and sometimes horror, lurks beneath the floorboards or behind the door.

The authors of these pieces have set many challenges for their protagonists. For some, the struggle will be with demons, vampires or other ‘unspeakable’ forms of ‘malicious evil’, such as the ‘inhuman’ force that will confront King Leoric in ‘Fallen Kingdom’. For other heroes and heroines, the terrors will be more familiar, if no less confronting: a distressing and very public fight with an adored best friend; a shocking betrayal of trust by a parent. Some of the protagonists, such as the protagonist of ‘Kaleidoscope’, are weary from a lifetime of witnessing ‘unspeakable things’, albeit, in her case, with eyes of ‘a shade the sky itself would grow to unconditionally desire’. Others suffer from a profound disillusionment with this world, a world which ‘has holes in its beliefs, morals and ethics’.

Collectively, the protagonists face their ordeals with courage, good grace and skill. Many observe the situation they are in with wry humour; stuck in a parallel universe with a murderous ‘alternate’ self as a roommate, the protagonist of ‘Synchronous’ is still able to remark, ‘I feel fine, besides the thought of dying soon.’ Some of the most sharply delivered humour is directed towards adults and their perplexing ways; the narrator of ‘Beneath My Bedroom Floor’ tells us of the house rumoured to be affected by ‘magic and sorcery and whatnot’ which, ‘thanks to my parents and a very persuasive agent’ is also ‘to be my new home.’ Humour is used to demonstrate the acute awareness adolescents have about how they are perceived, and how this perception can affect their place in the world; the narrator in ‘Medium High’ attributes her casual job as a psychic to the fact that ‘rumours of the crazy chick that saw dead people who lived on Whites Road had reached a man named Julian’.

The stories in the collection capture the essence of what it is to be young; the teenage heroes and heroines are required to show fortitude not just in fighting monsters but in talking to the opposite sex, and have to grapple with changes taking place not just in their circumstances but within their own bodies.

The worlds they inhabit disappoint them, frustrate them, and sometimes let them down very badly indeed, but these heroes and heroines are still capable of appreciating the ‘beauty and the absurdity’ in their lives, and reconciling themselves to the fact that these traits are often simultaneously present. As the protagonist of ‘My World’ finally, and reassuringly, tells us, ‘Life is a mystery, a beautiful mystery.’
The images in this anthology embody the beauty, and the mystery, that is eternally present in the world for those who have the eyes, and the artistic sensibilities, to capture it.

The photos have all been taken in and around the City of Salisbury; they provide a montage of images that are both dreamlike and real, familiar and yet otherworldly. Although taken independently of the texts in this volume, they speak to them. Several of the stories in this anthology have been set in a forest, often one of the magical kind, a place where, in one case, ‘different colours dance across the forest floor’; it is tempting to think that such a place has been captured in Josh Hansford’s image on the cover of this volume. An equally magical moment, of an adolescent staring out through the window of a moving train at a playground, has been captured with ‘Georgie’s Camera’. It is an image that speaks of the relentless pace of life, and its tendency to drive us all on, however reluctantly, to the ‘reality’ of adult life; it also, simultaneously, reminds us of the power we all have to remain childlike, and to continue to view the world with the wise and true eyes of a child. Several of the other images in this collection were taken around a schoolyard; they take as their subjects items as humble and unlikely as a feather in the dirt or a bottle in the gutter. In the hands of the young artists, these humble objects are transformed into beautiful, thought-provoking studies that again affirm the ability of the magical to exist in the everyday.

Thanks must go to those who have helped bring this volume to ‘life’. The Write Now competition and subsequent anthology were organised in partnership with the City of Salisbury, with the winning and commended entries announced at the opening night of the Salisbury Writer’s Festival in 2012. We are delighted to have the opportunity to launch this online publication at the 2013 Writer’s Festival. Sincere thanks go to Nichola Kapitza, Tabatha Weir and the Salisbury Writer’s Festival Working Party for their ongoing support of this initiative. Sincere thanks are also due to Stephanie Bryant and her colleagues in the Marketing and Strategic Communications department at the University of Adelaide for their amazing work in nurturing, supporting and developing this anthology.

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And, of course, special thanks must also go to those great explorers and wanderers who have travelled to other worlds and come back with tales of your journeys. Thank you for the words and images you have contributed to this book.

Stephanie Hester
The University of Adelaide
Reality is always unsatisfying, as not everything we dream of can be fitted into it.

I once had a dream. Not a big dream. Just a slight taste of an idea, though one that would never happen.
Left behind
by Madison Williams

Recipient of second place in the Senior Image competition
Synchronous by Brooke Lloyd

Joint Recipient of Second Place in the Junior Text Category

I didn’t attend her funeral. In fact, I have never met her in my life. She has a gravestone; therefore, she should be dead. Yet she isn’t. Her eyes pierce me like bullets in this foggy weather. Her pale skin becomes clearer as she wriggles herself out of her own grave. I step back and shriek. I know that nobody can hear me within the depths of the forest. I had needed to jog, as reality was becoming too much. I discovered that it was getting late. I made the mistake of taking the shortcut through the forest.

Now, here I am.

I didn’t know there were graves here. I wouldn’t have seen her if it wasn’t for her burning eyes. I should be sprinting for my dear life, but cannot. I freeze in awe, watching this woman dig out of her grave. Suddenly, she shoves a triumphant fist into the night’s sky. She glares at me as she begins to swing her fist.

“Come here.” Her voice is haggard. I take one, small step. “Hurry!” she growls. My knees shake as I run to her. I sit beside her; I feel mud seep into my shoes. She grabs my hand and twists it roughly. I bite my bottom lip to the point where I begin to taste the bitterness of my blood. I notice her grave is shallow.

“Promise you’ll get rid of it. Promise?” she asks frantically. Her nails dig deeper. I peer down and notice tiny holes forming on my bare skin. Each hole oozes with blood.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

Jago turned around and peered at me through his mop of golden hair. He held his hands behind his back. I feared him hiding something from me. We promised not to keep secrets from each other. But promises can be broken.

“I told you, Teal, nothing,” said Jago.

“I came to a standstill. He watched me intently. I sprinted and grasped whatever was behind his back. My fingers found a bag-strap quickly. Jago tried to tug it off me, but the contents from the bag spilt over the carpet. Keys, a purse, a mobile phone, make-up.

“You’re stealing,” I murmured.

Jago placed a hand on my shoulder. I wanted to shake it off but was too mesmerised by his gaze.

“It will make me happy—” he paused and cupped my face, forcing me to look at him “—you want me to be happy, right?”
I sighed. Fighting with Jago is useless, a waste of energy. I nodded slowly. He smiled warmly at me, kissed my lips softly and caressed my hair.

“I love you Teal.”

“I love you too.”

The vision blurs away as I gain consciousness. I examine the room and realise that I’m on my kitchen floor. As I sit up, an icepack falls into my lap. I don’t remember taking it out of the fridge. When I pick the icepack up, I see a bandage wrapped tightly around my wrist. The woman, she cut me. The memory floods back. I know she gave me something, but I don’t remember what.

“What do you mean? Is it bad to stay in a parallel universe?”

“Very. If you stay in one too long, you’ll die. Some even come back to life and experience it all over again,” says Jago.

“That’s completely irrelevant,” Jago remarks. "You left me a week later without an explanation,” I retort. Jago smirks. “You want the Time Dial back, don’t you?” He raises his eyebrows. The thought of a parallel universe even existing, let alone being something I can travel to, seems impossible. The clone-me Jago was referring to is my alternate being. I think back to what happened earlier, in my universe. The Time Dial. My eyes widen. The Time Dial is what brought me here. I need it back, fast.

“Have you seen a fob watch anywhere?” I ask.

Jago smirks. “You want the Time Dial back, don’t you?” He pauses. “You look surprised. Did you honestly believe that I was stealing from that woman’s bag?”

“What do you mean? Is it bad to stay in a parallel universe?”

“Very. If you stay in one too long, you’ll die. Some even come back to life and experience it all over again,” says Jago.

That’s what happened to the woman in the forest. But I thought.

Jago moves and leans down beside me. He doesn’t consider me that isn’t the case. This Jago could be a clone of the Jago I knew. Instinct tells me that isn’t the case.

“Just like you stealing from that lady’s bag?” I ask, my voice a whisper.

“That’s completely irrelevant,” Jago remarks.

“You left me a week later without an explanation,” I retort. Jago shrugs his shoulders. “It could be a coincidence. Have you seen a fob watch anywhere?” I ask, my voice a whisper.

“My alternate being? Is that the other Teal?” I pause, contemplating my next words. My eyes narrow. “Where am I?”

Jago stares for a moment as he ruffles his hair. I don’t pry. When Jago finally answers me, I cannot do anything but be in shock. “You’re in a parallel universe.”

I raise my eyebrows. The thought of a parallel universe even existing, let alone being something I can travel to, seems impossible. The clone-me Jago was referring to is my alternate being. I think back to what happened earlier, in my universe. The Time Dial. My eyes widen. The Time Dial is what brought me here. I need it back, fast.

I spin my head around and discover a woman. Her teal eyes peer at me with concern. She has light brown hair in a messy bun with a few pieces gone astray. I notice her tracksuit pants and jacket; they’re the same as my clothes. For a moment, I stare at her, perplexed. This woman looks exactly like me. We could be twins. She bends down and picks the icepack up.

“You had a hard landing. I’m Teal.”

My eyes widen. We share the same name. I am hallucinating; that’s the only logical explanation for this. I meet her warm gaze and reply, “But, I’m Teal. This is my apartment.” She looks down and caresses my hair.

“I love you too.”
the last chance I’ll get for a while. Jago follows; I find that Teal’s spare bedroom is where my study is.

I hesitantly lie on the bed. I wrap the blankets like a cocoon around my body. Teal leans over and shuts the blinds. Suddenly, she sighs. By now, even Jago looks confused.

“I forgot the water. I’ll be back,” says Teal.

“But you were just here. I thought you’d go with me—””, Jago asks.

Teal rests her hand on the doorway. She places a hand on her hip and glares at Jago. I don’t say anything; I figure that they may have been fighting earlier.

“No, I think Teal needs your company more than I do,” Teal replies in a cutting tone.

“I know who this Teal is. I know everything about your history with her—” she points an accusing finger at me “—I know who this Teal is. I know everything there is to know about this stupid fob watch. You two should really work on being discreet about your secrets.”

I glare at Teal, perplexed. I arise from the bed and look at my alternate being. “Please, let me go back to my universe. I won’t bother you again.”

Teal moves forward. She now stands in front of me. I don’t move backward; I’ve had enough of being a coward. Teal leans close to my ear. “I will ensure that you die a torturous death in this room.”

Before I can react, Teal grabs my wrist and unravels the thin cloth. She digs her sharp nails deep into where one of the cuts was earlier. I scream and try to push her off me. Jago yanks my waist and hurls me onto the bed. Teal continues to glare at Jago; rage fills her eyes.

“Are you mental? Killing her won’t solve your problem,” says Jago, firmly.

“You’re right.” Teal murmurs. She grabs Jago’s hand and squeezes it gently. “But killing you both will.”

Jago shakes Teal’s hand off. He steps back and stands beside the bed. I peer down at my wrist and find blood, which trickles downward into my hand. I hold my wrist against my chest.

“This is ridiculous!” Jago glimpses his hand. I notice that blood soaks it. Just like mine. I peer at Teal; a hint of blood is on her inner palm.

“Lift your sleeve up,” I blurt. To my dismay, she does. A deep cut oozes with blood on her inner wrist. It’s on the same spot as where one of the cuts was earlier. I scream and try to push her off me. Jago yanks my waist and hurls me onto the bed. Teal continues to glare at Jago; rage fills her eyes.

I manage to stand again. “Do you really want that?” I ask gently.

Teal closes her eyes and shakes her head. She hands me the Time Dial and wraps her fingers around mine. “I apologise. I was wrong to let my anger out on you.” She turns to Jago. “Why aren’t you running from me?”

“Because, I think you need to talk about this,” he replies.

Teal nods her head. Jago gives me a pat on the shoulder. “Good-bye Teal. One day, our paths may cross.”

“Bye, Jago and Teal,” I reply.

I turn the Time Dial three times backwards. I feel light-headed and close my eyes. The only thing I can recall is the sight of Jago and Teal waving.

I awaken on the floor of my study. I sit up slowly and smile.

“I’m home. Beside me, I notice the Time Dial. Suddenly, I hear approaching footsteps. I pick up the Time Dial and slide it into my pocket.

“There you are, Teal. The neighbours reported that they heard a bang from your apartment.”

I glance upward and find a police officer. He has thick, dark blond hair. His eyes are hazel and he has golden skin. He looks oddly familiar.

“Who are you?” I ask.

“My name is Jago,” he replies.

My eyes widen as I gaze at him in awe. This is crazy, I think.

This Jago appears to have never seen me before. I clutch the Time Dial tightly.

Confusion sweeps his face. “Are you okay? You look like you’re off in a completely different world,” he says.

I peer at Jago and laugh. “Something like that.”
Beneath my bedroom floor (excerpt) by Yen-Nhi Nguyen

Chapter 1

I still remember the first time I saw the land.
It happened the summer of my fourteenth birthday and
that was when we moved into the new house. Unlike the
quaint, small towns read about in books, Redburn did not
hustle with activity and laughter every other day, nor did it
boast the familiar and intimate relationships most towns
had. Although everyone was certainly friendly, the streets
of Redburn were quiet and the people usually kept to
themselves, happier to worry about their own lives than get
involved in everyone else’s. The town had one supermarket,
one shopping centre, two schools, a hair salon, an ice-cream
parlour, a small bar and the new swimming centre near the
high school. There was also a house which no one lived in;
it had been left standing for years and years. It was said that
there was a myth surrounding the house which talked of
magic and sorcery and whatnot, and, thanks to my parents
and a very persuasive agent, that was to be my new house.

Chapter 2

The sky was overcast and heavy clouds threatened to cause a
flood on the day we moved into the new house. Before this, I
had only seen pictures of the house and it had looked pretty
miserable, and seeing it in real life was not much comfort. As
the car pulled into the driveway, I saw that the front yard was
a jungle of overgrown weeds and shoots. Wild flowers and
leaves littered the area and, in a corner, a thorn bush was
growing to an impressive size. The front of the house looked
old and tired, if a house could look as such. The windows
and doors looked bleak compared to our neighbours’ and
the front porch looked ready to collapse. Mum produced a
bronze key and the door unlocked with a click. Dad pushed
the door open and I stepped in. My first thought was that it
didn’t look as bad as I’d imagined it would; the hallway was
a combination of timber flooring, beige walls and a mini
chandelier, and I could see part of the staircase which I knew
led up to my room. The windows let in quite a bit of light and
the house smelt a bit musty.

After helping my parents unload the car, I gingerly made
my way up the stairs, still cautious and sceptical about the
soundness of the house. My bedroom was the only one up
there, along with the study and bathroom. I stepped inside
and was surprised by its size and the openness of the space.
The room was more a pentagon in shape, and the wheat-
coloured ceiling was higher than what I was used to. The
windows were long and big, letting plenty of sunshine in,
and, unlike most of the other rooms in the house, my room
had polished wood instead of carpet. The moving guys had
been there yesterday so my bed and desk were already set up,
but the room still looked massive.

I crossed to the window and found that it overlooked the
backyard, which in its current state was not a particularly
picturesque view. As I turned my head, I caught a glimpse of
something glittery on the floor. I walked to the middle of my
room and found tiny specks of what looked like glitter on the
floor. Kneeling down, I ran my finger across the floor. I found
it stayed on the floor, as if glued there. In the sunlight, I saw
that the gold glitter was actually some sort of shimmering
dust, similar to the powder girls sometimes smeared on their
eyelids because they thought it made them look good instead
of like a circus oddity.

I crossed back to the place where I had found the dust and
found more shimmering dust scattered on the ground. I
realised that the dust formed straight lines. I began to trace
the shimmering lines with my finger and that was when I
noticed the slight cracks in the floor. There were four thin,
straight cracks which formed a rectangle; they were hardly
noticeable unless you looked really closely or happened to
touch them. It seemed to be that the shimmering dust was
surrounding the rectangle and I wondered why.

Wouldn’t it be amazing if it was a trapdoor? I thought to
myself. Imagine all the things I could store down there!
Determined, I found a pen in my backpack and slid it
carefully into one of the cracks. I moved the pen around
and tried to manoeuvre the piece of timber, but it didn’t budge.
I tried again from a different angle and was shocked when it
moved a fraction above ground. Just as I was trying again, I
heard Dad’s voice calling from below.

“Genevieve, dinner’s ready! Come down and meet our
new neighbours.”

Reluctant to leave, I sat there for a minute, staring at this
newfound discovery. I left the pen in the crack for later and,
as I walked down the stairs to the dining room, I promised
myself that I would move that piece of timber from the floor,
whatever it took.

Chapter 3

Dinner was a polite affair, our neighbours being the first
people we’d spoken to in the new town. The middle-aged
couple who lived across the street from us were friendly and
welcoming, helpfully pointing out the attractions one could
find in Redburn, which was not a whole lot. After dinner,
I helped wash the dishes and excused myself, eager to get
back to my room. After closing the door, in case I had an
unexpected spectator, I sat cross-legged on the floor and
stared at what I was convinced had to be a trapdoor.
The pen had moved the wood a little, but it was not enough,
I mused.
Suddenly grinning, I leapt up and took a long metal ruler out of my schoolbag. I slotted it through the space and deliberately pushed downwards. At first, nothing happened, but I applied more force, not so easily deterred. Slowly, the wood shifted and moved upwards. Holding tightly onto the ruler, I peered into the crack to see if it was very deep, and was stunned to see a dim light underneath. I quickly exerted all my strength and the trapdoor sprang open. The yellow light was much brighter now and I could see why; it was coming from street lamps underneath!

I crouched to the floor and let my head hang over the hole, not believing my eyes. About fifty metres below me were people — I think — moving about, talking to each other and, well, alive. From where I was sitting, they were very small and hard to see clearly; I couldn’t make out their features, aside from the fact that they were two-legged and human-like in form. Thinking swiftly, I closed the trapdoor and wedged a book in to keep it open, then raced downstairs to the kitchen where I knew Dad usually kept a pair of binoculars for no particular reason. I grabbed them from the drawer and raced back up, taking two stairs at a time due to my eagerness. I flipped open the trapdoor once more and held the binoculars up to my eyes.

It took a minute for my eyes to adjust and then I saw them; they were human-like creatures with slightly pointy faces and large round eyes, and, aside from the fact that their skin was greyish-blue, they didn’t look all that peculiar. I saw one of them, with long, wavy hair, was gardening, and a couple of smaller ones were playing ball near an ordinary-looking playground. What fascinated me, though, were the ones I saw through the binoculars and the ones standing out where I was being taken. But, try as I did, it was hard to detect any sound other than heavy pairs of boots stomping on the ground. My captors did not speak to one another very much and, if they did, it was in hushed tones. Finally, it seemed that we had reached our — well, their — destination, and I was ungraciously dumped on a hard surface which I assumed was a chair. My feet were then bound and I was strapped to the chair like a coming victim of electrocution. The gag over my mouth was taken off and, with it, the blindfold. After adjusting my eyes to the blinding light, I gasped aloud.

In front of me was a guard. One of those guards, like the ones I saw through the binoculars and the ones standing under my trapdoor. I blinked rapidly and, with a glance, saw that there were a number of guards walking around the room. That was the second thing, the room itself. I don’t know what I was expecting when I was being abducted, but it wasn’t to be bound inside a room which looked like it did. In one word, the room was grand. High ceilings with impressive plasterwork, marble flooring polished so that
you could see your reflection, and what looked suspiciously like a throne directly in front of me. As the guards in red and black walked around doing things I again gasped in surprise, for, as they turned around, I saw that they had small, almost transparent wings on their backs. None of the guards used them but I was sure that they were real, working wings and not there only as decoration.

Suddenly (everything to me was sudden at that point), the big doors with the gold handles to my right banged open, and in walked a very impressive creature. He looked like the guards in features, if a little bigger, but his clothes were definitely not cut from the same fabric; they were bright velvety purple, with gold trim dripping around the collar and cuffs like diamonds. I assumed that he was the ruler of this strange place and couldn’t imagine what he would want with me. He walked purposely to the front of the room and sat in the throne. I waited for him to shout orders or do something king-like but he just sat there and looked at me. He studied me with piecing blue eyes and I stared back at him, unflinching as he narrowed his eyes.

“Why have you come here?” His voice was like a sword, sharp with a bit of edge to it.

“I—” I stammered. With what little courage I had left, I drew in and gave him my best answer. “I didn’t choose to come here. I was taken by your guards and then tied to the chair here.”

“Didn’t choose to come here? Ha!” he spat. “If you didn’t come tonight, you would have tried to come here another time. I just saved you the trouble and had you brought here instead.”

I sensed that he didn’t expect an answer so I gave him none.

“All you humans want to do is come here. Like this is a tourist site or something. Well, I can tell you this: humans are not welcome in Syrantia and never will be.” He glared at me and I stared back. Later I would wonder why humans were hated so in this strange land, but then was not the time for figuring friendly relationships. “You humans think you can just come here and take pictures and take samples back to your world and study us as if we’re a rare specimen of something. We in Syrantia live differently. Syrantia is a different world to yours and it always will be! Well?” He narrowed his eyes even further. “What is your ever-so-harmless goal for our land?”

“I’m sorry to cause you trouble, but I don’t want to ruin this place or study it or anything!” I might have sounded a little desperate but I was beyond calmness.

“You say that now because you are tied to that chair like a lifeless doll but, yesterday, were you not spying on us in order to report us to your leader so that he may capture Syrantia?”

“What? No! I wasn’t spying on you or doing anything wrong!” The king clicked his fingers and a guard brought over a bag. From it, the king withdrew the binoculars I’d dropped before.

“So you deny that these belong to you?”

“N-no, they’re mine—” I started, but was cut off.

“Whatever. I don’t care what your pitiful excuse is, I’ve had enough of you.” He glanced at the binoculars in his hand, then threw the offending instrument on the ground. “You can take her away now. I never want to see her again,” he ordered the guards. With that he got up and marched out through the open doors, his face still etched with anger and fury.

Two guards came to me, untied my feet and arms and dragged me through the doors and down a hallway. I was too astonished to protest otherwise. After many twists and turns and stairways, I was led through a thick wooden door to a place I presumed was the prison or jail. I was thrown unceremoniously into the cell and, after checking that the door was locked, the guards left. I stood for a moment, stunned, then frantically searched for a way out.

