



TORNADO ALLEY

**The Literary Magazine of
Dover High School and
Dover Public Library**

VOL. 1: SPRING 2015

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and Dover Public Library
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Detail from “Ceasar”
by Francesca Alguire

Advisor's Note

Tornado Alley is an experiment with many variables. First, if we had no content, we would have no magazine. That's where these awesomely creative teens come in with their unique stories and engaging essays. I'm so proud of each of these teens for their hard work!

We also needed some help in the selection and design areas. That's where our teen editors, Katie and Felicity come in, saving the day by voting on submissions. Katie went above and beyond by helping me put together the magazine itself. She picked out the font, chose the cover art, and took on the crazy task of putting eleven different submissions into one Microsoft Publisher file. We couldn't have asked for better help.

Last but not least, an experiment like this requires funding. For the last few years, Dover High School and Dover Public Library have been receiving funds from a 21st Century Grant to promote creative writing and technology among Dover teens. This year, part of those funds has created what you now hold in your hands. We're very grateful for the opportunity to work with the community to give teens a way to showcase their creativity and hard work.

Our creative teens, our teen editors, and the 21st Century Grant funds have made the high school and library's first literary magazine a success. We now pass the experiment on to you. We hope you enjoy *Tornado Alley*.

Liz Strauss

Teen Librarian

Dover Public Library

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Senior Editor's Notes

By Katie Hanslik

Grade 10



I know it's been said time and time again, but something within me has always known that I wanted to be a writer. I taught myself to write and read at the age of six, and came up with a rather fantastical story about a leopard and a panther who became friends. Needless to say, my writing capabilities have since much improved

and expanded, but there is something vitally important about my early desire to write. It was—and still is—an innate yearning to be able to fluently and beautifully tell a story; to show others a glimpse into my own heart and mind, a world that I alone usually inhabit. There is no moment when I have not enjoyed creating such miracles out of words.

Where will this lead me? I oftentimes wonder. In fact, hardly a day passes when I don't ponder my possible future as a

writer or author. As do all authors, I have aspirations of being published someday—but it's more than just a simple longing to see my name in print, or to make a profit, or even to know the pride of my friends and family when I've reached that goal. I want to write because I truly think that it can change people's lives... and I'd like to do that.

The Reincarnation of Spring

Natalie Caswell

Grade 9

A flash of pale blue, a wink of silver. She awakened slowly, eyelashes fringed with brittle frost. Everything was slow and hurt, and sitting up was like bending a branch far enough to snap. She had to ease up carefully, as not to frighten the quiet earth around her. Breath escaping her in dancing wood smoke, she flexed her fingers, trying to work some feeling into them. It was like coaxing life into a frozen bird—taxing, but rewarding.

Heartbeat steady, her feet trudged unhurried over the frigid land. Her senses were keenly attuned to the world around her. Eyes watering, she headed toward the horizon, to the mysterious arms of dawn. The light blue smidge reemerged in the sky, as if encouraging her. It was a crescent moon **shape, a smile in the smothering clouds... a cruel smile.** The girl craned her white neck back, baring her throat to the harsh cold and to the strangeness of her existence. Hope flared to life deep in her chest, a tiny flame ignited by the sneering sky and soft drip of melting icicles.

Her breath halted in her throat, forming a ball of ice. She pulled her worn cloak around her, letting the furs entrap the

shy flame inside her breast. *Not yet, surely it's too soon to hope.* Yet the light remained stubbornly behind the bars of her rib cage. *Why am I awake then?* it seemed to whisper back. She shivered, teeth clicking.

Trees were her only companions as she walked, and cold companions at best. They reached upward with sharp fingers and bare bones, stripped by winter, and seemed to scorn her. *You think you can change this barren life with merely bright eyes and a little warmth in your heart?* they seemed to hiss. The girl lowered her head and pulled her hood further down. Brambles and thorns clawed at the hem of her cloak. Perhaps she should return, sleep forever. Because what could she do? How could she banish something as massive and foreboding as winter?