“There’s no point in trying.”

I jumped and whirled around, trying to locate the low voice. I searched the darkness and my eyes fell on a figure in the cell next to mine. In the corner sat a boy with shaggy brown hair and bright eyes.

“You won’t find a way out. We’re locked in tight.”
Clouds
by Emily Verhurst
The binding (excerpt) by Shaylee Inge

Chapter one:
Thorns and tails.

I stumbled helplessly after my brother, hoping not to get lost. Although it felt like I knew these areas off by heart, I still couldn’t help but worry. I always got like that when I was travelling with Higura. It wasn’t that I didn’t trust him, I trusted him with my life; it’s just that sometimes he would bring up things I wish I didn’t need to hear. Memories of home... Needing to move for safety... How my latest catch somehow just... disappeared...

I cringed and plopped down heavily onto a large rock, already worn out. Lately, I just didn’t have the energy in me to do these kinds of things. I ran my fingers across the boulder’s surface, which was covered in cool, fuzzy, green moss.

Higura came to a sudden halt, his scaled, sharply spiked tail swishing side-to-side. He turned his head to look at me.

“What’s the matter this time?” The grumble of his harsh voice made me shrink back a bit.

“N-nothing... I’m just tired...” I sighed. Higura grimaced and marched over to me. He bobbed down, adjusting his spiked goggles as he did so.

“Look, kid—”

“Brother... I—I’m not a kid no more... I’m twenty-one... like you...”

I hated to be called Kid. Nickname or not, it made me feel smaller than I already was. I was fairly normal in height, maybe slightly shorter than my sibling, but I didn’t care about that. It was just the inconsiderate name of Kid.

“Hmpf...Fine then, Boy; you can’t give up now! We are close to our destination and I am NOT going to wait around for you. If you want to be mauled by bears or wolves or WHATEVER, be my guest! I’m not saving your arse!”

“I—I guess so...”

Not this time, brat!” He glowered at me, gritting his teeth in frustration.

Lately he hadn’t been very well, deprived of human flesh. It made him psychotic and violent, which was a very scary thing to witness.


Higura grunted and promenaded ahead. I hated it when he was like this. It made me worry and feel pain for him. I wasn’t even that close, just mere workmates — acquaintances.

He’d mainly leave with Higura to patrol and defend our area from unwanted people and creatures. Though, sometimes, he’d come back early to check on me. I really owe that man my life. One day, I had been stricken down with the flu. I was in complete agony for most of the time. I couldn’t bear to move, though I knew I needed to; I had a job to continue on with. I ended up falling back asleep and didn’t get that job done, and Higura came home only to realise that. He was furious, and in one of his “states” again. Rowan took the blame for me and... Things just weren’t the same after that...

“Oi.”

I looked at Higura.

“We take a break for a while, aye?”

I guess he had reconsidered the situation after all. “I—I guess so...”

“We still have a while to go, anyway. No point me carrying your dead body there.” Chuckling, he sat down and leaned against an old oak tree. Almost instantly, he grabbed a stick lying close by, flipped out his pocket knife and started sharpening the end.

Relieved, I collapsed on the spot and sprawled out on the lush green grass, yawning. Higura did have nice moments, even when he was seeming to be a loony. Snuffling lightly, I drew my hand up and proceeded to nibble on the back of it.

“Been a while since I’ve seen you do that.”

“Huh? Haven’t noticed.” I hummed softly, my words being muffled behind my hand.

“You know...” Higura looked up into the branches and leaves of the oak tree. “I don’t think I’ve seen you smile for quite a long time... You never seem like your old cheerful self... what happened?”

I winced, not wanting to tell the truth. “I don’t know what you mean. I AM happy.” I forced myself to give him a bright grin. “I don’t know why you’d think that, brother.”

Higura sighed, obviously not believing me. “It’s just that... since we left mother and father...” His words drifted to silence. We both remained quiet, somewhat waiting in fear of the next set of words, and of who was going to break the silence. I shut my eyes and concentrated on the calm whispering of the wind and trees. It was as if they were having a conversation. I liked the idea of that: believing that everything has a way of communicating. A nice breeze would mean a nice chat, while a storm would equal an argument.

“You miss them... Don’t you?” I could feel his burning gaze locked onto me. Shifting uncomfortably, I sat up and looked over at the red-headed male.

“Well?” Impatience overpowered any other emotion that lay in his eyes.
“Don’t be so...silly. I mean, the only proof of their existence to me is memories, which are most likely false.” The slightest bit of a chagrin pulled across my face.

“Tch...Whatever you say,” Higura went back to sharpening the stick, which looked more like a branch to me than a stick, although I actually felt indecisive about it. I’ll just go by stick.

Time slowly slid by and we both seemed to get caught up in our own thoughts. My thoughts happened to lock onto the memories of home that I possessed, which both saddened and sickened me.

People in the town I came from — which is called Sszreames, because of all the now-extinct Sszreame plants that once inhabited the area when it was first discovered by a man named Richard Darlings — were very superstitious, especially when it came to rare humanoid species of the sort my brother happened to belong to. Higura’s species is Demonde, more commonly known as Demon. And, seeing as I am his twin, I am known as the ‘Demon’s right hand’, even though I am an Unknown and Unknowns generally avoid Demondes.

This relationship also posed health risks for me. The ancients once had a written formula that explained the Demon’s curse, which apparently was meant to strike down the sibling that happened to follow the Demon. The sibling would have to do what is known as ‘bond’ to him — or another Demonde — using a special seal. As the formula was handed down through the generations, however, it became disorientated and too complex, which is why I found it hard to explain to people just why I now wore a necklace with a jar attached to it.

The jar is approximately 6.7 centimetres long and 5.2 centimetres wide. It is just less than a quarter full of both mine and Higura’s blood. This was one of the only links that the Demonde, more commonly known as Demon. And, seeing as I am his twin, I am known as the ‘Demon’s right hand’, even though I am an Unknown and Unknowns generally avoid Demondes.

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Yet the bond was only effective so long as there was a certain degree of proximity between my twin and I. If we became separated and out of range, the effects would stop and I would be taken under. The same applied if the jar was broken and blood spilt.

It is unknown as to what exactly the Hidden World is. Some people say it is basically a place where you go, but it doesn’t signify heaven or hell. Others say it is hell and all the species on Amura are unable to reach heaven due to our sins or creations or just because of what we are. Once upon a time, creatures such as Vampris were thought to be bad spirits created to ‘suck the soul’ out of people. Why, though, is a tough question to answer. Vampris (which are also known as Vampire) are quite nice people from what I hear, and quite similar to other people, people except for Humans, that is. Human are a dying species, being bred out over the years. So they are known as ‘pure’.

“Oi! Boy? Boy!” The faintest hint of a male voice called, almost completely muted. It slowly grew louder as I fell out of brainwork.

“Huh?” I blinked, slightly brain-dead for a few moments.

“C’mon! We’ve got to go!” Higura was leaning over me with an unreadable expression on his face.

“Urf.... Already?” I groaned quietly.

“No...What do you think?! Come on, come on!” He stepped away and turned his back to me. “This way!”

I quickly jumped to my feet, not wanting to be left behind, and followed the man.

“W-Why the sudden hurry?” A strange feeling jolted through my body for a moment, which made me start to believe even more that something was wrong. I heard just the slightest of a snicker.

“Do you remember our dear cousin, Zashshuchen?” My skin pimpled partially as the hairs on my arms stood on end.

“Zas...shu...ken....?” Confused, I sounded the name out, wanting to remember just who that was. The name bothered me highly and my head started to buzz from within.

“Wouldn’t expect you to remember him.”

“Why are we hurrying?” I repeated the question.

“We are meeting up with Zass at our destination. Try to not make him feel out of place; he IS family, you know.”

I winced at that. I do not like new people, even if it is someone who I am related to. Saying that I’ve never met Zashshuchen, though, would be a lie. I may have met him, by what Higura had said, but I wouldn’t know.

I stopped walking and concentrated on the ground. My head was still buzzing heavily, and I knew this would help it stop. I could just see Higura’s feet. He wore black boots, which were mostly covered by the long coat he wore. He also stopped and then turned in my direction.

“Dear god... Reiden! Don’t be like this!”

I wasn’t sure what he was talking about or what he meant.

“We don’t have much further to go! Now move, before I make you!”

I didn’t budge and just stood on the spot. I couldn’t move for some reason, as if my legs had become dead and stiff. Higura marched over to me. At this moment, I could tell he was becoming agitated.

“I can’t...” I mumbled, turning my head up to look at him.

“What?” His eyes narrowed and the large thorn-like spurs on his tail lengthened.

“I can’t!” I quickly covered my mouth, noticing how loud I’d spoken. It was accidental, too.

“How dare you...!” He didn’t seem to finish his sentence; instead, he gritted his teeth together. His body tensed up in a violent way. I closed my eyes just in time.

Whatever had happened, it happened fast. I found myself lying on the ground with a bad stinging pain rupturing from my left side.

“Stupid brat!” Enraged, Higura stomped off to elsewhere.

Groaning, I sat up and grabbed at the jar dangling from my left side. I winced at that. I do not like new people, even if it is someone who I am related to. Saying that I’ve never met Zashshuchen, though, would be a lie. I may have met him, by what Higura had said, but I wouldn’t know.

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Groaning, I sat up and grabbed at the jar dangling from around my neck, detached it from the chain, and examined it. It didn’t seem to have any damage whatsoever, so I connected it back to the chain and tucked it under my shirt and part of my scarf.

I then pulled my shirt up slightly and checked out the gashes in my side. They weren’t deep, but they bothered me like buggerly. Somewhat like when a cat scratches you. It stings and partially burns, but also has an irritating sense to it that is close to itchiness.
I tried to push the existence of the wounds to the back of my mind and stood up. I knew that I had to get to where we were headed, or I’d be alone until the connection was lost, and I’d be reaped. Numbness sinking deep into my legs, I forced myself to move forward, step by step. I knew there was an alternative, but I hated it.

“Brother...What is wrong with you?”

Chapter two:

Unfortunate memories and unwanted company.

I once had a dream. Not a big dream. Just a slight taste of an idea, though one that would never happen. It was one brought on by my elder sister, Mara. She always had crazy ideas and plans. I remember my parents accusing her of being a stoner at one point or another, which mustn’t have been true, because she was too much of a good person. The dream was to bring world peace between the nations, the leaders, the living and non-living, which is stupid, because one person, or two, or three, or four, cannot settle over two million people. It just isn’t possible, and everyone knows that.

Mara is dead now. She died when I was 14.

I wished I had a watch. I had no idea what time it was, how long I had been separated from my brother. It was starting to arouse panic in me, a terrible feeling of pain mixed with regret of what I had done wrong, even if I didn’t understand what it exactly was. With a nervous pang, I glanced around the area. It was too dark to see properly and the only visible things were the faint outlines of trees and the light from the moon forcing itself through obnoxiously from behind them. I was alone; at least, I thought I was, until I heard a faint rustle of leaves and cracking branches, along with smooth dark laughter. I stared hard into the darkness. It was nothing, nothing except for my mind messing up once again. The more I tried to convince myself, the more terrifying things became. I wanted to cry, to scream and run...But something kept me there...Familiarness.

Faint glowing of bright blue came into view: eyes, perhaps. They peered at me curiously, though in the most mocking way possible. I stared back, looking at blue against grungy orangey-brown.

A few moments passed, and no one made a move, nor a sound; not even breathing could be heard. Thud, thud, thud. I shuddered at the sound pounding against my ears, from the inside. Thud...Thud...Thud... Another sound, not one of heart. The luminous spots moved closer, moving up and down slightly. Then, finally, a figure came into view, limping with each step.

A soft snarl rippled from the silhouette. I shivered, both from the cold touch of the wind’s fingers working their way through each microscopic loop-hole in my shirt, and the aggressive sound.

“Who...are...you...?” His words were delayed; his voice kept low but possessed a questioning tone. By the way he spoke, I started to believe he wasn’t good with English.

I shook my head in response. This was all too realistic to be my imagination, and this voice I recognised from somewhere.

“Speak!” the shadow snapped, hobbling forward. I could see him now, not very well, but enough to see his appearance: chin-length white hair; glowering, deep eyes, marked with dark rings, most likely caused by sleep deprivation; tattered clothing, stained with some sort of sickening substance; and a long, pale tail that swished by the male’s feet, that would’ve been the thumping noise accompanying his awkward walking. Yet, the thing that hit me the hardest were the bony spines that ripped through the spinal-extension’s flesh... He was so much like Higura, in a way.

“You respond, now!” Snarling loudly, he smacked the monstrous tail into the earthy flooring. I whimpered quietly at this. He was violent; the words moved through my mind automatically. “You’re gonna die, boy.”
Prologue

“I sent it.”
A heartbeat.
A claw swipes for my body and reaches its target, ripping out my heart.
I seem to have lost mine; it has run away from me. Like a frightened horse tearing down a country paddock, no idea of what is to come. Like a mouse dodging a cat’s menacing claws. Like a bird flying, soaring free through the endless sky.
My eyes fly open. I lay on my bed, covered in layers of sweat that drench the sheets beneath me. I am frozen, unable to move. I am still, obscured from the worries of ordinary life, but consumed by the worries of this frightening fantasy that I am living now. They eat me up, swirl around my head, blocking out any other, normal thoughts.
I groan and turn my head to look out the window. The rain is pouring down outside. I close my eyes and breathe out. The rain only makes me think about that rainy day I was walking home from school, that normal day. But the one thought that bugs me like an annoying brother is what she said.

“Does she mean the book or the message in a bottle that I found so long ago? This thought won’t leave me alone. I take a few deep breaths as my heart rate starts to slow. I lie on my bed for another half an hour, wondering what is going on with my life, fearful of the future. A tear runs down my cheek and before I know it, I’m crying. I weep silently for what feels like forever, curled up in a tiny ball, hoping that something good will eventually come out of the madness.

*****

It is seven days after my thirteenth birthday. The storm rumbles like a hungry stomach, ready to eat anything it can devour. The fat raindrops fall on the ground, leaving puddles as big as dinner plates. I plop through the unforgiving rain on the way home, tattered schoolbag slung over my shoulder. I don’t bother hurrying home; my hair and possessions are already drenched. Besides, I hate it there.
The rain weighs me down with every step I take. I don’t mind though; the weather matches my mood. I keep walking and I finally arrive at my cottage of a house.
I have a small family but I might as well live by myself as they’re never home. As always, I find myself dreaming of a different world. One filled with pixies and witches, fairies and talking animals, dragons and...magic.
All of this abruptly stops when I get to the door. I ready myself for what is to come. A self-centred father, a mother who can’t even remember her own name and a sister who won’t leave me alone but is the only one in my depressing family that manages to bring a smile to my face. Nothing magical about that, nothing at all.
I open the door and, surprisingly, it’s silent.
“Is home,” I yell out.
Nobody answers. I walk past the study and look in. There’s dad, sitting at the computer as usual.
“Hey dad.”
“Lara, do your homework and stop disturbing me.”
Why do I even bother? I always get my hopes up that dad might talk to me or even take an interest in what I am doing, but it’s always about his work.
I don’t have any homework tonight so I unpack my bag, sit on my bed and stare out the window. It is an immensely unevenful setting, my backyard. I see my wet driveway, which is still damp from this morning’s rain. I also notice the sun desperately trying to pop out from behind the clouds that cover the sky. I guide my gaze towards my fence. I spot a large grey tabby cat, his ears sticking up, listening to the cars passing by. For a few moments I stare at him, looking at the texture and detail of his fur. My eyes dart up to meet his and, with a start, I realise he’s staring at me.
No, he can’t be. That’s ridiculous.
I get off my bed and walk towards my wardrobe, my eyes not leaving his grey ones. He is still looking at me. I move closer to my window. There is no mistaking it; there is an odd cat looking over his shoulder at me. I make my way to the front door and, on the way, inform my dad that I am going for a walk. He doesn’t even look up.
The cat’s still there. He leaps up onto his feet and turns around to face me. His nose twitches. He jumps off the fence and onto the path. His tail flicks to one side, the right; I look to my right and see, in the distance, a water feature made out
of stone. The cat saunters towards it. I make a decision to follow as my curiosity gets the better of me. I decide I need a name for this cat.

Just as my mind starts thinking up names for my feline friend, he starts meowing and moving quicker towards the river and I hurry to keep up with him. Names float through my mind and I settle on Boaz. I have always been one for short and unusual names since mine is short but so overused: Lara.

At last, we reach the water feature. Boaz springs onto one of the rocks and looks determinedly at one spot where the water is flowing off one rock and onto another. I follow his gaze; he is staring at a rock that is covered by some greenery. Underneath, there is a stone with a hole right through the centre. I make my way over to where the stone is and bend down to pick it up. It has a smooth feel. By some instinct I turn it over in my palm and hold it up to my eye. What I see is remarkable. There are little creatures playing in the water. I think they are water fairies; well, they are tiny, have wings and are playing in the water. One girl really catches my eye. Her hair is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. When she moves her head, her black hair glistens and ripples down her back.

I take the stone away from my eye. In a heartbeat, all the creatures and the little fairy girl disappear. I make my way home with Boaz following me. I pick him up and he doesn’t seem to mind. On my way I pass a strange man in a long trench coat — one might’ve mistaken him for a stereotypical detective — and hurry on. His timeworn fingers are thin branches, twisting from the stem of his palms. His face didn’t look all that menacing but I am afraid of strangers and his outfit doesn’t comfort me in the slightest.

I keep walking and arrive at my house. I sneak up to my room, hiding Boaz from my dad, and set him on my bed. “You are so beautiful. But you know I can’t keep you, right?” Boaz meows.

I reach for my laptop and get the Google webpage up. I type in ‘stone with a natural hole in the centre’. No, that’s too much, I decide, so I search for ‘holey stone’. I click on the first link that comes up:

_Holey Stones_ are stones that have a hole running all the way through them, and are usually found in streams or rivers, and at the seashore, where running water has created the hole in the stone.

This may be one of the reasons why they are considered so powerful, as it is a common belief that magic cannot work on running water, and these stones have been holiday by running water and so protect from magic. _Holey Stones_ are also known as _Hag Stones_, _Ephialtes Stones_, _Wish Stones_, _Nightmare Stones_ and _Witch Riding Stones_.

The most powerful quality of a holey stone is its protective power. Worn or carried, it would ward off evil spirits and protect the wearer from harm. Stones were hung from bedposts to prevent nightmares. If a stone broke, it was thought to have used its power to protect a life.

That is interesting. I click on Google Images and the pictures that come up match the stone I have in my hand.

“Lara!” comes a whiny voice. “Lara, what are you doing? Come play dolls with me!”

I groan. It’s my little sister, Alyla. There’s no getting rid of her so I lock Boaz in my room with a bowl of water to make sure Alyla won’t get to him.

Alyla and I have so many differences that it’s a little bit surprising we get along as well as we do. There’s a six year difference between us and I love reading, whereas she only treats it as homework. I mean, I was reading the Lemony Snicket books when I was her age. She plays with dolls, I played with teddies. She likes craft, I like sport. We're different. But I love her anyway.

So, after twenty minutes of pretending to be Ken, I tell Alyla that I have to do my homework, because I really can’t wait to look up more about the Holey Stone.
Angles
by Kimberley Kean
Blood red (excerpt) by Nicole Remillosa

My heart pounded against my chest as I ran for my life, running from door to door, looking for anything that would help me escape this maze-like place.

I turned one of the door handles in panic; it was open. I pushed the door in a hurry and slammed it closed. I barricaded myself inside, blocking the door with any large furniture I could find.

I sat in the corner, away from the moonlight shining into the nearly blackened room. The window was broken and the cold icy wind came in and touched my skin as I huddled in the corner with my ear to the wall. Waiting and listening in silence. Just waiting, waiting for something to happen.

After a while of silence, I thought I was safe...or at least away from the danger lurking on the other side of the wall. Until.

I heard a faint sound of breathing. Deep breathing. I held my breath; the footsteps of whatever was outside became louder, and louder. Boom. Boom. Boom. It stopped just right where I was huddled up in the corner. I put my back to the wall and gazed out of the window, only to see the blood red, alluring moon. I was drawn to the moon, like a man addicted to drugs. A teardrop ran down my face and fell to the dusty cemented floor; that's when I knew I wasn't myself anymore.

My body forced itself to stand; I tried to control myself but my body moved on its own. I started to slowly walk forwards, towards the moonlight and out of the darkness. The moonlight shone onto my face as I took a step into the light; I tried to go back. I couldn't. My sanity, my control of my own body were gone. I kept walking; all I could do was stare wildly into the moon as it pulled me closer to the window.

I pushed the shattered glass away and climbed onto the window pane. I stood, dangerously out of the window, holding onto its sides. My dress ripped on the broken glass as I climbed through. I could feel no pain as the glass pierced my skin.

The wind blew through my long, brown hair. My eyes were now full of tears. The door behind me blew open. The thing lurking in the hallway was now in the room. My heart beat faster; I knew I was gone. I was already dead before my heart stopped.

I shut my eyes and leaned forward.

I took a deep breath.

“Goodbye...”

Chapter one

My name is Samantha Nisa; I am sixteen years old. I’m part of a rebellion, along with four others — Dre (sixteen), Mae (four), Jaye (fifteen) and Mia (sixteen) — to stop the blooded war before it awakens something darker. Everyone calls us orphans because our parents were knights in the war but their whole squadron disappeared; the king assumed they died in the war. But we know they are still alive; they left us hidden messages here and there, it's just taken us a while to find them. This is our story.

I heard a childish scream that woke me in the middle of the night; I jumped out of bed and ran downstairs in my night gown only to see Mae Avaidion, Dre's little sister, crying in the kitchen with glass and spilt milk all over the floor. “I guess she came down and got herself a drink again,” I said to myself as I picked her up and held her in my arms.

“Sleep in my room tonight, okay little one?” he whispered to his little sister. He reached out and took Mae from my arms.

“Sorry about waking you guys up again,” he told us. “Uhm, I’ll clean this up. I’ll just get Mae to bed. Thanks for watching her, Sammi.”

“No, it’s alright. I’ll clean it up, Dre, you need more sleep than me and I don’t mind, she’s a little cutie,” I told him, slightly blushing.

“Oh, get a room guys,” Jaye Lilyenh yelled out, rolling her eyes.

“Aww, I think it’s cute. Are you two dating now? You should,” Mia Renesme asked as she stepped down from the stairs.

“Uhh NO! I mean, uhm-”

“No, we’re not together, Mia, for the last time. Just friends...” Dre butted in and gave me a wink before he walked upstairs with Mae in his arms.

“Not yet that is...” he whispered to Mia as he walked passed her.

I blushed immensely. I quickly turned around to look for a broom to sweep the glass off the wooden floorboards; Jaye and Mia were already walking upstairs back to their comfy, warm beds. I was tired, very tired. But I knew no-one else would clean up this mess, so I stayed up a little longer to clean up.

I was just about finished when I heard the floor creak as someone walked down the stairs. It was Dre. He walked over to me and knelt down and grabbed the cloth I was using to mop up the cold milk off the floor. “I guess she came down and got herself a drink again,” I said to myself as I picked her up and held her in my arms.

“What’s going on?!” Dre Avaidion came rushing down the stairs, along with the others awoken by Mae’s screaming. “Mae, not again...Can’t sleep?” he asked his little sister.

“Nuhp, I wanted too drink some milk but didn’t want to wake up big brother,” Mae said in a faint childish voice as she pointed at Dre so that he could carry her to bed.

“I can do it, Dre,” I told him in a whisper. “I’m almost done.”
Write Now 2013 anthology

quietly, trying to hide his embarrassment. He leaned closer to me, our lips just about touching… We just stared into each other’s gaze for a while, never looking away. I knew that a million things were going through his head too because I felt his hand shaking slightly nervously. We just be alright…as long we stick together. Trust me,” I whispered to him in a gentle voice. He looked me in the eyes, smiled a little and started to slowly lean closer ’til our lips were just an inch away from each other’s. The moon shone in through one of the windows and lit up the spot we were sitting down in.

I knelt down again and put my hand on top of his. “We’re all frustrated, I know. Patience, Dre. It’ll be alright…We’ll be alright…as long we stick together. Trust me,” I whispered to him in a gentle voice. He looked me in the eyes, smiled a little and started to slowly lean closer ’til our lips were just an inch away from each other’s. The moon shone in through one of the windows and lit up the spot we were sitting down in. It was silent. A million things were going through my head; I knew that a million things were going through his head too because I felt his hand shaking slightly nervously. We just stared into each other’s gaze for a while, never looking away. He leaned closer to me, our lips just about touching… “SAMANTHAAA!” Mia yelled out as she burst down the stairs. “Oh shush, let’s sleep. The sun will come up soon.” She laughed.

Chapter two

The sun was up and bright; I awoke from the warmth of the sun’s rays touching my skin through the open window. I heard many footsteps and much talk outside, too much commotion for a usual day, and then I knew the army was here. We needed to move fast. I packed my bags and rushed downstairs; everyone was already packed and waiting for me.

“I’m so sorry, guys! Why didn’t you wake me? We could’ve left already!” I yelled in panic. “Hurry, we have to leave now!” “OPEN THE DOOR!” A man yelled from outside as he banged loudly at the door. “WE HAVE PAPERS TO ARREST YOU AND YOUR GROUP!” “EVERYONE! OUT THE BACK DOOR BEFORE THEY SURROUND US!” I screamed; I picked up Mae and headed towards the back door. Dre opened the door in a hurry but stopped just as he stepped outside; two knights from the king’s army were waiting outside. They raised their swords and pointed them towards us; Dre took out his sharp dagger from his pocket, Jaye took out his long sword, and Mia, as a hand-to-hand combat fighter, got herself in a fighting position. I had to hold onto Mae in one hand and took out the dagger Dre gave me with the other hand. The knights started to attack; one fought with Dre and the other fought with Jaye. Mia stood and defended us. One of the knight’s blades almost cut Dre in the face; luckily he ducked down, just missing his head and cutting a piece of his black hair. As he ducked down, he stabbed the knight in the leg; blood gushed from the cut. Dre jumped backwards and kicked him in the face ’til the knight fell backwards. Jaye dodged most of the second knight’s attacks, but at some point he got a slight cut on his arm. Jaye raised his sword in the air and slammed it down on top of the knight’s sword as he tried to defend himself, and broke the enemy’s sword. With both of the enemies down, we all ran for it. We followed Jaye into the forest as he was the one with the map. As tired as we were we kept running; a few times I almost tripped because I was holding onto Mae. We kept running for about fifteen minutes, before Jaye signalled to us to slow down. “We’ll…be…okay here,” he gasped. “Huhh, look at…the map, Jaye,” I told him. “Where are we?”
Jaye took out the map and started to figure out where we
were. “It looks like we’ve stumbled upon an old mine shack.”
“Ugh! The mine shack, it’s part of the clue our parents left
us. Look.” I pulled out the letter we had found at our last
pitstop. It was a clue and, by the looks of it, we had found
another clue.

The letter read:

To our children that we love the most,
Our heart goes out to you all, you’ve done so well if
you’ve found this clue.
Hidden beneath a bunch of leaves you’ll find a dark
opening you must journey through;
Bring a lamp or a candle or two. Have enough food
and water to last you at least two weeks.
Your journey will be hard and emotional, but we know
you’ll make it. Bring lots of dry, warm clothes with you.
We’ll all meet again soon.
Much love,
Your Parents.

It says ‘journey through a dark opening’; this is the only dark
tunnel we’ve seen so far,” I stated.

“I guess; do we have enough food though? And warm
clothes? And water? And how about milk for Mae?” Mia
asked worriedly.

“We have enough food and water to last three weeks, and I
packed a lot of milk for Mae as well,” Dre answered. “I don’t
know about warm clothes though.”

“We have enough warm clothes to last us a while,” Jaye said.
“I had a gut feeling we’d need a few extra.”

“I guess we’re all organized. I’ve got us a lot of candles and
a lamp and matches. So, should we start heading in?” I
asked the group.

I hadn’t realized until now that Mae was asleep in my arms.

“We’ll rest for a bit. Take a nap, guys. Looks like we’re going
to be up all night,” Dre whispered. “We’ll set up camp and
take turns for lookout. I’ll be first.”

We made camp close to the mine, hidden behind a large
bush. I made a bed for Mae and I, consisting of blankets and
one small pillow. I wrapped my arms around Mae and cuddled
close to her; Jaye and Mia made their own beds around the
fire. Dre sat on a large rock, clutching onto his dagger.
It took me a while to fall asleep.

TO BE CONTINUED

If you’re living a life without giving
a F. Then you’re only living a LI[ ]E.
The wacky theory of evolution by Shyanne Burckett

Once upon a time, there was a dinosaur.
It laid an egg.
The egg hatched a human.
The human was bored so it laid an egg too.
The human died and went to heaven.
Then the egg hatched a turtle.
The turtle’s name was Mr Turtle.
Mr. Turtle was hungry so he ate the dinosaur.
He felt sick and threw up; in his puke was an egg.
Mr. Turtle was lonely so he left the egg and the egg was alone.
The egg hatched a bird, and the bird laid an egg and flew away.
The egg hatched a chicken.
The chicken was happy and laid two eggs.
One egg hatched a dolphin, but the dolphin had no water and it died.
Not long after that, the second egg hatched a llama.
The llama ate some grass and then choked on a seed and died.

So there was no-one left, but then Mr. Turtle came back.
Mr. Turtle had a bath and, while he had a bath, he laid an egg.
The egg was so big that, when it rolled over, it squished Mr. Turtle and Mr. Turtle died.
The egg then hatched twin crocodiles, but the two crocodiles had a fight and they split up.

One crocodile laid an egg and died.
Then the egg hatched a monkey.
The monkey danced for five days and was tired so it went to sleep.
When it woke up, there was an egg.
The monkey did not know what it was so he poked it with a stick.
The egg did not do anything so he started pounding it with a rock.

The egg finally hatched a lion.
The lion was angry at the monkey so he chased him up a tree.
The lion could not climb the tree so the monkey peed on the lion’s head.
The lion was so pissed off that he exploded into an egg!

The little monkey waited for the egg to hatch, but it didn’t hatch, so the monkey died.
Eventually, the egg hatched a pig; the pig had wings and flew around.
He suddenly spotted a round thingy; it was an egg!!!
The egg hatched an ant and the ant ate the piggy.

The ant was really fat but then it laid an egg and got skinny again, but then it had a seizure and died.
The lonely egg hatched an elephant.
The big fat lumpy elephant thought that he was a rhino and kept running into trees.
It laid an egg and died.
The egg hatched a wombat, the wombat laid an egg.
The egg hatched an emu.
The emu ate the wombat.

Then the egg laid an egg and died.
The egg was green.
The emu died.
The egg hatched a chimp.
The chimp then slowly evolved and eventually became a human

THE END
Opposite worlds  by Rachel Ferguson

The sticky summer’s heat of the Alabama lay upon Miss Milster’s backyard patio. The smell of rose hung about, casting a damp mist in the air. The folks around here always said that the Alabama had a sun of its own. Miss Milster sighed; it was hard being her, holding her status as, let’s face it, the queen of the whole town. Every woman here followed her beliefs, style, lifestyle and, most importantly, her opinion.

“Drink, Ma’am.”
Miss Milster was shaken from her thoughts of self-endearment. Her maid Cindy stood there with some homemade lemonade. She sat up from her lounge chair, beckoning Cindy to come closer so she didn’t have to stretch far. The coolness of the glass slid into Miss Milster’s hand, well away from the hand of her maid, but what distracted her was the maid’s shaky hands and the effect that the heatwave was having on her white skin.

“You should really put some sunscreen on Cindy, hmm?” Miss Milster wanted it to come across as an independent choice for her maid but it was more of an order. She liked the other town’s ladies to think she was a saint with her maids. Having Cindy walk around with sunburnt skin would give them the wrong idea.

“You skin’s much more vulnerable than mine,” she said while waving her black skin in the air, which had become a personal statement she made when trying to make Monica feel less, and the smell of her rose perfume filled her nostrils and made her woozy.

Monica was pulled out of her stance as the other woman gave up on trying to make Monica feel less, and the smell of her rose perfume filled her nostrils and made her woozy.

Horns clacked, people were shouting profanities, and the clackety clack of the woman’s heels behind Monica made a deafening sound, almost blocking out the morning rush. She could feel the disapproval boring into the back of her head. She stole a glance at both of the reflections in the passing shop windows. To outsiders it would seem as if they were just walking along the sidewalk, not in a hot pursuit. Monica saw her basic outfit of black jeans and a black shirt; she stood out on what was a colourful and trend-setting bypass. Monica could guess exactly what her shadow of disapproval was wearing without even having to look at her. Ankle-breaking heels, fur jacket, the latest Chanel LBD and the most expensive jewellery she could find. She oozed of her own personality, but, as Monica stole another glance, she saw that every other passerby showed who they were through their style; all bunched together, they all moulded into the same conformant. This was the other group of people, the people who dominated this city.

“I’ve never seen a sun like this here,” Miss Milster began to speak in a hushed tone. She stared at the woman’s hand she now held, vision fully back; Mora’s vision swayed and turned, the darkness slowly fading away. She searched for something to hold onto; her hands clasped another woman’s hands. She was sitting at a round table with a tablecloth with embroidery; candles of the colour rose were lit all around the room, filling it from corner to corner with the sweet smell. This scent brought her back to the different world she had just witnessed. Wide-eyed, she stared at the woman’s hand; she now held, vision fully back; this woman was withered, wearing a shawl that matched the same tablecloth, with a matching headband as well.

The woman sat there solemnly, studying Mora’s reaction. Miss Milestone gave up on her portrayal of modesty and just win her short and gracious diatribe.

“Great job, Miss Milestone! Your report on the excellency of our PM Selia Stillard and the commendable and gracious support of Johnny Pabbot will definitely catch the public’s eye and win their ongoing support for politics; your report is exactly how we write about that very topic here at this newspaper.” Miss Milestone blushed at the support and congratulations that her co-workers gave her after her editor finally finished his short and gracious diatribe.

Miss Milestone gave up on her portrayal of modesty and just grinned from ear to ear. She was proud of her newsworthy piece and drunk in the attention her co-workers so very generously gave her. One had been so excited that she baked a cake. She claimed it was a rose cake, swathed in frosting of the colour rose, with petals scattered on top.

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The woman sat there solemnly, studying Mora’s reaction. She began to speak in a hushed tone.

“What you saw today was what you sought. You said to me that this current world had holes in its beliefs, morals and ethics. What I showed you were different worlds to the one that we know. Even though the different world you wanted to see would seem more satisfying, there will always be problems. Which you witnessed today. Everything that is
different won’t always be better; we just believe that because it is different from the reality that we live in. And the reality is always unsatisfying, as not everything we dream of can be fitted into it. So we look to this different world, a theatrical composition of our minds, to be able to fit all our dreams in.

“What I showed you was the reality of these different worlds. The similarities still exist. A generational way of thinking may have been opposite but was still similar: the exclusion of people who do not fit into the norm. Even though that woman you saw may be classed as different in our world, in this different world she was normal and she was still conforming. The way in which the media portrays certain aspects of our country was reversed; even though it was pleasant compared to the media in our world, it was still very biased and was not giving the full portrayal to the public. A different world will still have flaws because humans will still exist in it.”
Wall
by Izik Nehow
I began creating a new world in my mind. When I closed my eyes, I was living in a perfect world, but when I opened my eyes again, I returned to cold and cruel reality. I detested reality, and reality loathed me.

“Mixing a normal life and one full of secrets can be dangerous.”
We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking up at the stars

by Alex Haynes

Recipient of second place in the Junior Image category

It's amazing how one piece of rubbish can change the whole world...
Another world, indeed by Krystal Humm

Joint recipient of second place in the Senior Fiction category

I was thirteen when it all started. My mother got sick, really sick and really fast. The doctors said it was cancer, and also that she’d left it too long and it was everywhere. Suddenly, mum was always at the hospital for treatments or tests and she always looked pale and weak when we visited. The last time dad talked to the doctors, he ended up crying and we were allowed to take mum out for the day. Dad drove us to the beach, where my parents watched me run around in the surf and mum laughed and smiled as she fed the seagulls. After that, we went to an all-you-can-eat restaurant and stuffed our faces with delicious food. Later that night, we went to the best restaurant in town, and dad didn’t let a penny go to waste. Once we were home I was half asleep, so dad lifted me and took me to my bed; mum lay beside me and stayed until I was asleep. Her frail body shook as she fell the seagulls.

A nurse came in and told them that they needed to go now. I lifted my head enough to look at her. “What’s wrong, baby girl?” I asked. “You’ll find out, sweetie,” he purred. “The rules are you can’t run, you can’t fight, you can’t hide, you can’t make noises and you can’t tell anyone.”

A few words like rape, child molestation and sexual abuse come to mind when I think about it. I lived with that for a few years before I went to live with my Aunty. She didn’t do anything to help and kept me in school even though my grades were dropping and I needed serious help. I turned to drinking, drugs, and started to cut myself with the broken glass of the beer bottles. My aunt got sick of it and kicked me out. I last a day on the streets before I moved back in with my dad, only to find he’d become an alcoholic in my absence, and a violent one, at that. When he found out that I had become a drinker too, he’d leave me unconscious on my bed after beating me and raping my limp form. We screamed at each other all the time; we had full-on brawls, no matter where we were or who we were with. I ended up repeating Year Ten and dropping out halfway through Year Eleven. No one cared about me anymore. No one bothered to come around and see why I wasn’t showing up. I was suddenly invisible to everyone; even my father didn’t see me as me anymore. When he looked at me, he saw my mother and he forgot that she’d died a few years back.

He looked at me; at first it was as if I shouldn’t exist and then it was like he’d found something, something good. “You do look an awful lot like your mother.” All of a sudden the air around him changed. I tried to get off his lap but he held me there. “Hey, baby girl.” I didn’t like the way he said it. He was looking at me different, the way he used to look at mama before they put me to bed and made an awful lot of noise in their bedroom. I used to think they were hurting each other but then I found out what they were doing. “Do you want to play a little game with daddy?”

“What kind of game, daddy?” my voice quivered a little. “You’ll find out, sweetie,” he purred. “The rules are you can’t run, you can’t fight, you can’t hide, you can’t make noises and you can’t tell anyone.”

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One night I tried to get rid of any photos of her but dad caught me and beat me within an inch of my life. Some neighbours called the cops, because they heard screaming and saw the silhouette of my dad and me fighting in the living room window.

I woke up the next morning in hospital. There was a bandage over one of my eyes and my whole body ached with both sharp and dull pains. It was as if there were knives all over my body and each one was being plunged into my skin. They went in at different speeds and different lengths for different times.

Nurses would always come in when I screamed out because of the nightmares or the pain or the confusion. One or two of them asked me what happened. I tried to tell them but the words kept choking in my throat as I heard my father’s voice in my head. “The rules are you can’t run, you can’t fight, you can’t hide, you can’t make noises and you can’t tell anyone.” Even when he wasn’t around, he stopped me! On the third week that I woke up, I stayed conscious long enough for the police to come in for about five minutes.

“Hello, Miss Franklin, we have a few questions for you, if you feel up to answering them.” The officer showed me a picture of my father. “Is this your father, David Franklin?” I nodded weakly. “Did he do this to you?”

My eyes welled up and I looked away. My body was starting to hurt again. Breathing deeply was out of the picture but I tried to take as deep a breath as I could. I nodded, again. “What else did he do to you?”

I whimpered and looked away, tears spilling over my eyelids. A nurse came in and told them that they needed to go now and I let the morphine take me away. I was out of it before my eyes even closed.
I dreamed of a castle, a great, big castle that shot straight through the clouds. There were so many rooms. All of these unopened doors, and the open ones, were home to horrible monsters, terrible memories and things best left alone. I found myself running down the hallway until I came to a huge staircase, with stairs leading towards the heavens until all you could see was a tiny little dot. Taking a step towards it, I felt a hard hand in the middle of my back shove me forward. It made me jump, but I began clambering up the stairs as quickly as I could, trying to reach the tiny speck in the distance.

I try to reach this point even though I know it’s unreachable. It seems to be getting further away so I start running. The faster I run, the further away it gets. The stairs turn into something like an escalator and suddenly I’m being transported down, away from my goal. Sweat is pouring over my face by the bucketload and I try to run faster. No matter how fast I run, I’m still in the same place. My feet slow to a stop and I am transported to the bottom of the staircase, where I started. Unfortunately, it doesn’t end there. At the very bottom, my shoe lace is caught. I can’t get it untied.

Shaking. Someone is shaking me. They have me by the shoulder and they’re waking me up. I try to reach this point even though I know it’s unreachable. It seems to be getting further away so I start running. The faster I run, the further away it gets. The stairs turn into something like an escalator and suddenly I’m being transported down, away from my goal. Sweat is pouring over my face by the bucketload and I try to run faster. No matter how fast I run, I’m still in the same place. My feet slow to a stop and I am transported to the bottom of the staircase, where I started. Unfortunately, it doesn’t end there. At the very bottom, my shoe lace is caught. I can’t get it untied.

As the week passed, I slipped in and out of consciousness, and although I sailed through nightmares, there was still the real world to come back to. I still couldn’t decide which was worse.

Eventually, the cold sweats, the body-shudders and the excruciating headaches went away. Finally, the nurses said I was free to go. I didn’t know where to go and when I knocked on my aunt’s door, she didn’t open it. I went back to my dad’s and found that he wasn’t there. A letter was in the mailbox. It was the electricity bill. I had the sudden urge to get out of the suburb and get my life back together.

First thing I did was look in the paper for a job: not a place to live, a job. I could live in my dad’s house for a few more days, I supposed, until I could get my own place. But there were many horrible memories in dad’s house.

Walking to the kitchen on the first night, I checked the fridge for food. Finding an apple, I took several bites as I walked around the house. I finished it just as I came to my bedroom door. I tossed it into the bin and shuffled over to my bed. Sitting down, I moved to the corner, like I usually did, and pulled my knees up to my chin. There wasn’t even a tear and that was different; I just sat there. Waiting. That’s what I was doing. Every other time I sat here it was only a matter of time before daddy dearest came in and — well, let’s stop there.

A few minutes later, I heard a clattering outside. Walking over to investigate, I was stopped by a hand reaching out from the window and wrapping its fat, sausage fingers around my throat. My father was back. He threw me onto my bed and I clutched my throat, trying to regain my breath. As I tried to crawl towards the door, my dad grabbed me by the hair and threw me into my wardrobe.

“You WHORE! WHO DID YOU TELL?” He bellowed at me while I cowered in the corner. “IT WAS ONE OF THE RULES OF DADDY’S LITTLE GAME, YOU BROKE IT!” He paused to punch me in the face until I was on the floor, and then he started kicking me. “TELL. ME! WHO. DID. YOU. TELL. SKANK? WHO. DID. YOU. TELL?” He punctuated each word with a rib-breaking kick.

“I DIDN’T TELL ANYONE!” I screamed. I was bleeding. The horrible taste of iron was in my mouth and when I wiped away the tears, I saw blood. “I SWEAR I DIDN’T! PLEASE, STOP IT!”

He kicked me a few more times and colourful dots danced across the room. I waited for the pain to fade away with the room, like usual, but somehow I stayed conscious. I heard a door bang open and people shouting; flashlights illuminated little bits of the room. Dad didn’t stop kicking me until someone tackled him; even then he tried to hit me. It took five officers to hold down his flailing limbs; three of them held me back while trying to keep me away from their guns. I didn’t care that I was only half conscious, didn’t care that I couldn’t see properly, either; he had to pay, with blood or with his life.

It was a couple weeks later that I sat in court and watched as my father was charged. I watched as he was escorted out of the courtroom in ‘cuffs. His eyes were angry, they were hurt and they were sad. Ever since mum had died, he had looked at me as though I was her, and the thing that now stood out most about his features was agony and confusion. He looked me in the eye as he passed me. “Why did it have to be her? Why couldn’t it have been you? We’d’ve been happy without you.” Tears were spilling out of my father’s and my eyes.
I felt the familiar tug in my chest when I thought about my mother.

“This is your fault!”

Unconsciously, I clenched my fists. “No, it wasn’t! You brought this on yourself, you stupid, pathetic fuckwit! I’m not going to let you blame me for something that I had no control over! You’re a worthless piece of shit! Eight years isn’t long enough!” I watched as he struggled to get out of his restraints to get to me, to punch me, kick me.

“I’ll kill you! You stupid slut!” And just like that, he was out of the doors and, I decided, out of my life forever.

“Miss Franklin?” asked a voice behind me.

I turned to face it. There was a small, mousy little man with greasy brown hair that looked like it hadn’t been washed for years. His teeth were yellowing and his breath smelled faintly of day-old bourbon.

“Miss Franklin, I’m your mother’s lawyer. Your father would not allow me to read your mother’s will and I accepted that because he was grieving. I’ve only now got the chance to tell you that she left you everything. Her house, all the furniture, and now, I believe, you are entitled to your inheritance.”

I stood still for a moment. Staring at the strange looking man in front of me with complete disbelief, I sat down on the bench behind me.

“Your mother has left you fifteen thousand dollars and requested that you keep your father away from the money. I guess that won’t be too much of a problem anymore, right?” He chuckled and I stared at him with my mouth hanging open. Fifteen thousand! “Anyway, Miss Franklin, if you’d excuse me, I have to see another client. Tomorrow morning, I’ll get someone to send a letter containing more information and a copy of your mother’s will. Goodbye and good luck!”

Smiling, he turned on his heel and left.

I had always said I had to get out of here and within the next week or two, I’d make sure I was in Italy eating spaghetti and enjoying myself for the first time in a long time. Nothing would stop me; I was going to live because, even though at times it feels like the world’s ending, there’s always going to be a tomorrow.
King Leoric stood proudly atop a stone balcony situated at the peak of his castle, gazing down at the land that was his kingdom — the Kingdom of Icaria. He glanced out towards the sparkling sunrise, seeing his industrious city standing tall and proud, his people commencing in the busy markets, and his kingdom’s flag raised high, indicating strength, power and prosperity.

A distant ringing was heard from the castle’s gigantic clock tower, which stretched impossibly high towards the clouds. The bells marked the arrival of the next hour. The sound of footsteps echoed from the seemingly endless spiral stairwell and seconds later a servant appeared, standing at attention.

“Speak,” Leoric said, acknowledging the servant.

“You Majesty, the morning meal has been prepared,” the servant said, avoiding eye contact.

“Ah yes, thank you.” Leoric began to head down to the feasting hall but noticed that the servant was rooted to his spot, nervously awaiting orders. “You are dismissed,” he told him as he began the long descent.

Fallen kingdom  
by Thomas Kong

Rage. Anger. Hate. Many unspeakable, inhuman thoughts raced through its mind. Bound by sophisticated arcane spells, the odds of it escaping were nearly impossible. The common populace had forgotten it even existed. But soon it would get its revenge — on Icaria, the kingdom, and especially King Leoric. The demon would have scowled at the thought of Leoric’s name if it had a mouth. It would put Leoric through ultimate suffering — and personally tearing that imbecile’s heart out from his chest once it had finished. But first, it needed to escape.

Over the time it had been imprisoned, the demon had slowly worn away a microscopic portion of the magical barricade. This gap was now just large enough for it to send out a tendril of its power. It reached out with its malicious will, seeking a host. There! A weak, unknowing human. It mentally prodded his mind. Perfect, no resistance. It took the opportunity and forcefully entered the young man’s body.

Icaria was a peaceful land. There had never been a major conflict since the Upheaval — a nightmare in which a group of doomsday cultists had awakened a malicious evil which threatened the wellbeing of Icaria. But the cultists had been defeated long ago, and the evil sealed away for eternity — or so everyone thought. The evil would soon reawaken, and return with a vengeance.

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Startled, the man awoke, his breathing shallow.

“Just a bad dream,” he told himself, “just a bad dream...”

The young adult’s name was Lucifer, a lowly guard stationed at the Soul Prism — a basin of magical energy which kept the great demon at bay. Lucifer had always wondered why he needed to defend the mystical prison. The constrictive powers were inescapable, so no one could ever hope of escaping.

In fact, the only way the imprisoning barrier could fall was to kill the mighty wizard who maintained it. For an outsider, finding the magician’s quarters was a feat in itself. Built around the Soul Prism was an impenetrable, entrenched fortress. Underneath were many labyrinthine passages where one unfamiliar with the winding tunnels could get lost for days. Additionally, dozens of armed guards like himself defended the wizard with their lives.

His mind now comforted by those thoughts, Lucifer began to doze off.

Shortly after he lost consciousness, the demon lurking inside him surged into his brain, destroying Lucifer’s mind instantly. Then, controlling Lucifer’s lifeless body, it forced the guard’s rag-doll-like form to rise. Unsheathing his sword, he crept silently through several winding tunnels until reaching an iron door, which was slightly ajar. He carefully pushed the unguarded door open, and stood over the slumbering wizard. He grinned malevolently to himself and plunged his razor-sharp sword into the snoring mage’s chest.

Freedom! Sweet, sweet freedom! The demon literally catapulted out of its now shattered cage, flying into the glimmering moonlight. Its senses now flooding back, it could almost taste Leoric’s blood in the air. Returning to the dark confines of the castle, the demon fully embedded its life-force into Lucifer’s pale corpse. Lucifer’s eyes began to emanate a blood red glow, full of hate for Leoric. Demonic energies surged through his body, which slowly began to mutate. Moments later, the once puny guard had been transformed into a malicious winged demon. Lucifer flexed his new bulging muscles with wicked content.

“Your end draws near, King Leoric!” Lucifer snarled menacingly.

Icaria was a peaceful land. There had never been a major conflict since the Upheaval — a nightmare in which a group of doomsday cultists had awakened a malicious evil which threatened the wellbeing of Icaria. But the cultists had been defeated long ago, and the evil sealed away for eternity — or so everyone thought. The evil would soon reawaken, and return with a vengeance.
“Sir...” Leoric reluctantly forced his eyes open to the gentle shaking of his royal advisor. Leoric grudgingly rubbed his eyelids and sat up in his luxurious four-poster bed. “What demands my attention at this hour?” Leoric enquired sleepily. “With all due respect sir,” his advisor started, “you may not believe me until you see this yourself...” He beckoned towards the nearby balcony, motioning for Leoric to follow. With a new sense of curiosity, Leoric pushed off his quilt and walked toward his nervous advisor. His advisor pointed at something. “Look,” he said, his voice full of dread. Leoric’s eyes followed the direction of his advisor’s gesture, and then he saw it. He was lost for words. An entire portion of his kingdom’s outer walls had vanished; smoking debris was strewn in its place. He could faintly hear the agonised screams of his people, the growling of some otherworldly beasts and the distinct, booming laugh that could only belong to one being. Leoric thought he had ridded Icaria of that bloodthirsty brute some good twenty years ago, not long after he had been crowned king. He squinted and confirmed his worst fears. The leading creature had taken on its favourite manifestation. Leoric could never forget that winged devil, not in a thousand years. The creature paused, then glanced up at Leoric. A look of pure contempt was painted across its demonic visage. A chill raced down Leoric’s spine. He had better act fast. Thousands would die if this menace was allowed to run rampant.

Leoric turned to his advisor and said, “Gather the wizards, knights and anyone strong enough to fight, and tell them to find me in the meeting hall.” With those words, he turned and hurried down the spiral staircase.

“It is decided then; we will meet the offensive head on,” Leoric announced to the determined faces of his best soldiers and mages. There was a murmur of agreement amongst the crowd.

As the rallied knights braced themselves for the coming confrontation, a lone man stepped out of the mass of warriors and stood next to Leoric. It was Prince Jaffre, the King’s son. Barely out of his teens, he was slightly shorter than Leoric. Although he had a bony, fragile frame, he was already a dashing young man, more than fit to take over from Leoric as king in the future.

“Father,” Jaffre said, looking Leoric straight in the eye, “I wish to fight.” Leoric raised an eyebrow. “You want to join the battle, son?” “Yes,” Jaffre replied confidently. Leoric thought for a moment, then decided. “No, I will not permit you. You barely have any training with a sword, let alone any real combat experience.” “What!” the prince cried out. “I can handle myself!” “No, I have already decided. It is far too dangerous.” Leoric shook his head, “Just know that I am doing this for your own safety.” The young prince choked on what could nearly be tears, then turned and fled from Leoric’s sight.

King Leoric, now dressed in full bronze plate armour and wielding an enchanted diamond-forged sword, stood at the entrance to Icaria’s inner city. He warily analysed the demonic legion’s slow advance. Behind him were a hundred strong warriors, armed to the teeth with swords, shields, longbows and various other weapons, all anxiously awaiting his command. Sir Bastion, the captain of the Knights of Icaria, eyed the approaching army with dread. “Do you think we can repel this threat?”

Grand Mage Sarus answered in an equally nervous voice, “Possibly. If we can achieve perfect unison in our actions, we may have the strength to overcome these foul beasts.” “Be wary,” Leoric warned. “They are nearing our location.”

The otherworldly demons were edging close enough to make out their features. Razor-sharp teeth, vicious claws and talons, wicked horns, spiked tails — the list went on. The demons had a wide variety of mutations. Leoric gripped his sword tightly in anticipation. He felt his adrenaline levels beginning to rise.

The demonic army stopped just short of their position. Lucifer glared straight at Leoric with absolute hate in his eyes. “Leoric!” he snarled. “For twenty years I have been imprisoned by your order! But now, I will bathe in your blood! Charge, my minions!”

The demons responded instantly, letting out a blood-curdling battle cry and commencing a charge towards the gathered troops.

“Archers!” Leoric yelled.

Moments after Leoric gave the word, a rain of arrows pelted the incoming foes, disrupting their ranks. Several bodies fell, but they were quickly lost under the approaching swarm. The sound of frenzied shrieks filled the air. The demons at the head of the charge began lashing out with their claws at any humans within range. The knights brought up their shields and braced themselves against the onslaught.
At that point, it officially became a royal bloodbath. The battle was a blur of movement, blood, screams and death. Leoric had felled roughly two score of the wretched creatures himself, but they seemed to never end. For every demon he decapitated, a dozen more jostled for the newly vacated position. His shield had already been mangled beyond recognition and he had suffered many minor injuries. His line of knights was slowly faltering. The remaining contingent of archers had fallen under a barrage of magical missiles fired by demonic warlocks. The dwindling wizards were already exhausted from the casting of countless spells. After what seemed to be an eternity of fighting, Leoric was losing hope. He was in no condition to fight anymore; he was bruised, bleeding and fatigued. Then, the impossible occurred.

He saw from the corner of his eye an armoured figure race from the rear and hurl a silvery object at the enemy ranks. It embedded itself in a faceless, robed creature, which gurgled and fell lifeless to the ground.

The effect was instantaneous. About half of the demons had dissipated. A summoner! Leoric realised. Lucifer had enslaved a warlock to conjure a demonic portal to transport demons from the underworld. But now, with the connection severed, the demons could not remain in the physical world. A new hope burning in his chest, Leoric rallied his troops and marched forward, cleaving the remaining demons with renewed vigour. In moments, the only thing standing between him and Lucifer was a handful of lesser demons. Leoric stepped forward and, with a flick of his wrist, sliced a demon clean in half. His advancing knights followed suit and disposed of the rest of the monstrosities.

Lucifer witnessed the last of his demons fall to the hand of his human nemesis. “No! I will not be defeated by the hands of a puny human a second time!” Lucifer began to radiate a crimson glow, channelling all of his rage and energy into a single, concentrated orb of magic. His physical body melted away and transferred all of its power to the orb, which grew larger and more intense. Suddenly, without warning, it launched itself at Leoric.

This was it. Leoric closed his eyes and embraced his inevitable end.

Leoric’s eyes snapped open to the sound of a loud, agonised scream from the anonymous armoured figure before him. The brave warrior had leapt in front of the orb’s trajectory before it could strike Leoric. His helmet fell from his head and Leoric gasped — the knight was Prince Jaffre, his son!

“No!” A shout left Leoric’s lips as he sprinted towards his son’s prone body.

“Careful!” Grand Mage Sarus warned. “His body may be corrupted by demonic energies!”

“Be silent!” Leoric yelled at Sarus.

Jaffre’s skin had completely drained of colour.

“Get a healer!” Leoric yelled in desperation. He couldn’t bear the thought of losing his son. Moments later, a few specialised alchemists whisked Jaffre’s unmoving body up to the castle.

For many days they worked on him, but to no avail. The prince’s condition seemed to be worsening each passing day. The king had confined himself to his chambers, refusing to leave or let anyone in.

Leoric wiped the hundredth tear from his damp cheek. It was the fifth day since the conflict with Lucifer. The kingdom had been saved and thousands of lives had been spared, but at the cost of his only son. Leoric had forgone the prospects of eating and bathing, constantly reflecting that he should have been the one to die, not Jaffre.

He was interrupted by an abrupt knock on his door.

“Go away,” Leoric shouted.

Against his wishes, the door opened. Leoric looked up and almost leapt with joy.

Prince Jaffre stood at the doorway, a little pale but upright, traces of a weak smile on his face. Leoric rushed over and pulled him into a deep embrace.

Suddenly, Leoric felt a sharp pain in his back; he cried out in shock. The relief that his son had returned from the dead was instantly replaced with horror when he realised Jaffre had shoved a knife into his back.

Leoric dropped to the carpet, as blood pooled out from his stab wound. “Why?” he wailed. “Why, Jaffre?”

“Because,” Jaffre replied with a twisted smile, “I am no longer your son, for I am Lucifer!”

“No...!” Leoric cried. His mind was going fuzzy from blood loss.

“IT feels good to finally triumph over my greatest nemesis,” Jaffre — no, Lucifer — said as he licked the knife.

Leoric remembered when Sarus warned him of the demonic influence that may have possessed Jaffre, but he had waved it off and now...he was paying the ultimate price. He had failed his kingdom, all because he could not accept the fact that he had lost his son.

“Any last words?” Lucifer leered at the weakened king kneeling before him.

“Make it quick,” was all Leoric could muster.

“As you wish.” Lucifer raised his knife and stabbed it through Leoric’s heart. The king gasped as he coughed out blood. Then he finally succumbed to pain and all went dark.
And in another world
by Emily Doan
I have seen unspeakable things in my life: so many, in fact, that I often wonder how I came to see such strange sights, such tormenting scenes with my own two eyes. They’re heterochromatic, if you were wondering; a shade the sky itself would grow to unconditionally desire. And with them, as I sashay quickly through the dark, dust-infested streets of East London, I absorb the harsh realities of a world so unlike its predecessor — the silent misgivings of those poor enough to wind up in these parts.

You see, in this world, the rich get precisely what they want and the poor suffer under the rule of those fortunate enough to climb higher on the ladder of social hierarchy: doctors, scientists, socialites...They’re all the same. But me, I don’t care for constraints or expectations. In my world, the rules are simple: kill or be killed. Whether it be the personalities battling for dominance in the darkest reaches of my conscious mind, or any thug, criminal or two-timing jezebel willing to get in my way, I don’t intend to play ‘house’ for the higher-ups, and I sure as hell don’t intend to let some standard issue ‘tall, dark and handsome’ man stop me from getting the treatment I deserve. To be honest, I don’t know how I’ve lasted thus far, what with the mental strain of housing over fifteen downright conflicting characters in one tiny, not-quite-stable-yet-stable-enough nutshell. And that brings me to my current state of affairs.

“Tell me where he is,” I hiss through clenched teeth, lips curling in a pointed snarl as I bite out another threat.

“If you don’t want it painful...” he warns, a furtive glance over his shoulder. His ambrosial scent in rolling waves. This warmth, though somewhat, withdrawing from this omnipotent display of seduction. He utterly destroys the space between us in order to steal my gaze, my unwavering attention, and I swallow thickly, tasting his familiar, is unwelcome.

He utterly destroys the space between us in order to steal my gaze, my unwavering attention, and I swallow thickly, tasting his familiar, is unwelcome.

“You aren’t about to give in, either. I can see it in your eyes.” His lips flutter like moth’s wings against my own, his eyes suspended in a limbo between my mouth and the gun. He knows the wrong answer will result in a deliciously gory death; in fact, I’m fairly sure he can taste it by now.

Red flows readily from the opened wound, and he curses frenziedly with cracking lips, eyes suspended in a limbo between my mouth and the gun. He knows the wrong answer will result in a deliciously gory death; in fact, I’m fairly sure he can taste it by now.

“Tell me what you know and I’ll endeavour to make this as painless as possible.”

He shakes at my icy tone, feeling the gun’s barrel glaring like a second set of eyes. Though, in reality, seventeen pairs are on him right now, including the cheap firearm I have commandeered from an ex-cop.

“I already told you. I—I don’t know.”

“Wrong answer.”

The contraption rouses in a brief cacophony of sound and light, skewing away the lingering silence as a guttural shriek tears through the stale, night air. Bullet shatters bone, splitting muddy flesh and imbedding the irreplaceable bite of heat into skin that has seen better days.

“I won’t ask again.” Agitation defines the tone with which I issue the command. “Where is he?”

Red flows readily from the opened wound, and he curses frenziedly with cracking lips, eyes suspended in a limbo between my mouth and the gun. He knows the wrong answer will result in a deliciously gory death; in fact, I’m fairly sure he can taste it by now.

“Tell me where he is,” he blubbers unintelligibly, rubbing at a balding scalp with bloodied fingers. Sanity has all but left him by now.

“I don’t know who you’re talking about!” he denies hotly, so much as daring to meet my gaze with a less than steady one.

“Wrong answer.”

His eyes speak nothing but betrayal.

“I already told you. I—I don’t know.”

“Wrong answer.”

Red flows readily from the opened wound, and he curses frenziedly with cracking lips, eyes suspended in a limbo between my mouth and the gun. He knows the wrong answer will result in a deliciously gory death; in fact, I’m fairly sure he can taste it by now.

“Wrong answer.”

Forcing Death’s hand once more, I glance down the slender barrel, feeling nothing short of impatience as the man burbles prayer after prayer to any merciful god willing to listen.

A hollow, very nearly pretentious gurgle escapes my lips before I have the chance to snatch it away. It’s all quite pathetic, really.

An otherworldly howl escapes the gun’s clutches, cueing the man to droop like a wilting flower, but a distant voice distracts me from these enigmatic moments of accomplishment. It’s twisted, I know.

“That was rather harsh, even for you,” his silky voice declares smoothly — too smoothly for my liking, and I start cynically, twisting on the balls of my feet to face the man I seek so vigorously, so hopelessly that every fibre of my being deceives me in desiring him. After all, he is the reason I’m out here, wading knee-deep through the hierarchy’s leftovers.

“I’m disappointed in you,” he berates softly, slinking closer with long, fluent strides. They are predatory, scarcely human in nature, and they match the lustful heat burning amid the shadowed depths of his eyes. “You’ve been off chasing ghosts again, haven’t you?”

He utterly destroys the space between us in order to steal my gaze, my unwavering attention, and I swallow thickly, tasting his ambrosial scent in rolling waves. This warmth, though familiar, is unwelcome.

“You aren’t about to give in, either. I can see it in your eyes.” His lips flutter like moth’s wings against my own, uncomfortably close yet not close enough, and I flinch pretentiously, withdrawing from this omnipotent display of seduction.

“Don’t touch me,” I manage feebly, drawing the dagger belted at my wait with an evasive growl.

A touch of amusement invades his expression, a slight pinch of the lips veiled behind a fractured smile, and I can’t help but sneer in unadulterated contempt. He’s provoking me.

Kaleidoscope by Samantha Pinnington

Write Now 2013 anthology
“You and I, we aren’t so different,” he spits arrogantly, conquering the blade primed at his abdomen. “In fact, if I recall correctly, I am you.”

It glistens, thin and plain beneath the waning moon, with a ghostly pallor uncannily similar to the very skin clinched at its hilt, and suddenly I am hyperaware of my surroundings: the distant rattle of the twelve o’clock to Limehouse, the unmistakable aroma of brine and smog overflowing from the north bank of the River Thames and the musky scent of gunpowder on recently pressed satin brocade.

And, in the blink of an eye, the bat of two dubiously smudged lashes, one premeditated flourish of steel wipes it all away. The dagger lances silken skin, drawing blood at the corners of my lips and a gargled splutter of terror bathed red. For a moment, reality wheels like the colours of a kaleidoscope: bright and hopeful and naïve... But I can no longer see the weapon, nor my executioner — the very man who had lost himself amongst the oceans of my eyes; where, in his place, remains nothing.

I know he is real; the bitter-sweet pressure of his lips and the dangerous glint in his eyes are as real to me, dear reader, as the air I breathe. At least... I believe them to be. But the words slithering into my ears, hard and sharp like ice, do not leave the mouth dangling precariously within my periphery. Rather, they leave my head in vague whispers: insistent, maddening, but, most of all, alien.

And I rouse myself suddenly amongst a snarl of sheets to find my clothes damp with the blood of a stranger I knew for all of five minutes.
As the sun expands: Part I

by Curtis Woods

Worn solid metal clinked and clanged as those never-ending gears turned, each in perfect synchronisation. They were of a short-lived legend; they were the gears that kept one of the last remaining human space craft moving through the dark starlit vastness of space. The year was MMCXII and the Earth had been destroyed. Those blasted scientists, getting all of their damned research wrong, had told us that the sun would expand billions of years into the future, but no, it had to happen when I was alive.

I thought that my life was a normal, dull and boring life. Nothing special ever happened. I had dropped out of school when I was in Year 11. I found it boring; nothing ever seemed to make me wonder anymore, nothing ever seemed to make me ask, “Why? How does that work? How does that function?” The only thing I could focus on was writing. Not any type of writing: creative writing, writing fiction. Yes, you can say I was in escapist mode, at least that’s what some bloody therapist told me. Therapy, hah!

I didn’t need therapy, my stupid foster parents obviously didn’t realise that I had already seen the world for what it was: boring! Everything is explained, nothing is ever new! A small discovery that I would make in a Science subject used to excite me until I was told that it was the expected result; yeah, that’d be right, someone’s already done it!

I wrote my own stories, with their own logic, their own history; things were how I made them. Those word documents quickly built up, taking up space on my storage history; things were how I made them. Those word documents quickly built up, taking up space on my storage devices; it wouldn’t surprise me if I was the fastest keyboard typist in the world, typing away on my small, fifteen inch computer tablet.

Anyway, it all started one year in June, the fifteenth to be exact; I was walking alone through the smoggy stench of the slums in the giant state called Adelaide. I had heard that it used to be a city, but that it had slowly but surely expanded to encompass the whole of what they used to call South Australia. The area I lived in was called Salisbury; it was, back in the past, a very nice, well-kept council area (oh yeah, did I forget to mention that I know my history, history and creative writing are definitely the two things that I love about my crap life). So, Salisbury used to be a beautiful place to live, but that all changed when the state government got rid of local governments. Oh, for sure they made the City of Adelaide such a wondrous and amazing city, but they forgot about everywhere else. Damn governments. The stench didn’t get to me because, I suppose you could say, I was used to it; yeah, that’s probably not a good thing, but some of the things that are not good for us and that we still do make it seem very small in comparison.

I usually took walks through Salisbury because they helped me think; they helped me think of some new ideas that I could write about, something that I had not yet thought of. On this particular day, I was thinking of something evil, something that would make whoever read it feel uncomfortable and make their innards squirm; I was distracted, however, and never put (as they said in the old days) the idea to paper. The distraction that actually caught my attention was, believe it or not (not much seems to catch my attention these days), a commercial that was on the giant panel that had been built where some old eight cinema complex had been. The commercial was telling people to come to this underground shelter as the scientists had got it wrong; the sun was going to expand within the next ten days. This worried me as I had always been sceptical of such things as what these ‘brilliant’ scientists had said. I noticed a lot of people looking at the commercial and saying to the person next to them, “What a load of crap!”

This, funnily enough, would probably be what my dumb foster parents would say.

I began to walk home at a quicker pace then my usual walk, passing those houses with boarded-up windows and broken fences, past those people sitting in gutters asking for a spare couple of dollars. I had to see what my foster parents thought about this commercial; despite what they said, I had already made up my mind about going to this underground shelter.

“Mum! Dad! Where the bloody hell are you two?” I yelled annoyingly.

Dad walked into the living room where I was standing and spat an insult back to me. “Don’t you dare speak to us like that, you ungrateful slob!”

I replied with a simple, “Thank you for those kind words father, oh and I’m sorry...?”

“You bloody better be, Mate!” he said.

“So, have you and Mum seen that commercial about the underground shelter yet?” I asked him.

“Of course we have seen it and we think it’s bullshit. We’re sure as hell staying put and you are too.”

I looked around the living room; two eighteen inch tablets lay on the mangled couch, powered on, and the TV panel was flashing different colours. Not much had changed in the short few hours that I had gone for a walk.

I replied to Dad’s stupid statement. “I don’t think so, I’m seventeen and I’m leaving to go to that shelter. I want something interesting to happen and leaving you two here would give me a better chance at something. Besides, I’ve been thinking of moving out anyway.”

“Is that so?” called Mum as she too walked into the living room. “Well, if you think that then go, you stupid boy.”

That threw me off guard a bit when she said that, but I knew they hated me, just as much as I hated them.

“I’ll just be grabbing my stuff and going then; don’t try to stop me,” I replied calmly, expecting them to think that I would change my mind.
I walked alone once again, my clothes and other personal belongings such as my fifteen inch computer tablet neatly organised in my MicroBag. (The MicroBag is a bag that fits into your pocket. You can store pretty much anything in it; it was invented by Microsoft, and Apple Inc. have their own version called the iBag.) My feet kicked away the occasional scrap, or moved to dodge the dog shit from when some arsehole had deliberately let his dog take a dump there and not cleaned it up. Dusk was fast approaching and I was still about thirty kilometres away from the underground shelter; I decided that if I was to get to the underground shelter safely, I would have to use Adelaide’s sad excuse for a metro system. I waited at the nearby old bus-stop with the faded sign and broken glass, hoping that a bus still stopped at this particular stop. Sure enough, about fifteen minutes later I could see lights struggling to break through the smog; unfortunately, as it got closer I realised it was a car. It pulled over; the car was an old red Holden Commodore VE X12H. A man with a fuzzy afro and black round glasses got out; he was wearing a stained lab coat. Oh great, a freaky scientist!

He looked around and then walked straight to his bonnet; he barely stood level with the bumper. Haha, I thought, maybe he forgot to switch the car off properly so it is still in hover mode. He was extremely short, so maybe that could have been it as well. He hadn’t noticed me yet, so I decided to make myself known.

“Um, excuse me sir, need help?” I asked. He jumped at the sound of my voice; I swear he probably nearly saw the front of the engine that he was trying to fix. The little scientist turned towards where I was sitting and looked over the top of those huge black rimmed glasses. “Uh Um, who’s there? I can’t see a thing,” he replied in a squeaky, croaking voice.

“Uh, hello, my name is Emerson…uh, um, I’m sat at the bus stop, waiting for the bus,” I replied with uncertainty.

“Oh, well, please do move closer, I can’t see you!” called the scientist, now a bit excited. I got up off the bench and moved closer to the red Holden. “Oh wow, you’re a tall one!” exclaimed the tiny man. “I would very much appreciate it if you could help me; I know how to fix it, it is just that I have trouble seeing what I am doing!” he added, with excitement building.

“Oh, well, seeing as there doesn’t seem to be a bus in sight, I might as well help you…” I replied.

The tiny fuzzy haired man ran around to the back seat of the car and lifted out a toolbox roughly the size of his own body. “The tools are in here; just do exactly as I say and we should have it working again!” He passed the toolbox to me. The scientist seemed to be taking note of how I looked as I was fixing his car.

“You’re a curious one aren’t you?” I asked him as I checked the energy conductor.

“Ah, yes, I suppose I am. Strange, your clothing, I don’t believe I have seen a teenager donning the clothes of the early twenty-first century before.” Obviously he was referring to my denim blue jeans, white t-shirt and sport striped jacket.

“My shoes aren’t from the early twenty-first century though,” I stated as I pointed down to my red Converse All Stars.

“Oh yes! So they aren’t! I’m guessing twentieth century then?” he asked with enthusiasm.

“Yeah, twentieth century,” I replied.

After about twenty minutes of tinkering with the fuzzy afro scientist’s car, it began to work again.

“Oh, thank you!” said the man. “I do believe you said you’re waiting for a bus?” he asked, gazing over to the bus stop.

“Yeah, but I don’t think the blasted thing is coming…” I replied.

The man obviously detected the annoyance in my tone and asked, “How about I give you a lift to wherever it is you want to go? It’s the least I can do after you took your time to help fix my car!”

I thought it over for a minute. It was reasonably dark now and it would probably be safer if I did, especially with those damn darkness-dwelling flesh-eating birds that came out at night.

“Okay then. I’m heading towards that underground shelter, to do with the sun-expanding business.”

“Oh ho!” replied the tiny man enthusiastically. “That too is where I am heading. It will be no bother!”

And with that I jumped into the passenger’s seat of the car and my journey continued to the underground shelter, with the occasional mutated bird flying into the back or front windscreen of the car.

And the sun just barely visible over the horizon, with what was left of that warm glowing orange now moving among buildings as if being collected by the shadows. As the car moved smoothly around a circular building, a moss-covered opening with a dim light could be seen. “That there is the entrance to the shelter,” said the tiny man excitedly.

It didn’t look like much of a shelter, but I had this gut feeling that if something was to happen, then I would be in the safest place possible. As the car pulled up about five metres away from the entrance to the shelter, I opened the door slowly, half-expecting a giant mutated bird to swoop and half-expecting to see the little man already at my feet with his fuzzy hair and stained lab coat.

The little man was already waiting at the entrance. “Over here!” he called enthusiastically.

As I walked over to the man, the dim light started changing and shapes started to form. “What the hell?” was the first thing I said as I got closer to the entrance. Inside of the entrance was what looked like a giant television panel with a bright red LED display. It was counting down; at that moment it stated that there were nine days, ten hours and forty-two minutes until expansion.

As we trekked further down the long hallway, I thought about what I was going to do, and wondered, if the sun did expand, how would we survive? A mere underground shelter would definitely not be enough.
“You have got to be joking!” was what I yelled out as I saw a huge metal spacecraft being prepared for launch. I thought that if the sun expanded and we were underground we’d be fine; oh, I was so wrong to assume that. I followed the tiny man around nervously; I asked his name as I never actually had before, and he told me it was Adalbert Sparks and he was currently looking for his daughter.

“Oh my god...” was what I quietly mumbled to myself when I saw Adalbert’s daughter; she was probably the first girl ever to catch my eye. I’d say she was about five foot ten, with dark brown hair and baby blue eyes; just by looks, I could tell she wasn’t one of them stupid old hags that walk around Elizabeth offering god knows what for money. She was beautiful. My mind went kind of weird as if I was watching myself; when her father introduced her to me, all I could say was a small hello. All I could think of after was an image of myself, like a sport coach, yelling Emerson, what the hell are you doing, get your head back in the game!

The next few days after my embarrassing hello to Shiloh, I managed to start talking to her more normally; we ended up becoming quite good friends. Not only was I forming a friendly relationship with Shiloh, but I had been introduced to several people, including the spacecraft commander known as Brandon. He had everyone call him Bran for short. He was a sort of no-nonsense type of person, the real typical kind of leader; he had the typical military haircut and a muscular build, and his eyes were always burning with determination.

In the short nine days I spent at the underground shelter, I not only helped Bran with washing some of his clothes, I also managed to get a spot on the ship next to Shiloh; Bran told me I had to do something for him and then he’d do something for me, for a win-win situation.

Adalbert, however, would most certainly be sitting on the other side of her; Adalbert seemed real excited about me sitting with them but, then again, he was always excited.

As I’m sitting here and writing this I currently have Shiloh trying to distract me, and her father is busy racing around, trying to make sure that everything and everyone is on the ship and working. Shiloh reckons he’ll be asleep once we are in orbit. I can’t wait to see the Earth with Shiloh, it will be beautiful.

Countdown and lift off seemed like a breeze; now we are in orbit. I have just gotten a glimpse of the stars and the earth, not easy when everyone else is trying to do the same thing as you. This damned red-haired kid, the height of a giraffe and the width of a gorilla, has decided to stand in front of me.

We just managed to escape the sun’s massive expansion; my god, it was huge. I’m sure if you could see the exterior of the ship it was like one of them scenes in a movie where the heroes narrowly escape an explosion. It’s a pain to see the Earth turn into stardust, thinking of all those lives; I think there are only about ten thousand people on this ship, although I have no idea how many other ships are out here.

Shiloh is once again trying to distract me from writing. She can’t understand why I’m not using my computer tablet; I tell her in a situation like this, an electronic device probably won’t help up in the cockpit, and besides, I prefer to write on paper like this. After all, I didn’t just print out the document with Adalbert’s wacky printer for nothing; my god, that thing was weird and painful to use.

I’m starting to get a little worried about my safety now we have been in flight for almost forty minutes. Actually, to be honest, I feel more safe now than before when Adalbert insisted on driving the ship five minutes ago; we nearly flew straight into the International Space Station!

I’m still worried though. The ship seems to be having a few difficulties, and Adalbert’s sleeping at the moment so he’s not causing the problems; they seem more like engine difficulties to me.

After about an hour of flying, the crew manages to activate the new concept technology called Slipstream, which allows us to travel through about three small star systems. A planet over in the far left corner, next to this red star, catches my attention; it looks so green and lush, I wonder if it has life?

This is the story of a boy who is currently missing; to this day no one knows what became of the ship, Emerson, or the other Earthen's. Prognatis Naradano discovered this journal; we have kept it stored in our Earthen Archives.
Late
by Nguyet Huynh

books packed,
shoes ties,
late for class
Fallen by Tamika Kehl

I run blindly through the trees, branches grabbing, clawing at anything within reach. The forest goes silent; I stop and wait. I know he’s here, somewhere in the forest. Watching and waiting.

There used to be a time when this wasn’t my world, when this would have been insane. Unthinkable. But nothing happens; everything’s quiet, dead, lifeless, and I don’t know the way out. I look all around, searching for a figure, a shadow, anything that would indicate where he is. He’s getting closer, I can sense it. One more glance around; still nothing there. I get out of my slightly crouched position and run. I hear a branch break to the left of me; I don’t look, I just focus on running as fast as I can. My feet barely touch the fallen leaves, brushing against them, a feather touch. Leaves are crunching behind me, getting louder, closer. Something hard shoves my back; I fall to the ground.

I roll onto my back in time to see him, Blade, fangs lengthening, leaping in the air, about to pin me to the ground. I lift my knee up and grab hold of his shoulders in time to flip him over the top of me; he lands with a solid thud on the ground behind me. I leap to my feet and spin to face him. I stand in a fighting position, balancing my weight. The very little light from after dusk makes Blade’s cold black eyes stand out against the clinging fog. I watch him, my eyes never leaving his.

“You’re making this a lot harder then necessary,” he says tightly, words lisping from the fangs.

Yeah right, as if I’m going to give up without a fight.

He must have guessed what I am thinking because he smirks at me. I don’t see him move; all I know is his fist is about to connect with the right side of my jaw. I block his attack and punch him in the nose; bones break, blood spurts everywhere. Blade straightens and spits on a patch of fallen leaves. Apparently unaffected. The scarlet red blood is startling against the dull brown and orange of the leaves. Blade leaps and grabs hold of my upper left arm and tosses me into a tree, as if I weigh nothing. My head connects and I felt a gaping wound open on my forehead; blood is running down my face. My black hair clings to the blood, a black curtain. If it wasn’t for the liquid fear coursing through my veins, I could pretend it was all a horrible nightmare. My body slumps against the tree. I can’t stand; splotchy black patches dance across my eyes.

I can hear Blade walking over to me. I try to stand, but I slip; Blade grabs hold of my arm, pulling me to him. I close my eyes and try to push away the queasiness. Trying to be strong. I will not surrender. I’m facing Blade now; he’s holding both of my wrists, so tightly I’m worried that the bones will break, shatter into pieces, and splinter the skin.

He pulls me closer, fangs coming towards my neck. I manage to wriggle around in his arms, enough to kick him on the thigh. His leg gives out; Blade goes down. I try to pull my wrists out of his reach, but he doesn’t let go, so I end up sprawled on top of him. I am about to move but he grabs hold of my back, forcing me to stay. I look up at his face and see that he’s staring at me, a strange expression crossing his face.

We look at each other, and I notice the little differences and similarities between us. His hair is the exact same shade as mine, black like his eyes, whereas my eyes are an aqua blue. I put my hands on his chest and felt the long, tense muscles underneath his long-sleeved top. I push myself up and try to move my leg but Blade pushes me back down. My breath huffs out of me in a white puff. I hadn’t realized how cold it’d gotten underneath my black tank top and hoodie.

The last thing I see are the brightly-lit green leaves illuminated by the moonlight, glistening like diamonds as moisture drips off and softly pats against the fallen leaves. But I know this isn’t it. I will fight him.
Chapter 1:
The dream

I ran through the mansion with all my strength, nothing on my mind but fear. I looked behind myself to see if it was still following me.

Oh god, it was!

I then knew, deep down, that I was doomed to die. I stormed down the hallway with all my strength ‘til I came to the window. I saw the road outside the house; there was a large white van slowly making its way along it. So I quickly turned around to see if the thing was still behind me. Suddenly, it appeared at the top of the hallway. It didn’t seem to hesitate; it looked straight in the eyes. Its powerful beam was scanning through my mind. Its face made my heart skip a beat as it stormed down after me.

I screamed as loud as I could as I turned around, back to the window, but the driver couldn’t hear me. I could see him bobbing his head to some sort of music. I then felt my sad emptiness grow larger. Then I realised that my heart was beating so fast that I thought it was going to come out of my chest. I had to make my choice of what I should do quickly.

I dropped to the floor as the thing leapt at me and it smashed straight into the window. The glass shattered into bits as I gave way and I fell.

Before long I hit the ground hard. There was no light except for the misty beam coming down through the hole five metres above. I then stood up, but fell back down immediately. Pain flowed through my leg. I put my hand on my leg, only to feel a bone sticking out. Blood flowed down over my hands and legs. I clenched my teeth hard so that I wouldn’t scream.

A gut-wrenching roar echoed through the dark place. A glow in the distance made me look straight up. I thought it might be hope, but the light glowed red, like two red glowing eyes.

It roared again and started to run towards me. I tried to shuffle backwards but it was no use. As it came centimetres in front of me, I screamed and yelled in fear, as it put its face to my face!

Amander shot out of bed, drenched in sweat and screaming. “Oh god, no!” she panted.

She looked around, noticing the features of her bedroom, her shelves, windows, lamps. She slowly lay back down on her bed. She tried to catch her breath and lower her heartbeat back to normal.

“When will these nightmares end?” she cried to herself. Amander reached to the side of her night stool to look at the time on her clock. It was 6:30 a.m. She lay back down and wanted to go back to sleep but, at the same time, didn’t want to. She was scared of seeing how the rest of her dream would turn out (and did not want that!)

Chapter 2:

Up in the hills

After a while of sitting in bed, staring into dead space, Amander got up slowly, slow enough to make her bones crack. While rubbing her eyes, she went into the bathroom and got ready for the morning.

The morning was cloudy and misty. It was pretty cold, and the morning frost on the lawn outside gave her the hint that it was even colder outside. Every time she took a breath it stung.

Amander walked into the kitchen and poured herself a cup of steamy coffee. Then she looked out through her glass wall into the forest. No wonder she had nightmares all the time about that forest. Living up a hill in a forest, alone in a three-million-dollar house, could be lonely sometimes. Amander walked into the lounge room and pulled a blanket from a cupboard, rugging up in front of the fireplace. The flame of the fire was refreshing to Amander; the warmth and heat of it felt so safe, even though the fire was deadly. She took a slow sip of the coffee. It filled her with warmth, and the creamy taste was really smooth. She then grabbed the silver remote off the coffee table and turned the television on.

An early morning sunrise show appeared on the huge plasma screen that fitted perfectly across the whole wall. But before Amander could even get a good look at it, it turned into white noise. It buzzed through her ears loudly. She tried to switch channels but each one was white noise. It buzzed through her ears loudly. She tried to switch channels but each one was white noise. She gave up and slapped the remote down, staring in disappointment at the screen, and suddenly noticing a dark figure in the reflection of the television.

The figure took a few slow steps towards Amander. Fear caught Amander and wrapped itself around her tightly. She felt as though she couldn’t go on. As slowly and
calmly as possible, she shifted her hand to the coffee table. Underneath it was a gun. Once her hand touched it, she wrapped her hand around it. Although panicking, she tried to keep her cool, like she had not noticed anything.

The stranger made a few more steps towards her, getting closer and closer; just before the stranger could get closer still, Amanda jumped out of her seat with her gun pointed at the mystery person.

The stranger screamed. “Wow, wow, wow, Amander, take it easy. It’s just me.”

“Oh my god, I’m so sorry, Katy.” Amander dropped the gun on the couch and walked up to Katy, giving her a hug. Katy was Amander’s best friend; they had been BFFs since the second grade!

“Jesus, Amander, are you still having those bloody nightmares?” Katy asked.

“Yeah, they are absolutely horrible. I hate them,” Amander replied.

“We should take you to a mental hospital, you know,” Katy joked.

“No way. We need to do this again.” Amander replied, playing along.

“We should take you to a mental hospital, you know,” Katy joked.

“Yeah, I know,” Amander said, playing along.

They let go of each other and walked into the lounge room, sitting down on a sofa.

Chapter 3:

BFF

“So what brings you here? And it better be good, because you scared me to death before, and why didn’t you call first?” Amander asked.

“Wow, one question at a time. Well, first off, it’s the weekend, so you’re not working; second, it’s a good reason; and third, I wanted to surprise you.”

“At seven in the morning? You know I’m not a morning person.”

“Well, too bad. Look outside at that beautiful weather.”

“Beautiful?” Amander asked with one eyebrow up.

“Yes, to me it is. I love that mysterious look!”

“OK, so?”

“Because it will look fantastic with the party we’re having.”

“What party?” Amander asked.

“The one you’re going to have. I’ve already got your gear for it. Anthony, Katharina and Jake are outside, and the rest will be here later.”

“Who are the other people?”

“Some of our good friends from school. Now, please tell me you’ll do it! Please, please, please!”

“Fine!”

“Thank you so much. I’ll go get your gear, and if you really don’t want this house, I’ll have it.” Katy laughed while skipping to the car outside.

Amander shook her head and stood up while sipping her coffee.

Chapter 4:

Hallucination

Katy came running into the house with excitement. Without saying a word, she handed a full bag of clothes to Amander, who sighed and went upstairs to try them on. Thoughts were rampaging through her head like a stampede. She became suddenly a little light-headed.

After turning on the light, she put on her clothes; staring in the mirror, she decided they did not look that bad. The ruby-red dress was really nice. She suddenly thought this might not be so bad. Amander then slipped on the high heels, and they didn’t look that bad either! The colours in the design were really strong, black with red stripes. She looked into her eyes in the mirror, trying to look into her very own soul. But she saw nothing but darkness. Amander wondered what was keeping her down. The dream had really put weight on her shoulders.

Suddenly, her eyes flashed a bright red.

Amander rubbed her eyes in sudden desperation; pain was pressing from behind her eyes. It felt like something was inside her own head, trying to push her eyes out. She widened her eyes in fear. Her voice was trapped in her throat so she had no hope of calling out for help.

Amander stared at herself in the mirror in horror. Blood leaked from her tear-ducts. It flowed down her cheeks and dripped onto her clothes. Her knees buckled and she collapsed onto the floor. She had enough strength just to sit up. Small, whimpering cries escaped from her mouth as she felt the bite of pain from behind her eyes. She heard a popping sound as she felt her own eyes dribble down her face.

Amander screamed as loud as she could, for she could no longer see. Suddenly, she felt a hand grab her shoulders. She screamed once again as it shook her violently.

Chapter 5:

Awakened

“Amander, wake up. Please wake up,” a voice begged.

Suddenly, Amander’s body jerked up and her eyes opened. She looked around in shock. Just to be sure, she touched her eyes, even closing and reopening them to make sure they were still there.

“Amander!” the voice yelled again.

Amander woke fully and looked into Katy’s eyes.


Amander didn’t think about her answer, but continued to stare at her. She still couldn’t believe what had just happened. Thoughts were rampaging through her mind like rockets. She was too terrified to comprehend what had just happened. Just as she opened her mouth to answer, Anthony came bursting through the door.

“Hey, what’s taking so long? Get your asses down to the car before we start without you.”

Amander hadn’t realised how long she had been up there.
Chapter 6:
Pain

Six minutes and forty-four seconds later, Amander slowly but carefully made her way down the stairs, watching each step to make sure she didn’t fall. She had thought carefully about how to react to the situation and decided not to tell anyone. For one reason, she only knew Katy and not the rest of the group waiting for her. Secondly, Katy would be really disappointed in her if she told her what had happened.

She would think I was making excuses to get out of the trip. Amander stopped three-quarters of the way down the stairs. But what if Katy could help? Maybe she knows something about this creature, this ghost, or maybe...Oh my god, what if it’s a demon?

Her thoughts came to a halt. She had never considered that the thing in her dreams or her hallucinations was possibly a demon. That horrifying thought made the air turn cold.

A chill ran down her spine. She could not move; something was holding her in place with some kind of force. At first, she thought that she was just too shocked to move. But then she realised it was not shock holding her down, but something more forceful and evil.

Suddenly, her chest started to tighten. No air was getting into her. She felt the pain rocket up into her face, which was now burning. Her pulse was getting too fast. The pain was excruciating. She had the feeling, again, that there was no hope. Her eyes dashed around the room, looking for a chance to escape this nightmare.

Suddenly it all stopped! The pain was gone, but, suddenly, she tipped forward and, in a motion that felt like flying, fell down the stairs. The air seemed to be as thin as paper; she sliced through it like nothing. As she fell, she felt nothing, as though she was already dead.

After what seemed like forever, she hit the ground. In the distance, she heard Katy yell and saw her run towards her. Katy was moving in slow motion, but somehow that didn’t seem strange to Amander. All noise was eliminated from the scene as Katy shook her desperately. She felt blood dribbling down her face and could sense her fibula bone sticking out of her leg, just like in her dream. As she stared at the ceiling, it all started to fade slowly...Now she saw nothing but darkness...

Chapter 7:
Demon

Waking is hard; who wants to leave the warmth of their dreams? Dreams are just so safe and peaceful.

Even the dream Amander was having was nice. But instead of trying to stay inside it, she let her eyes fly open and inhaled a whoosh of air. Her mind snapped back to reality, taking in as much as it could. She realised she was tied to a table.

“Katy?” Amander yelled, panic starting to rush over her.

“What’s going on here? What’s happened to you?” Amander asked, her voice really low.

“Nothing. I’m just being me. I’ve watched you for a very long time. In fact, since you were a little kid,” the thing said.

“What do you mean?”

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Chapter 8:

Chosen

“You know what I mean, Amander!” it said forcefully. “I became your friend as soon as I got the chance. You actually think that I liked you? I was there to make your life as miserable as possible! Hah, remember that time you spilled those chemicals in Science and the room caught alight? Only you escaped and, well, the rest, they got the pleasure of experiencing their skin melting off their faces and bodies. It was fun to watch!”

“Shut up! Just please shut up!” Amander begged, the tears streaming down her face now.

“Oh, how sweet, you’re begging.”

“Where are the others?”

“The others? They’re all enjoying a pop of margaritas...Where do you think they are? But you already know the answer to that, don’t you?” Evil spread across her face.

Amander looked around desperately for a way to escape.

“What are you?”

“Me? Isn’t it obvious?”

“I know that you are ugly, manipulative, lying, soulless, evil, and the spawn of hell.”

“Close! I’m the demon on your shoulder. Now, enough chitchat.” The demon walked up to her.

Fear walked over Amander as the demon put a finger to her face. Its long nail grazed her skin; Amander screamed in pain as it cut into flesh. Blood dribbled down her face.

Katy pulled away. “Don’t worry, I’m not here to kill you!” she laughed, untying the ropes around Amander’s hands and feet. “You’re chosen!” she added proudly.

“I won’t do anything you say,” Amander yelled.

“You will, because I’m here to possess your ass.” Katy laughed, then put a hand on Amander’s forehead and muttered some Latin.

The walls started to crack and the lights flickered. The air ran cold and the wind picked up.

Suddenly, a force ran up through Katy’s arms into Amander. The evil force made its way through her body, taking over everything. Pain started to explode in her head. It really was possessing her! Suddenly, it all went dark.

It wasn’t Amander anymore...

TO BE CONTINUED
My world by Cindy Ly

Recipient of first place in the Junior Fiction category

It’s funny, really, how people say, “Do what you love and love what you do,” because, contradictorily, the expectations that they expect us to live up to restrain us from doing just that. Society is a hypocrite. This whole world seems to contradict itself. If only I could build my own world, a new world, a different world, there would be no pain. I want to live, not merely exist.

“You’re wasting your life,” my mother scolded me one day, “go outside and do what normal teenagers do.”

Why did I have to be normal? Why did I have to be like them? I didn’t understand how I was wasting my life. Life is only precious because there is an end. Why did we live, if we were to die anyway? I never understood why children were forced to be educated. Education is simply a robot, messing with our minds, controlling us, controlling our lives. Dictating the rules of society and expecting us to follow them. This is normal, and that is not. Those who are different are frowned upon and isolated. They are expected to be ‘normal’, to fit in with society’s uniform and act like everybody else, think like everybody else, talk like everybody else. Some ‘out of the ordinary’ people get labelled as ‘mentally ill’. What if they were completely normal and ‘normal’ people were actually the mentally ill patients?

Why did laws exist? What would happen if, one day, we found out that what we had been classifying as good was actually bad? Weren’t these words simply invented by humans as names of particular categories? The borderline that separates good from evil seemed transparent, blurry, and messy. Maybe there was no border line. Why was good, good, and bad, bad? If bad did not exist, then how would good be defined? Maybe good and bad were the same things and humans just decided to categorise the two with different names. Maybe there was no purpose to life, but we were just stubbornly looking for the purpose.

“When you grow up, build a career that you enjoy,” my mother had advised, but when I told her about my goals and dreams for the future, she shook her head, cringed, then replied, “No, don’t do that, it’s not a good option for you.” That’s a waste of your life. You can earn more money if you become a GP doctor.”

But I didn’t want to become a GP doctor. To spend my life doing something I didn’t enjoy would be a waste of my life. Before death decided to track me down and attack me, I wanted to spend my life doing things that I enjoyed and found meaning in. I wanted to do something that synchronised with my values and beliefs, something that reflected who I truly was. Yet, my mother placed money before my life.

Was money worth more than life? I was happy with the financial status that I was in. I didn’t want much more. I never dreamt of owning a big house, designer brand clothes or expensive cars. Happiness was all I wanted, and my definition of happiness never included the amount of money I possessed. I just wanted to wake up every morning feeling grateful for being alive, for surviving, for living a life at all. Instead, every single day, I woke up to the pressure of meeting expectations and society’s standards. My family expected me to be good natured, good mannered, filial, socially active, beautiful, smart, successful, flawless and the best. To them, I had to be perfect, but their definition of perfection constantly changed. It was unfair. Once I had worked hard enough to meet a certain expectation, the finish line was postponed, extended, and the distance was increased. No matter how fast I ran, I could never reach the finish line. No matter how hard I tried, I could never fulfil the expectations.

I wasn’t smart enough. I wasn’t pretty enough. I wasn’t good enough. Disappointment greeted me every single day with a bright smile on its face, as if it was mocking me, telling me that I could never smile as brightly. At times I wondered, who am I living for? I should be living life for myself, so why does it seem like I am spending my life chasing after my shadow? I continually chased after something beyond my grasp. Blindly, I kept on running forward, searching for the destination where I didn’t even know where the destination was located. Blindly, I didn’t see the obstacles and insisted on running through them. As a result, I only hurt myself.

What was the outcome? I ended up standing on the edge of the cliff. Just hanging there, barely balancing on my own two feet. I was so close to falling off the edge, breaking the boundaries, putting an end to the suffering. I was so close to giving up, because I could no longer take it anymore. I was too weak, too vulnerable, and too breakable. This world had pushed me to my limits, tearing me apart in the process. At the brim of breaking down and deteriorating, he came into my life.

“Create a different world,” he told me, “start by creating a new world in your mind, and if you persist on turning it into reality, then one day, this world will be a different world.” Though it sounded stupid, almost impossible, I tried, because I had lost all hope. I tried because I was completely lost in the forest, and every opportunity to find my way back home would be grasped tightly in my trembling hands. So I began creating a new world in my mind. When I closed my eyes, I was living in a perfect world, but when I opened my eyes again, I returned to cold and cruel reality. I detested reality, and reality loathed me. Every night, I drowned myself in my thoughts and seized every opportunity to spend my life in the world played out in my head, because, for once, I felt happy.
Living in my head, I felt alive. In my world, there were no expectations, no standards. There was no set rule on how to live a successful life. It was up to the person to pave their own path and walk on it. Beauty could not be measured because there were no beauty standards. Smartness could not be measured because there were no IQ tests. Nothing was measured in my world, because quantity had no meaning; quality was the key.

In my world, our hearts were pure. Jealousy and betrayal did not exist. Hatred did not exist. Nobody felt the competitive need to outdo one another; nobody wanted to be the best. Sacrifices were made to protect one another, but nobody betrayed others for their own benefits. Nobody was abandoned because they were not good enough. Nobody was hated for being different. In my world, everybody felt safe. Even if they had to find their way out from a strange dark forest, they were not lost. Not all who wandered were lost.

Day after day, I devoted all my time to the world in my mind. People had said to me that those who always think have nothing to think about but their thoughts. Many had told me that I had lost touch with reality and lived in a world of illusion. But my world was not an illusion. It felt real and captivating. I felt every heartbeat, heard every whisper, and smelt every drop of rain. Like Buddha reaching enlightenment, I was living in a paradise. My mind was at peace, my heart was at peace. Every breath I took felt smoother, every step I took felt steadier.

When I finally woke up, my breath hitched and my feet trembled. Slowly prying my eyes open, I concentrated on inhaling and exhaling. Around my legs, pulling them close to my chest. Closing my eyes, I concentrated on finding any form of white cloud in the almost colourless sky. Why am I even doing this? I asked, as I struggled to find any form of white cloud in the almost colourless sky.

“I don’t mean that; you just don’t seem like the type of girl to obey.”

“I didn’t mean that; you just don’t seem like the type of girl to obey.”

I scoffed, and eyed him suspiciously. Something about him seemed mysterious. There was something about him that I wanted to discover.

“What?” he retorted, as he effortlessly sat up, resting one arm on his knee, the other pressed against the ground.

Shifting my gaze, I breathed, “Have you ever tried living in your own world?”

“Well, still am.”

“But don’t you ever get sick of reality? I want to sleep and live in my own world forever. I don’t want to ever wake up.”

“The moment you live in your own world forever is when your dreams have finally turned into reality. It is when your world and the world around us have finally collided and created a compound.”

I gave a little nod, chewing on my bottom lip.

“When will that day come?” I questioned.

“Eventually.”

“What happens if my life ends before that day?”

“When life ends, death begins.”

“And what happens after death ends?”

“I don’t know. Do you think I’ve been through all that?”

He chuckled.

“I don’t know, have you?” I replied in an emotionless tone; I didn’t find any humour in my question.

“You’re different, you know that?” he smirked, as he propped himself up on one elbow.

“Doing what?”

“What can you do other than living?” he asked, rolling over on his side to face me.

“Living.”

“But dying is not a continuous procedure; it ends, eventually.”

“Life ends eventually.”

“When life ends, death begins.”

“Dying.”

“And what happens after death ends?”

“I don’t know. Do you think I’ve been through all that?”

He chuckled.

“You’re different, you know that?” he smirked, as he propped himself up on one elbow.

“After all, I’m living in a different world,” I whispered, almost inaudibly.

“Oh, you did as I told you to?”

“Was I not supposed to?”

I mimicked his action, gently lying down next to him on the grass. As the prickly green grass tickled the back of my neck, I released a sigh that had been trapped behind my lips. Pulling the sleeves of my plain black hoodie over my freezing fingers, I felt the cool wind softly brushing through my shoulder-length honey brown hair. I could almost taste the scent of daffodils scraping across my tongue, but it wasn’t sweet as it was supposed to be; it was rotten, like my lifeless life.

“Why am I even doing this?” I asked, as I struggled to find any form of white cloud in the almost colourless sky.

“I don’t know, have you?” I replied in an emotionless tone; I didn’t find any humour in my question.

“You’re different, you know that?” he smirked, as he propped himself up on one elbow.

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“Oh, you did as I told you to?”

“Was I not supposed to?”

“I didn’t mean that; you just don’t seem like the type of girl to obey.”
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“I’ve never loved or been loved.”

“And how do you know that it doesn’t?”

“It doesn’t exist.”

“How?”

“It’s stupid.”

“Why not?”

I scoffed. “Love? You believe in that thing?”

“What do you think of love?”

“Love,” he simply said.

“What do you live for?”

“Then find something to live for.”

“This world is too cruel. I have nothing to live for.”

“What do you live for?”

“Love,” he simply said.

“Love? You believe in that thing?”

“Why not?”

“This world is too cruel. I have nothing to live for.”

“Then find something to live for.”

“I scoffed. “Love? You believe in that thing?”

“Why not?”

“It’s stupid.”

“How?”

“It doesn’t exist.”

“And how do you know that it doesn’t?”

“I’ve never loved or been loved.”

“To me, you’re perfect, but you don’t see it. That’s why I hope that you’ll allow yourself to see your world, the perfect world that is played out in your mind, in this world called reality. The collision between your world and this world will take place as soon as you change your view of life. And when you see this world from a different perspective, it transforms into a different world. Only then will you find the meaning of your life. Only then will you be able to live, not merely exist.”

He made it sound so easy, but it was hard. Reality had wounded me so much that the pain was unbearable. He was saying that I’d find the meaning of my life, but my life was a coincidence, just like the Big Bang Theory, just like how all life forms began. And coincidences do not hold any meaning. “My life is meaningless,” I hissed.

“Then find the meaning of life.”

“What? Am I supposed to look for a definition in the dictionary? It doesn’t work that way.”

“It doesn’t. You create your own meaning.”

And I did.

Life is a mystery, a beautiful mystery.
Apocalypse please
by Samantha Pinnington
She didn’t feel part of this world, but of another.

Lucy smiled in response to another thing she did not understand.

“A different world”
Georgie’s camera
by Georgia Bishop

Recipient of first place in the Junior Image category
Chapter 1: The strange reading

It wasn’t the first time Fay Williams had been late for an appointment at the Psychology Clinic for Distressed Teens. In fact, she was always late to them, and the pile of excuses she kept on coming up with was building up to the roof. Sometimes Fay would get in trouble at school on purpose so she wouldn’t have to go to the appointments. Another good reason for being late was the trains that went into Adelaide (where the Clinic was) were either slow or late. However, today there was absolutely no reason as to why she should be late; Fay’s grandmother had made sure of that.

So here Fay was now, standing outside the psychiatrist’s office, playing with her roughly cut black hair — courtesy of her grandmother — and two minutes late. ‘Just go in,’ Jenova whispered in her ear. ‘Get it over and done with.’

Jenova, Fay’s best friend, usually disappeared during the week, but every Tuesday he stayed with her and kept her sane during the session. The grey door opened and a woman in her late thirties appeared, a frustrated look on her face. Mrs Kay waved her hand and Fay trudged into the room, eventually perching on the edge of the long green chair that stood in the corner of the neat, organised room. Mrs Kay sat in the adjacent chair. Her usually ashen face was a ruby red and her hair was a crow’s nest.

Fay couldn’t help but giggle at her; Mrs Kay looked like a scarecrow.
‘How are you, Fay?’ she asked, putting on a huge fake smile and staring at Fay through piercing bottle-green eyes. Fay laughed and Mrs Kay looked at her, puzzled. She clasped her hands over her mouth to stop herself from laughing.
‘What are you laughing at?’ Mrs Kay asked as a disapproving scowl spread across her face, like jam spreading across toast. Fay knew not to tell her the truth, because all that would achieve was more appointments and possibly a day in a straight-jacket. Jenova wasn’t making it easy for Fay to keep her laughter contained; he was making hilarious expressions behind Mrs Kay and blowing raspberries right into her ear. Of course, the psychiatrist could neither hear nor see him doing this. No one could see Jenova, except Fay.

‘Let’s start again, shall we,’ Mrs Kay questioned, clutching her white clipboard.
Fay nodded, and Mrs Kay continued.
‘Have you seen or heard of Jenova?’ she probed.
Yes, Fay thought.
‘No,’ she lied out loud.
‘Good, that’s very good,’ Mrs Kay said, making a note on the clipboard.
Fay giggled again, causing more frown lines to wrinkle Mrs Kay’s face as she stared disapprovingly at Fay.
But Fay couldn’t help it; a few pigeons had landed on the window ledge outside of Mrs Kay’s office, and Jenova was pulling faces at them.
‘Fay,’ Mrs Kay snapped. ‘Stop laughing immediately.’ Fay, stop laughing immediately,’ Jenova mocked in a high pitched girl voice, which only made Fay laugh harder.

‘Fay Annabel-May Williams, if you don’t cease laughing in the next two seconds, I’m calling your grandmother.’ Fay sobered straight away, then winced. Bringing her grandmother into the session last time had ended with a lot of shouting and crying.
‘Now that you’ve controlled yourself, let’s continue,’ Mrs Kay said briskly.
Jenova shot Mrs Kay a look of immense rage; he hated it when the shrink threatened Fay, and Fay knew his anger could get the better of him sometimes.
‘What are you doing, Fay?’ Jenova hissed in her ear. Fay winced at his harsh tone, and he immediately looked contrite. ‘You don’t need to be afraid of your grandmother,’ he said in softer tones.
Fay wished she could respond to him, but if she showed any sign of being able to see Jenova, all the progress she’d made convincing Mrs Kay that she couldn’t see him would fly right out the window.
‘How’s school been?’ Mrs Kay continued. Great, a horrible topic to begin the session with.
Fay swallowed the lump in her throat and smiled weakly.
‘Good,’ she answered.
‘Really? Well, I have your report card here and you failed everything except for Maths,’ Mrs Kay scolded.
Jenova made a move to slap Mrs Kay in the face, but his fingers passed right through her. Mrs Kay, of course, felt nothing.
Jenova was proud of Fay’s grades — at least she wasn’t failing everything.
Fay’s grandmother didn’t see it that way, though. When she had received Fay’s report card, she had spent all night yelling at her.
She stopped outside her house, her hand resting on an old wire gate that screeched with the slightest breeze. Fay didn’t know why her grandmother had bought this old, decaying house. It was so ugly and old; it was on the brink of collapsing. It was a wonder the council didn’t have it condemned. Fay thought the paint used to be white; now it was the colour of stale urine, a yellowish colour that made it look uglier. The purple roof had several patches, which Fay had fixed herself, and the front garden was full of different kinds of weeds.

‘Hey,’ Jenova whispered in Fay’s ear.

She jumped nearly a foot in the air, startled. ‘I need to talk to you,’ she said when she recovered from the mini heart attack he had given her.

Jenova nodded his head once, immediately understanding, and said ‘I’ll meet you inside the bathroom.’ Then he disappeared again, fading into nothingness.

Fay opened the wire gate and walked up the cracked footpath through the weed garden to the front door, which had termite damage from a couple of years ago. She unlocked it with her brass key and gently pushed it open. She didn’t want to push it too hard for fear of it falling off its hinges.

Fay dumped her bag in her room and continued on to the bathroom. She opened the door to the filthy bathroom that any normal person would have fixed herself, and the front garden was full of different kinds of weeds.

‘Hey, I’m in here,’ Jenova yelled, pretending to pull up his fly.

‘Stop doing that,’ Fay protested. He did it every time Fay went into the bathroom. Any normal person would have gotten bored with it by now, but Jenova was a ghost and normal rules didn’t apply to him. Of course, Fay wouldn’t know, since Jenova was the only ghost she’d ever encountered.

Jenova grinned at her, seeming happier than he had before. Fay walked over to use the toilet, and then remembered Jenova was still with her.

‘Can you leave, please?’ she asked him nicely.
He closed his eyes and turned around. ‘I’m not looking.’
Fay shook her head. ‘You’re one annoying ghost.’
She did her business, and then washed her hands with the purple soap that smelled like a hundred-year-old mould.
‘Where did you go before?’ she asked Jenova as she dried her hands.

‘I was hanging out with Eleanor—’

‘Something happened,’ Fay said, cutting him off before he got too immersed in his usual conversation about Eleanor, a girl who went to Fay’s school.

He stopped talking to look at her, a frown wrinkling his brow. ‘What?’

‘Something happened to me after you left,’ Fay managed to say, her voice trembling with restrained anger.

Fay was about to answer when a deafening crash came from downstairs. They both jumped out of their skins at the unexpected sound. Regaining her composure first, Fay’s grandmother leaned down and whispered in Fay’s ear, sour vodka breath fanning her skin. ‘You are grounded for a month, which means no television, no dessert and no going out for leisure time,’ she hissed.

Jenova walked towards her and held his arms above her shoulders, like he wanted to give her a hug. A comforting but useless gesture, considering the only times he could actually move or touch solid things was when he was really emotional.

‘Don’t worry about your grandmother,’ he said, letting his arms fall back to his sides. ‘If she dares touch you—’

‘No, it’s not that,’ Fay interrupted with a whisper.

‘What, then?’ Jenova asked, puzzled.

Relaying her vision to Jenova was like reliving it. The alarm clock in her bedroom went off, alerting her that she needed to go to work.

‘Go get ready,’ Jenova insisted.

Pushing the vision to the back of her mind, she went through her small wardrobe to look for some decent clothes. Meanwhile, Jenova was staring at the ceiling, looking deep in thought.

Fay finally decided on a black ruffled skirt that went down to her ankles, a violet top with spaghetti straps, and a pair of black flats. It was most likely the only decent outfit she owned. Fay tugged them on and examined herself in the clean mirror in her bedroom. Expecting to see only herself, she jumped when her grandmother appeared in the doorway.

Her spectacles slid down her crooked nose as she stormed into the room towards Fay. Her tanned, leathery face was creased with wrinkles of anger and old age.

Fay’s heart pounded against her chest; she knew what was coming.

‘I heard about the appointment,’ her grandmother said, her voice trembling with restrained anger.

Fay was about to answer when a deafening crash came from downstairs. They both jumped out of their skins at the unexpected sound. Regaining her composure first, Fay’s grandmother leaned down and whispered in Fay’s ear, sour vodka breath fanning her skin. ‘You are grounded for a month, which means no television, no dessert and no going out for leisure time,’ she hissed.

Fay watched the reflection of her grandmother amble out of the room as tears began to emerge.

‘Come on, let’s go to work,’ Jenova whispered.

Rumours of the crazy chick that saw dead people who lived on Whites Road had reached a man named Julian. Needing to fill the spot of a psychic in the supernatural shop he owned, Julian had sought Fay out and hired her.

She wasn’t really psychic. She saw one dead person, so what? She couldn’t read people’s minds or see the future. She wasn’t really psychic. She saw one dead person, so what? She couldn’t read people’s minds or see the future. But all Julian had needed was someone who could spew bull poo and make it believable. Fay was good at what she did, but she hated having to lie. She also hated how everyone thought she was a crazy chick when she wasn’t.

Students at their school who Fay thought were her friends would always run up and give others hugs. They treated Fay like an invisible person and it wasn’t until she spoke that they realised she was even there. She didn’t feel part of this world, but of another.

Static filled the air, making the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end. The jingle of bells welcomed the arrival of a new customer.

The man who entered the small shop was unlike any man Fay had ever seen before. He was tall, with a receding hairline and bald patches on his head. As he approached Fay’s circular table on the far wall, she noticed he had an old scar that ran from his forehead to the corner of his mouth. It was a bright beacon across his tanned skin. He sat down in the chair opposite her and stared at her with a look of deep concentration.

Fay wondered why; no one ever looked at her like that.

‘My name is James, and I would like you to read my palm,’ he ordered. His voice was low, cold and hard. It was also forceful, something that both Jenova and Fay didn’t like. Jenova’s emerald eyes narrowed at the tone and his pupils turned into angry little slits.

Jenova leaped over the table and grabbed Fay’s hand, pulling her forward. Fay tried to drag it back, but James held on tightly.

Jenova stormed forward, his form becoming more corporeal with every angry step, and balled up his hand, ready to punch James. Before he could do so, James lifted his hand and a ball of white electricity shot out. It hit Jenova smack in the chest and he froze.

‘Jenova!’ Fay screamed.

He hit the floor with an audible thud. James held her hand in an iron-clad grip.

‘Let me go,’ Fay yelled, panicking.

‘Sit down or something very unpleasant will happen to your spirit friend here.’ James gestured threateningly at Jenova, who was lying on the floor, twitching with occasional spasms from whatever James had thrown at him.

Fay lowered herself slowly back into her small, cushioned seat. James took her palm in both hands. At first, nothing happened. After a moment or two, her vision clouded and she sunk into darkness.

I was standing outside a building that was seven stories high. Teenagers my age and higher were hanging around, laughing and chatting. Unexpectedly, a bright green thing came flying at me and everything went black.

Fay gasped and ripped her palm away from James. ‘Leave. Now,’ she whispered, panting for breath. She looked over to Jenova, but he had disappeared.
James wasn’t listening. He was looking behind her at Julian who had come from the back room. He was holding a rifle and had it aimed at James. Fay had never taken Julian to be a tough guy, with a massive gut hanging out of his purple shirt (he liked purple) and a rusty beard covering the lower half of his face. He had beefy arms and short stubby legs. Yet, at that moment, he seemed frightening.

‘Get out,’ Julian ordered menacingly. His deep blue eyes glared into James’ hazel ones.

Julian released the safety; James vanished into thin air.

‘What’s going on—’ Fay began.

Julian grabbed her arm and pulled her towards the room he had come out of. He didn’t say a word as he pulled her through the back room, then through the back exit. He opened the door and turned to face her.

‘Run home,’ he ordered. ‘Don’t stop for anything.’

She stood frozen to the spot, so he shook her. ‘Fay,’ he shouted, shaking her out of her reverie. ‘Do you understand me?’

She nodded, and he pushed her through the door. ‘Go, now.’

Fay ran the whole way home, panic coursing through her veins like wildfire.

What the heck was going on?
Safe place by Tegan Sabine

Friendship, it knows no boundaries,
It is infinite like time and space.
You can be so loyal when that friend is true,
That you’d follow your friend to a whole other place.

A whole other logic, a whole other notion,
You can go to this world whenever you choose.
With your friend you can imagine a heaven, a hell,
With your friend you can travel there without needing to move.

There are things that even friends can’t imagine,
Like when you lose your friend’s trust.
It is a non-imaginable hell where even angels cry,
As they beg for the pain to release you.

With your friend there with you,
You have a lucky charm that lasts forever.
With your special friend you can be whoever,
Whatever you want to be.

You can imagine a world like no other place,
A world where the impossible is possible.
Where dreams are real, reality is a dream,
And even the fairies from the stories live.

With that special person,
You can live out your favourite tale.
With your friends by your side,
You can do all you wish without fail.

You can love them, care for them,
You can trust them, tell them how you feel,
You can tell them anything and not be judged,
Unlike makeup, your bond can’t be smudged.

You are there forever in this wondrous place,
Even after they’re gone you keep this place safe.
You keep them and their memories in this place forever,
For this safe place is your heart and only true friends get a key.
Skull of nothings
by Jordanne Pelligrini

this is how every teenager looks
until you get inside their head
A changing world
by Kathleen Mullen

Joint recipient of second place in the Senior Fiction category

“Get better, Anna. I’ll see you at the barbecue.” That was the last thing my Uncle said to me.

After my father died, my uncle had been like a second father to me. But what he had been saying a bit earlier to me seemed absolutely crazy; those type of things don’t exist and things like that definitely don’t happen here. But I let him speak. I’m lucky I did, otherwise I would be in even more trouble now. I believe him now. Now that he’s gone. Now that they got him.

He was out on his daily run when suddenly, out of nowhere, a group of them jumped him. He didn’t see them coming so he didn’t have much time to react, and that was enough for them. In a matter of seconds, they were finished with him. He didn’t deserve that, so tonight they would pay.

The moon crept closer to the centre of the sky, its round face taunting me. I crept back into the cave I was spending the night in. I couldn’t risk getting anyone else hurt. Only they would get hurt. Tomorrow I could go back, but tonight I couldn’t.

My uncle was always a nice man. He never hurt anyone and was nice to most people. Sure, he wasn’t a complete saint. He used to party when he was younger and he wouldn’t talk too nicely about the person who was rude to him at the shops. But he had never done anything to them; he’d never even met them. He didn’t deserve that, so tonight they would pay.

The moon crept closer to the centre of the sky, its round white face taunting me. I crept back into the cave I was spending the night in. I couldn’t risk getting anyone else hurt. Only they would get hurt. Tomorrow I could go back, but tonight I couldn’t.

I had been anticipating this moment ever since that night my uncle had told me about what was going to happen to me. I was at a party with my friends. Emily thought that it would be fun to have her birthday party in the clearing in the woods. It was secluded so we could be as loud as we wanted to be and there was not a parent in sight. The only light was coming from the fire in the middle of the clearing and from the full moon above.

We were having a great time. People were talking and laughing. Haylen had just told the worst joke and I think that someone had started a game of truth or dare around the fire. But then I noticed a figure off to the side leading into the woods. I wasn’t sure if it was a human or an animal. I decided to ignore it; no good ever came from walking into the woods alone. My friends had gone to get another drink and I saw the figure again. It didn’t look like anybody else saw it, so curiosity got the better of me and I followed the figure. Once I was inside the woods, all I could see were the tall trees looming over me and darkness, almost completely darkness, except for the one tiny sliver of moonlight that had passed through the trees. I couldn’t see the figure now and ventured further into the woods. The party sounds were getting quiet and I could barely see a thing. I decided to go back to the party, thinking it just must have been my imagination playing tricks on me.

I started to walk back, but something hit me and everything went black.

When I woke up I was in my bed with my mother fussing over me. I swear I had about five blankets on me. I asked what had happened and she said that when my friends noticed I was missing, they went looking for me. They ended up finding me lying unconscious in the woods, covered in dirt and blood. The strange thing was that I only had a few scratches on me and most weren’t deep. The main damage was done to my clothes; they were ripped to shreds. I was wearing my favourite pair of jeans too — those jeans are so hard to find. Nobody knew exactly what had happened, but I did get a long lecture from my mum about walking into the woods alone.

My uncle had come over to see how I was and explained it all to me: what had happened and what was going to happen. I didn’t know why this had happened. I just wanted things to go back the way they were. When my uncle was alive and I could go out with my friends on a Friday night without worrying about the fact that I could hurt them.

Now I sat in a dark cave, my body tingling all over, knowing what was about to happen. I read that the first time could take hours and I was terrified by that thought. I could barely see a thing inside the cave, which was probably for the best. I crawled outside for another peek at the moon. It was brighter than before and higher up in the sky. I felt something spark inside me and crawled back into the cave.

It was starting, I could feel it. It was slowly creeping up on me, starting with a tingle in my hands and moving to a throbbing in my head and heart. The first thing to change was my fingernails; they grew until they were pointed, black claws that could scratch somebody deeply. Then my eyesight changed. Instead of seeing almost blackness, I could see the walls of the cave, the shapes of the rocks, the dirt that made up the floor. Then suddenly my spine twisted and moved. The pain was like nothing I had ever felt before. Words could not describe it.

The twisting and moving continued for hours. The pain was excruciating. It just went on and on until I had almost screamed my lungs out. My uncle was right; nothing could’ve prepared me for this moment.
The pain began to subside, but was still very prominent. The thumping in my head lessened and I started hearing things. Besides my pounding heart, my breathing and the small noises of my changing body, I could hear things outside: the woodland animals scurrying back to their homes, the water trickling in the nearby stream and the leaves being ruffled by the wind.

The pain was still subsiding and I was relieved by that. But then suddenly the pain spiked and I screamed out once again. Then the pain was gone, like it had never been there. I could remember the excruciating pain that I had endured for the past couple of hours, but it was gone now. And I felt different.

I felt powerful and free. I slowly walked out of the cave and looked up at the moon once again. It looked different this time, as if I was seeing it for the first time. It was brighter than I had ever seen it before. Now the craters were more defined, the stars around the moon sparkled brightly; it was one of the most amazing things I had ever seen.

But I didn’t have time to stare at the sky. I dropped my head, looked in front of me and, before I knew it, I was running. Running faster than I had ever before. I felt powerful, I felt thrilled, I felt free. I was free. I was a werewolf. And it was time to hunt some vampires.
Bits of broken glass stuck out of her head. Blood was streaming down her face and onto the floor where she was lying in a pool of her own blood. Skye gripped the other end of the broken bottle in her shaky hand; she looked down at the girl lying on the ground.

Why did I do that? Am I losing control over myself again? Skye asked herself as she dropped the bottle and ran out of the gates of the Academy; behind her, she could hear people shouting. She was unsure of whether they were shouting at her or the girl she had hit with the bottle.

She sprinted through the crowded city streets, pushing past busy shoppers; she kept on running until she ran out of breath and her chest began to heave. She stumbled to a stop at the edge of town; taking in deep, calming breaths, she bunched up her skirt in her hands and tried to calm herself down.

The front door slammed open and her father stomped out of it and over to her. She tried to sit up but as she did he kicked her in the face, causing her to turn her face away from him. There were people on the sidewalk looking over at them but no one tried to stop what was happening.

Skye asked herself as she dropped the bottle and ran out of the girl lying on the ground. Why did I do that? Am I losing control over myself again?

“The front door slammed open and her father stomped out of it and over to her. She tried to sit up but as she did he kicked her in the face, causing her to turn her face away from him. There were people on the sidewalk looking over at them but no one tried to stop what was happening.

Skye asked herself as she dropped the bottle and ran out of them; there wasn’t a single scratch.

It had happened one day when she came home from school; her father had grabbed her by the neck and thrown her up against the door. She’d struggled but had been unable to break his hold; the grip on her neck was too strong. He squeezed and began to cut the circulation off. Skye began to choke; she kept on trying to get out of his iron grip, but he only tightened it more.

“Stop struggling, you little brat! This will all be over soon,” he yelled in her face.

Tears were now forming in her eyes, making them sparkle like two blue diamonds; the tears soon began to fall down her cheeks and onto her father’s arm. Her father began yelling at her again, tightening his grip each time she looked away from him; her took her off the door and threw her into a window.

The glass shattered even before she had made contact with it. Skye lay on the lush green grass, bits of broken glass surrounding her body. She looked at her arms and legs, expecting to see them all bloody and to have glass sticking out of them; what she saw shocked her. There was no glass sticking out of her limbs, or cuts with blood pouring out of them; there wasn’t a single scratch.

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Skye asked herself as she dropped the bottle and ran out of the girl lying on the ground. Why did I do that? Am I losing control over myself again?

“It’s time you learned your place, daddy dear, for I am no mere human, but something much more powerful than you will ever understand!” Skye’s eyes began to deepen until they turned into a pure dark black, like a never-ending void.

“W—what are y—you?” he stuttered, sweating with fear.

Skye just looked at him and the smile on her face grew wider. “I am Lucida, the Spirit Guardian of everything in the world! I can control every living and non-living thing without moving a single muscle, and I live inside your daughter!” she yelled at him. The glass shards moved closer and closer to his body with every word she spoke. “I have stood aside for all of these years, watching you abusing Skye, and I have been waiting for my chance to get out and teach you a lesson! After all of this time she finally felt true anger towards you and that anger was what let me out!” Lucida’s hair started to fade to an almost white shade; if you looked close enough, you could see the slightest hint of orange.

“P—please don’t hurt m—me.”

“You should have thought of that before you did all those things to Skye! So, now you must pay the ultimate price.” When she finished her sentence, the shards of glass flicked towards Skye’s dad. They penetrated his body, stabbing him in the shoulder, forearm, stomach and calf. He screamed in pain; blood oozing out of his wounds and dripping onto the grass, he slid down to the floor. There were two pieces of glass left and they were aimed at his heart and throat. They flung themselves towards him and he screamed again just before they made contact with his skin. Then there was silence.

Lucida laughed but then fell to the floor, her white hair regaining its bright orange colour and her eyes fading back to a light sky blue. Lucida had gone back into Skye’s body.
Skye blinked a few times before she stood up. She heard screams coming down the street; she turned to have a look inside the house and saw her mother on the floor, crying. Skye looked down the street and she heard sirens; not knowing what else to do she ran, running away from it all. Surprisingly, she wasn’t crying, but she should be, shouldn’t she? She had just killed her father; but maybe she was happy. She didn’t have to put up with being abused anymore; after six years, she was finally free. But now she had no place to go. “It’s OK, Skye. I’ll help you through this; you’ll never be alone again,” said Lucinda in the back of her head. Skye smiled at the voice; she knew that she would never be alone again...  

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Remembering that time brought a tear to Skye’s eye; it wasn’t sadness that brought the tear, it was more pain. The memory made all of the pain she once felt flood through her. What am I going to do...? I’ve got nowhere to live now. Maybe if I went to see Adam...No, I can’t, I can’t go to the human world, but then again, he’s the only one who really understands. God, I’m so confused! Skye thought as she stared at the setting sun. She turned her head around and looked behind her; all of the people that were on the streets were now gone. She sighed and glanced back at the orange sky. How long has it been since the incident? If feels like it was just yesterday. Skye turned around and ran away from him. Away from the Academy, away from everything. She had no idea as to where she was going; she just ran, stumbling on her own feet.  

*****

Skye is only seventeen years old, and yet she has been through more than most people have in a whole lifetime. As a young child, Skye never had any friends, and her parents hated her. Every day, when she got home from school, her parents would yell at her and sometimes even hit her; no-one understood what it was like for Skye except for one boy who was just like her. She was born with a rare mark on the back of her neck. Every time she got angry or upset it would begin to glow, releasing her hidden power and causing her Spirit Guardian-self, Lucida, to come out. Sometimes she would lose control when Lucida came out, causing her to do things she would later regret; the first time Lucida showed herself, she killed her own father. Even before Skye changed, she could still lose control over herself; she lacked control, as people had put it before. Adam was the only person who had ever had faith in her and thought that she would be able to get over what had happened when she was younger, that she would be able to control her feelings and Lucida. She was always happy when she was with Adam; he was the only one who was able to make her smile, laugh and forget her troubles. Then he was sent to the human world. It had been years since she last saw him. Every day she woke up feeling sad knowing that he wasn’t there; she’d never even found out why he was sent there in the first place. Adam was the best sword fighter she had ever met; in fact, he was the best fighter ever. He knew more about swords than anyone else at the Academy. Everyone was jealous of him and they all wanted to be his friend, so Skye was surprised when he came up to her on her first day at the Academy, wanting to be her friend. The Academy was built for people who were different than others; some of the people that went to the Academy had rare skills and talents. Like this one girl who was the same age as Skye and who could control the fire element, and this other boy who could sense when someone was near. Everyone was accepted and they all cared for each other until Skye came along. Skye sighed. How she missed Adam. He was the only person she could really trust in the whole world; he was like a brother to her.  

“Skye...” said a husky male voice from behind her. Slowly she turned around to see the founder of the Academy, Sir Dalen. Skye looked up into his soft brown eyes; she could clearly see the worry deep inside them. Sir Dalen took a step towards her and put his hand on her shoulder. “Skye, what happened back there between you and Mimi?” Skye looked away from him, embarrassed by the fact that she had lost control. “I, um, don’t know...” she said truthfully. Sir Dalen gave her shoulder a little squeeze and she looked back up at him. “Skye, are you losing control again?” he asked, concern in his voice. Skye nodded slowly, not trusting her voice at that very moment; she could feel something welling up inside her and she knew that if she spoke a single word, it would just come out in a croak. Sir Dalen sighed and let go of her shoulder. “I thought you had learned how to control Lucida. Maybe you just need some more training...” “I don’t need any more of your training!” she spat, rage growing inside her. “Can’t you see that, no matter what I do to try and control it, I just can’t! She’s taking over and there’s nothing you or anyone can do about it!” The rage inside her began to grow more and more until she felt a familiar burning sensation on the back of her neck. That’s it, Skye, let him have it, let’s show him what we’re really capable of, said Lucida in Skye’s head, a hint of darkness clouding her usually soft, sweet voice. No, I can’t give in to her, I just can’t. She cannot get out, no matter what, Skye thought, shaking her head. Just try to calm yourself down, Skye, it’s the only way to stop her... There was only one thing that could calm her down when she was like this and that was Adam. She would always get like this whenever someone picked on her back at the Academy and he would always be able to calm her down. Skye began to think of Adam, about some of the conversations they’d shared and about the good times. In an instant she began to feel calm again and the burning started to ease until it finally disappeared. Sir Dalen looked at Skye, relieved. She took a step back, her foot landing on the outskirts of town; she took another step and she was over the border. “Skye, what are you doing? Get back over here,” he asked and demanded of her. “No...” “What was that?” “I said, no!” she screamed. Skye turned around and ran away from him. Away from the Academy, away from everything. She had no idea as to where she was going; she just ran, stumbling on her own feet. The sun had set now and it was almost pitch black. This was not one of her brightest ideas...
Nachos
by Kimberley Kean
Chapter 1:
Questions
Where am I? I’m supposed to be in front of a little quaint cottage with red roses on either side of the path which leads up to the door and sunshine, making the whole garden look homely. But where do I find myself? In front of a house with dark, dirty windows, and roses with sharp thorns growing out of control. What happened to the sunshine? The weather was perfect before now. A cold breeze circles around me. I shiver but seemingly not from the cold. My skin is on fire so how could I be cold? I’m sure this is the right address; how could I forget where my best friend lives? What has happened? Where is Alice? Usually she knows when I am coming, even when I try to surprise her. Has Alice and her family moved? I didn’t think things could be that serious. Even if she was moving, she would have told me; we are best friends, we always tell each other our secrets.
Questions flood my mind as I try to think of a rational answer to them. As I wonder, my memory goes back a few weeks to when most of my problems started.

Chapter 2:
The past
The coldness had all started a few weeks ago. Alice had gotten mad at me for doing something that wasn’t even my fault. Looking back, I can’t even remember what she’d blamed me for. The argument didn’t end well; she stormed off, leaving me in a courtyard full of high school students. The words that ended the argument scratched my heart: “I HATE YOU! DON’T come looking for me because you WON’T find me!” Those words frightened me, but not as much as the expression on her face as she said them. It looked like she really meant it.
I was scared to talk to her so I ignored her for the rest of the afternoon, all the while thinking of something to say to her the next day. I needn’t have worried so much over what I was going to say because she wasn’t there the next day. I left her alone, thinking she would cool down, but the following morning she still hadn’t returned to school. I tried texting her, phoning her and e-mailing her, but nothing went through. She was either really, really mad at me or she was ignoring me on purpose.
Alice didn’t even return to school the week after. All that time I wandered the school grounds, looking for something to do to keep my mind off what was happening between us. I was so wrapped up in my despair that I didn’t realise that my seventeenth birthday was just a week away. Surely she would come to wish me a happy birthday or at least call. That thought raised my hopes; Alice never forgot birthdays and she most definitely would never forget mine. We had grown up together, and shared every secret, from the really bad marks we got in some subjects to our deepest thoughts. No one could separate us. Only, a few months back, just after Alice’s seventeenth birthday, something happened to her. She wasn’t able to come to school for a week. I tried to go see her but her mum wouldn’t allow me in. She said that Alice needed rest and no one was allowed to see her.
Alice never was the same. She came to school with a determined look on her face and an angry glint in her eyes. Looking at her, she looked slightly different; her face was pale and her eyes looked as if they’d had a reddish tone added to their chocolate colour. How was I to know then that she was a whole different person? She seemed like my best friend.

Chapter 3:
Pain
As I stand here in front of Alice’s house, I think about how tight our friendship had been. I haven’t been as lonely in my whole life as when I was alone without Alice. My life has become empty; no-one can fill up the emptiness in my heart other than Alice. When she left, it felt like a part of me left with her and was slowly, slowly running out of my grasp. I close my eyes as tears of despair start running down my face. Pain surges through me, not tiny stabs here and there, but a fire. What’s happening to me?

Chapter 4:
Reunion
I try to open my eyes but they won’t obey. It seems like I’m in total darkness, where no sense exists. There’s no light, nothing to touch, no sound, but there is a smell, a delicious one. The smell is familiar but I can’t put a name to it. I am drowning in this everlasting pool of darkness. I’m alone again but this time it feels good; the pain is still there but has ceased worrying me. I feel alive for the first time in days. The darkness is my friend. It will always be here. I don’t really
I hear a voice, calling my name. I know this voice, its sweet melodie chime.

My eyes fly open to see the person I had hoped to see, the person who has hurt me so badly, the person who has deserted me because of something I didn’t do.

Alice is sitting next to me, looking pleased with herself. She is smiling but not in the way you would if you met your best friend after a month without them. It doesn’t seem like she is overjoyed to see me. Her lips are twisted with a curl around the edges. She looks like she is lost in thought; her eyes are locked on my face. What is she thinking about?

**Chapter 5:**

**Realisation**

I shift my head to look into Alice’s eyes and see pure triumph. I look down at myself and gasp. My skin is pale, almost as pale as Alice’s. Why is that? The last time I’d looked at my skin was when I was remembering the time when I was alone without Alice. The last time I had looked at my skin, it had been a creamy colour, but now it’s almost white. Alice’s skin had gone like this just after her seventeenth birthday, just after the accident.

Then it hits me like a wave crashing down on a surfer. Alice knows something about what’s happening to me. It all fits. Her smug look shows she’s pleased with herself. My changing is a mystery to me, but she knows and it looks like she isn’t ready to tell me yet. I glance at her, only to see a realisation flash. I turn around to see a woman run up to me, then stop and stare curiously at Alice. She again seems lost in thought, and only when I am three-quarters of the way down do I stop looking into Alice’s eyes and realise what is wrong with the picture. To me, her eyes seem red rather than brown. Am I hallucinating? Maybe I did lose too much blood. She hands me the cup as I stare at her. I shift my gaze to the cup. The seemingly red cordial seems too thick to be cordial. I take a sniff of the stuff. So this is what was producing that delicious smell when I was waking.

I take a sip. It’s so smooth and it soothes my throat. Something’s not right about the picture. I keep on drinking, and only when I am three-quarters of the way down do I stop and stare curiously at Alice. She again seems lost in thought, though this time it seems like she’s calculating something rather than dreaming.

It comes rushing. Now I remember the name of the smell. It smelt like blood, but if it is blood, I would’ve passed out. Instead, I cut my gaze to the cup. The seemingly red cordial seems too thick to be cordial. I take a sniff of the stuff. So this is what was producing that delicious smell when I was waking.

It feels like blood, but if it is blood, I would’ve passed out. Just the smell of blood makes me sick to the core. But now it seems like it’s the most delicious smell in the world. It tastes better than chocolate, better than fish and chips, even better than Mum’s famous roast. What is wrong with me?

**Chapter 6:**

**Secrets revealed**

I stare up at Alice with accusing eyes. It seems like she is behind all this confusion. What is wrong with her? She stares back at me but her eyes glitter with excitement. “WHAT have you DONE to ME?” I scream at her.

While Alice is gone, I look around. The room I am in has a window, curtained, but light still filters through. The furniture is lavish and seems expensive. I look down at myself again to admire my skin, only to find the bed which I’m lying on is covered in blood. I stare at the bed, wondering how I could’ve lost that much blood. I seem perfectly fine; it doesn’t seem like I’ve lost a lot of blood. I hear a sound of footsteps and turn to look at Alice as she walks in through the door, holding a cup. It looks to me like red cordial, but I asked for water, not cordial! How is cordial going to quench my thirst?

I look up into her eyes and realise what is wrong with the picture. To me, her eyes seem red rather than brown. Am I hallucinating? Maybe I did lose too much blood. She hands me the cup as I stare at her. I shift my gaze to the cup. The seemingly red cordial seems too thick to be cordial. I take a sniff of the stuff. So this is what was producing that delicious smell when I was waking.

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It comes rushing. Now I remember the name of the smell. It smells like blood, but if it is blood, I would’ve passed out. Just the smell of blood makes me sick to the core. But now it seems like it’s the most delicious smell in the world. It tastes better than chocolate, better than fish and chips, even better than Mum’s famous roast. What is wrong with me?

She seems taken aback for a second, then smiles that lips-curling smile and replies smoothly, “It’s not what I’ve done to you but what you’ve done to yourself.”

I stare at her, bewildered. “What have I done? I never did anything! You were the one who stormed off, leaving me! You were the one who left me, and now you’re saying that it’s my fault!” I’m fuming now. I never did anything. She was the one who accused me of something I didn’t do. She was the one who left me to suffer on my own. What kind of friend is she, blaming everything on me? Is it always going to be like this?

“Yes it is. Ever since the accident, you were scared of me.”

Alice seems desperately trying to calm me down. “You never paid that close attention to what I said anymore. You deserted me and that afternoon was when I lost control of myself.” She is almost crying now. “I wanted to apologise and tell you who I really was, but I was afraid that you would be even more scared of me. So I—”

I cut her off. “Who were you?”

Alice gives a sigh through the tears which are trickling down her face. “Why don’t I just tell you from the beginning?”

I nod.

Alice gives me a sad look, then begins. “Just after my seventeenth birthday, I was going to the post office to pick up a parcel. As I was driving there, my car broke down in front of the cemetery. I didn’t have my cell phone with me then so I decided to walk to the closest phone booth, which wasn’t far off. As I was walking, something flashed. I turned around to see a woman run up to me, then the world went black.

“I woke up to see the same woman bent over me. I stared up at her and screamed. The pain which she had caused me was too much. I screamed at her until my throat was raw. She ran out of the room faster than anyone I have ever seen and came back holding a cup of red stuff. She thrust it into my hand and made me drink it. I was so mad at her that at first I refused to touch the cup, even though my throat was burning and I was salivating from the smell it was releasing. I gave in and finished the whole cup in several sips.”
“I looked up at her again and saw loneliness in her face. She seemed so sad. I apologised for my behaviour and told her that I had to go pick up the parcel. She wouldn’t let me go, saying that I had to rest and get my emotions under control before I stepped out into the world again. That was when I realised that the place where I was cooped up in was solitary. There were no windows, so no light came in, other than the smell of the woman and the cup, which still held remains of that wonderful substance. There was no smell, no sound and nothing other than what was in the room to feel. The woman then introduced herself as Sophie. She took care of me as I was adapting to my new body. In that time she told me the rules of her world and cautioned me to not reveal my true self to anyone; if they learned too much, I had to bring them over to our side.

“I returned home after two days. My mum and dad were relieved to see me but I didn’t have the strength to keep what had really happened to me a secret from them. I told them everything, starting from the beginning. They understood and promised to keep it a secret. Thankfully they didn’t ask any questions on how I would feed myself, but let me be. I realised a few days later that I was able to eat normal food as well. It didn’t taste as good as blood but at least people wouldn’t start guessing why I didn’t normally eat with my family.

“So I spent the rest of my days trying to contain my strength, my desire to rip apart humans and drink them up, and my emotions, which got out of control so easily. When I returned to school the week after, you seemed fine, but then, as the weeks went on, you seemed afraid of me, scared to speak to me, scared of my reaction. You were wise then to choose to keep quiet over matters which would’ve made me angry. I was tired of pretending, tired of trying not to harm you, tired of keeping secrets away from you. So I knew the only way to be equal again was to make you the same as me.” Alice sighs and looks at me to see how I am coping with all the information.

Chapter 7:
The truth

I blink. Realisation comes crashing down on me. How could I be so stupid as not to realise where things were going? Slowly, slowly the puzzle pieces of what I have become are slowly dropping into place. The cup full of red stuff, the thirst, the smell, the eyes, the skin, the story, are all pieces just waiting to be put into place. It all fits now. I have entered an entirely different world and am never going to be able to go back. The rules that governed my past life were there, but now a whole new set of rules have been given to me to follow. I know that if I break one rule, our whole existence could be discovered. I have to be careful as to how I go about my life. Mixing a normal life and one full of secrets can be dangerous. I pause. “Wait.” I stare at Alice, confused. “Did you say we can eat normal human food?”

She stares at me. “I don’t know if every Vampire can, but whenever someone came over, I always sat at the table and ate whatever mum had made. It didn’t taste as good as blood but I was able to digest it.”

“I thought that Vampires could only drink blood and couldn’t go out in the sun.” I glance at Alice to see a smile tugging at her lips. “I also thought that they slept in coffins and were scared of garlic.”

I turn to look at her. She’s beaming full out. “That’s what I thought too, but everything that you grew up hearing about us was a myth; nothing could have been further from the truth. Our only difference from humans is that we are faster, more intelligent and drink blood. All those myths were written by Vampires to lead humans on a different path so that they wouldn’t really be able to recognise us if they met one of our people.”

I process the information. It all makes sense. That’s why no one has been able to prove that Vampires actually exist. If Vampires have been able to survive so long without humans realising that they walk alongside us, then it will take an extremely smart human to figure it out.

I glance at Alice. She’s smiling at me, though this time the smile is full of meaning, soft and warm. I realise that I’m glad to have her back in my life. Maybe we can get through this together.
Ruki’s gift by Isabelle Cianfrone

Ruki stirred restlessly in her pod. It was still hours before everyone would awaken but sleep was not on her mind. She let her thoughts wander back to the events of how she had come to be in this shire.

Her own parents had not wanted her, afraid at an early age of her growing powers. Droids had been ordered to take her as far away as possible from the place she had been manifested, where for five years she had lived and grown: Tanlenia, the only place she had known as home.

Drugoids, half human and half droid, had found her, taken her in and cared for her. She remembered awakening to the night, and the night was all she had known since she was abandoned here ten years ago.

She had managed to live in the shadows, always careful not to draw attention to herself. Now she had flourished into a beautiful young lady with exquisite features, and more and more eyes seemed to look her way. Suddenly, the shadows that had protected her for all those years seemed transparent, leaving her feeling helpless and vulnerable to the point where she constantly felt uneasy.

It had become clear to her as the years had gone by why her birth parents had been so afraid and unable to deal with her special powers and abilities. She could, from the time she was able to utter her first words, foretell the future. The Quadoon Shire were a superstitious clan who did not take her presence well predictions from a child who always foretold events, things, things that made you feel alive and smile and go dizzy with excitement.

Her Drugoid family never understood as they, though half human, had never experienced or felt such feelings. They had no need to as they were only created to serve and obey. Ruki never felt like she really fitted in or belonged there. She always loved the feeling of new and unexpected things, things that made you feel alive and smile and go dizzy with excitement.

Her meeting with the Head Councillor came all too soon. Not nearly as prepared as she had hoped to be, she felt her nerves grow and knot at the bottom of her belly. Suddenly she felt so ill.

“Everything will be fine,” she chanted to herself over and over in her mind.

A shiny black Cabby Cruiser was there to pick her up and take her to face her future.

Upon arrival, she was ushered into a small, yet very brightly lit, room that boasted the same dreary grey walls as most buildings in Exitor. Only a table and two chairs were positioned in the centre of the room. The knots in her belly tightened and she felt a sudden urge to turn and flee. Flee over in her mind.

“Everything will be fine,” she chanted to herself over and over in her mind.

Exitor was now her home. Tall skyscrapers reaching for the sky, further than the eye could see, were everywhere. Billboards floated in midair, lighting up the skies, and hovercraft of all sizes and shapes crammed the always congested airways. Night birds flew in circles, hovering as if waiting for something, but Ruki was never sure of what. There were no colours worn; almost everyone’s attire was either black or dull grey. All women wore gowns that covered their necks right down to their ankles, leaving only their small pale faces in view. Their hair was always tied back in either a bun or ponytail.

Children got their education at home by one source, the big brain of the city, the brain that was full of knowledge, kept law and enforced order; it was the lifeline the city depended on to help make everything run like clockwork. All in all, life on Exitor was precise, predictable and very mundane.

Ruki never felt like she really fitted in or belonged there. She always loved the feeling of new and unexpected things, things that made you feel alive and smile and go dizzy with excitement.

Her Drugoid family never understood as they, though half human, had never experienced or felt such feelings. They had no need to as they were only created to serve and obey. Taking Ruki in and raising her as they did was not in their nature, but somehow they had, from deep within, known that this was the right thing to do. Drugoids felt no emotions, shed no tears and never laughed, but Ruki always felt safe and secure with them and she had always felt that deep down, even though they were not capable of love, they loved her.

The Head Councillor of Exitor had gotten wind of her gift and he had requested a meeting with her later on that day. Ruki wondered if he would embrace her powers with an open mind, or would he too be afraid and uncertain about events she could foresee? Would she once again be abandoned, alone and scared? At once, she dismissed these thoughts and tried to only focus on positive outcomes. Surely positive thoughts would bring positive outcomes. She hung onto this with every positive thread in her body.

The noise of her household’s pods opening, sounds she heard every waking time, let her know the day was beginning. Quickly, she dressed and ran the neofibre cloth over her face, brushed her hair and laser-zapped her teeth so they were sparkling and clean. Moving swiftly to the brewing area of the house, she helped prepare their first meal for the day. After eating, she swept the floors with a hover broom and set the electronic zoom mop to do its duties.

Her meeting with the Head Councillor came all too soon. Not nearly as prepared as she had hoped to be, she felt her nerves grow and knot at the bottom of her belly. Suddenly she felt so ill.

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into the room and firmly shook her hand in greeting, indicating to her to sit back down. Quickly, she obeyed. After what seemed like an eternity of never-ending questions thrown at her one after another, the Head Councillor was silent. He peered down at the notes he had scribbled down, tapping his fingers annoyingly on the table. Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap. “Why does he not say anything?” a voice shrieked inside her skull. The suspense was almost too much for her to bear. At long last, he peered up at her. She winced as though she already knew that what he was about to say to her was what she had been dreading all along.

But, to her surprise, he showed no sign of being concerned or threatened by her powers. In fact, he saw it as an advantage to their city, and thought that having her around would only be a good thing and certainly very beneficial to Exitor in years to come.

Overwhelmed with relief, Ruki’s heart was once again filled with hopes and dreams. Suddenly, her future did not look so bleak, and she had just as much chance as anyone else to be happy. She would do her best to serve her new world and everything else would surely fall into place. A small smile escaped her lips as she shook the Head Councillor’s hand in farewell for now. He would call on her often in days to come, but for now all she wanted to do was dance and twirl in happiness.

Ruki knew she belonged.
A different world
by Renee Miller

Joint recipient of second place in the Junior Text category

Lucy Kendrick had been having a hard day; she was sick of it all. She was sick of all the fights and all the half-hearted apologies that followed. She just wanted a break, a way out; that was all that was needed.

Lucy was walking home when the sky was dull and covered in rainclouds; a thin layer of water covered the street and sidewalk. She shrank into her hoodie, trying to keep warm for the rest of the short distance left to get to her flat.

Her shoes squelched on the pavement, flicking water up onto the bottom of her faded blue jeans. She looked forward to seeing her mother in the shopping centre, and the complete terror that had come with thinking she was lost. And that’s what she was, lost.

Turning back to the wall, she was deafened by the sound of her heart pounding in her ears; adrenalin pulsed though her veins with an icy chill; she ran and planned to keep running for as long as it took.

Minutes passed in a blur to her and all she felt was the burn of the cool air surging though her lungs; her legs were beginning to protest in agony with ever stride she took. She reached out with her slightly shaky hand and curled her fingers around the edge of the brick wall.

She whirled around, frantically looking, searching for an answer amongst the trees that stretched so high, almost punching holes into the sky. Her breathing increased in her panic; she had that feeling she had not felt in a long time. It made her remember being a little kid again who’d fallen behind her mother in the shopping centre, and the complete terror that had come with thinking she was lost. And that’s what she was, lost.

Looking behind her, she saw the wall of the apartment building; it was an older building with a door that squeaked when she opened it. She turned to the building, fumbling with the keys in her hand, getting ready to open her apartment door. She heard the soft click of the door shutting behind her; she looked up to find her door, but she wasn’t in her apartment building. In front of her were trees, and the ground was covered in leaves and twigs. She stood there for a moment, her mind racing, trying to grasp a possible explanation for all of this.

When she thought that she could not make her legs take even one more step, she could finally see the end of the wall. She stretched her left hand out into the trees, trying to grasp a possible explanation for all of this. She reached out with her slightly shaky hand and curled her fingers around the edge of the brick wall, needing to feel it was real, that this was no dream. Her breathing slowly evened out as she began to walk beside the wall, intending to see where it ended; she could not see the end from where she stood. She hoped there would be another door to take her home again; that hope kept her calm and kept her going.

She began by walking, trailing her fingertips along the wall, feeling every brick she passed. It was one of those rare moments where the mind zones out; she just kept walking, thinking about nothing in particular.

Thirteen thousand bricks later, the tips of her fingers on her left hand were tingling from constantly running against brick after brick. She had been walking for longer than she’d anticipated; she could feel herself losing the ease she’d had before becoming worried and anxious.

She was no longer satisfied by walking in her set rhythm; she began to walk so fast she was almost jogging. Then she took off running as fast as she could, like she was being chased. Adrenaline shot through her veins with an icy chill; she ran and planned to keep running for as long as it took.

She reached out with her slightly shaky hand and curled her fingers around the edge of the brick wall. It hit her that she had made it, but what had she achieved in all of that? All she wanted to do was rest, but the curiosity was burning in her; she had to peak around to the other side of that wall just to know if the way out might be right there.
But there was nothing but trees and an almost endless stretch of wall. It shocked her that she knew that there was going to be no magic gateway out of here, and yet she still felt disappointment, like she had just lost a bit more hope, even though she didn’t think she had any left.

Her hands clutched her hair; she felt like she was losing her mind, that everything was spinning out of control. Her vision was blurred and she couldn’t even see what was going wrong, let alone how to stop it.

She spun around, looking back and forth again and again from the wall to the strange mysterious trees. She had to decide whether to go into the forest or stay by the wall. She knew she had to leave and find a way out of the forest, but it still terrified her to no end, the distance between her and her home. She knew her best chance of getting home was to find another door, and the more she thought about all of this, the more she began to realise she needed to be able to survive here.

‘What if there is no food out here? How will I survive if there is no water? What kind of predators are out here? Is there even a way back to earth? What if this whole world is just a forest and I can’t find a way out?’ she thought in a rush.

While she was worrying about things she couldn’t know or change, she was too busy to notice that there were less trees now and light was beginning to stream in through the gaps, making the light of the trees less noticeable.

She did notice, however, when she stepped out of the forest and there were no more trees in front of her, only the most beautiful scene she had ever seen.

Lucy looked down at the floor which was covered in black smooth pebbles, so clean that she could see the light from the sky dancing off of them. Her eyes wandered above her to the sky; she stepped back in utter confusion and gasped at its beauty and its absurdity. Balls of fire burned across the sky almost like clouds, and the sky itself was not blue but a vibrant purple. As amazing as all of that was, she was more shocked by what she saw past the black pebbles: frozen waves, or at least that is what they looked like to her. Some were ten or more metres high; the whole sea was frozen and the waves stretched on all the way to the horizon, all different heights and shapes. The brightness of the sky tinted the reflection of the frozen sea that stretched on in the distance. The only word she could find to describe it was beautiful.

She didn’t really make the conscious thought to walk to the frozen sea but her feet carried her there. As she got closer she could see that it wasn’t frozen at all; it had a thick layer of something that looked like glass over the water and waves. Fish-like creatures swum under the water; some glowed, reminding her of the beautiful trees from earlier.

She couldn’t help herself; she stepped out onto the glass-like cover of the sea. She didn’t crack the glass when she stepped on it, and it held her weight without effort. She looked down and saw those creatures swimming underneath her; it took her breath away. She smiled with absolute wonder in her eyes. Her body was full of excitement now, instead of fear; all questions of danger and survival were forgotten as she walked amongst frozen waves that were so high no man could ever surf them. The breeze blew her hair behind her, only adding to the beauty of this place.

It felt to her so peaceful and untouched; no human being had stood here before her. She wondered whether the earth had looked something like this before humans built skycrapers and houses and ripped down trees and mined their world’s riches.

She looked up at the sky and saw that it had changed; the purple was now darker and streaked with pink and a golden colour. The balls of fire were moving away towards the horizon and she could see the suns now; one was the burning the brightest blue and the other burned orange like the earth’s sun. She could see them beginning to hover above her in the sky; spurts of what looked like smoke and water swirled together, and then she felt a drop of water fall down from one of the smoky clouds. She made the decision to head back to the cover of the forest, as much she wanted to stay on the still sea for a bit longer. She turned and ran back towards the trees on the solid glass that covered the sea; it surprised her that there were no pools of water on the still sea as she ran back to shore.

She stopped for a moment when she saw more rain falling; that is when she noticed that whenever any drop of water hit the solid sea it would not splash but disappear, like it had melted into the sea. Lucy smiled in response to another thing she did not understand.

When she made it to the forest, she stood for a moment under the cover of the trees, looking out onto the sea and the sky as the rain fell, making the scene misty and even more enchanting. She knew that sooner or later she was going to have to make a move but her body was so sore and tired. Her right shoulder still was burning slightly and had a black and purple bruise stretching across it. Her jeans were smeared with dirt and holes were forming at the knees; her jacket was damp and as dirty as her jeans.

She sighed and leaned back onto one of the many trees near her; she could feel the chill in the air because of her damp clothes and wet hair. She didn’t know how long she had until she would have to find somewhere to sleep, eat and drink.
She closed her eyes; she couldn’t worry about that now, she just needed a minute to figure out what was next. She had no choice but to keep walking into the forest again; the rain was still pouring down and there was nowhere else to search out there. So she headed back into the forest; she was on edge as she would have rather been out in the open than stumbling through that forest, but she really didn’t have a choice.

Then she saw it. It was off in the distance, beyond many trees and leaves, but it was there: the door. She ran to it, relieved and filled with joy, and smiled like a child at Christmas when she reached it. It was different to the other door; it was made of glass and, through the glass, she could see the lobby of a business building. She watched as a well-dressed lady sat behind the desk, frowning while she typed frantically on her computer; others sat on couches, clearly waiting to go in. Some were nervously tapping on their briefcases, other were drinking coffee and looking relaxed, while people who clearly worked there rushed through the lobby juggling stacks of paper and documents. The room was clean and white with paintings and flowers on a few of the tables. She knew she was ready to go back; she didn’t want to run away anymore. As amazed as she was by that place, she needed to go back home. She stepped forward and curled her fingers around the cold metal handle and pushed the door open; once again, there was no magical feeling or a sense of anything special happening, she just walked into the room.

In clothes covered in dirt and water from another world, she stood there for a moment; her shoes were getting mud on the carpet but she didn’t care. Then a man walked past her, not even noticing her dishevelled state, about to go through the door she had just walked through. She panicked and reached out to stop him but he had already opened the door; there was just an office with knickknacks on the shelves and a photo frame with a picture of two smiling kids in it.

Her arm dropped as she saw that there was no forest or purple sky but just an office; she was back on earth. Turning around, she spotted the door out of the building; she walked right past the lady at the desk, who looked at her and her dirty attire in shock.

‘Where did she come from?’ the lady thought as she saw Lucy step out of the front door, leaving a trail of mud behind her. Lucy was gone before the lady could say anything. She walked out onto the street and saw people speeding, hailing cabs and rushing about. She didn’t know why but it made her smile and shake her head. She turned and walked away, heading to a small flat, her home.

She never spoke to anyone about what happened that day; it seemed easy to pretend it never happened and so she did. She carried on with her life as usual, eating, drinking, sleeping, waking up, going to work and doing it all again and again for the next twenty-thousand days of her life.

Even though she never spoke a word of what had happened to her, because no-one would believe her and she sort of couldn’t believe it herself, she never forgot what had happened to her that day. She had never been so scared in her life but neither had she seen anything as beautiful in her whole life, and she never regretted ending up in that strange world; she just wished she had the answer to how any of it had happened. Over time, she slowly began to doubt that she had ever been on another world, even though she had been. It was just easier to understand things that way because, when she got back, nothing had changed; no-one had changed or had their whole view of the world shifted. They were none the wiser, but she was.
Hidden wonders of Salisbury by Josh Hansford

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