Even with these doubts swirling around in her head like awry snowflakes, the flame grew and her footsteps quickened. As the sun's first golden rays spilled out from beneath the clouds, the wind buffeting her thin body and pulling hair from her frozen braid calmed down. The snow underneath her boots turned to slush, mixing with the cold mud and dead grass. Drops of water from overhanging icicles pricked her forehead and she pulled back her hood. The air nibbled at the tips of her ears. A deer, with velvet fur and regal antlers, crossed the path in front of her. He regarded her with blank eyes, mere footsteps away yet looking right through her. The first smile of the new year graced her lips, tentative but true. She watched the gentle animal walk away on dainty cloven hooves, on to the next great happening in his brief life. The girl was suddenly hit by a wave of weariness and

longing that made her steps falter and her eyes close. *Oh to be free and mortal, not live your life silent beside the world that you can send spinning and crumbling with a single finger!* But she was not corrupt, and shouldered her burden, keeping the dark thoughts that often accompanied her winter sleep bound in chains.

Calves burning, her cloak billowed out from behind her as she crested the hill that led to the morning. Doubts clouded and whispered, clenched and nipped. Her steps slowed and she pressed her hands against her temples. Her fingers were blistered and wrinkled, hair white and loose, eyes sagging. She was fighting a war the sleeping world was blissfully unaware of.

Her knees cracked like the melting ice behind her. The boots on her tired feet were worn through the heels and her cloak practically hung in scraps from her sharp shoulders. The flame sputtered inside her and she fell to the ground, **exhausted. Mud and cold soaked into the girl's skin, and her** hope was struggling to stay alive. Her heart was a slow, ugly thing entrapped in her weak body. The trees watched with unmoving arms. *How did you even think you could do it?*

The girl was too tired to cry, too tired to get up, almost too tired to care. Then she rolled over and her gray eyes slid to the sky. There was the break in the clouds, the smile that was slowly closing. With shaking hands, she reached upward, wanting to pull down that blue silk and wrap herself in its

warmth. It grew even smaller as she watched, the clouds gray and choking like poisonous smoke. Panic bloomed inside her. She took a deep breath and stumbled to her feet, ignoring the popping and protesting of her joints. Shaking off her ruined boots and socks, she trudged up the rest of the hill. Slipping and grunting, she kept her eyes on the turquoise above her. Almost there, so close. Hope held its breath, and so did the sky.

And she was there.

There was no great thundering, no chorus of heavenly song to welcome her, no life-altering change that knocked the breath out of her. It was just... there. Sweet and quiet, full of budding promises. The sunlight brushed her face and she was no longer weary. Her hair fell from its braid, healing and turning a golden color. She shrugged the old cloak off of her, letting the cool breeze tentatively kiss her skin and tease the hem of her pale lavender dress. Taking a deep breath, the smell of soft, loamy earth and sparkling honey filled her lungs. This caused every vein and artery inside her to shiver in delightful response. She stretched her lacy wings and let the stress fall away, drip into the hungry soil. The sky smiled at her, and she returned the smile with new green eyes and a roaring fire in her chest.

Being A Vegetarian

Francesca Alguire

Grade 6

Think about it, waking up in the morning and having your eggs, orange juice, a cup of fruit, but no bacon, no sausage links, no ham. So you move on with your day. Go to work, go to school. Then comes lunch. You pack pizza with no pepperoni or you have a sandwich with lettuce, cheese, peppers, but no meat.

Your day goes on.

You present the newest product to your boss; you complete your report on the world's best inventions. Then you go home.

Dinner's ready and it's taco night! You pile beans, cheese, sour cream, lettuce, but you leave the ground beef off. Sound hard? Not for me. That is what I do every day.

"Well what do you eat?" That is the first thing they always say. I always reply with the same thing, "Everything you eat, just without the meat." So then I have to explain the difference between vegetarian and vegan. After that, I am told that you cannot survive without meat and that I am living an unhealthy

lifestyle. So then everyone gets used to it, that is until I bring leftover tacos to school for lunch and they all say, "How are you eating that I thought you were a vegetarian?"

I always have to say the same thing, "I am. It doesn't have meat on it." In addition, I always get the same response, "Well what's on it?"

I have to admit, most times I sit there and think, are people that oblivious. But I always seem to end up realizing that I'm different. How many eleven-year-old girls haven't had meat in seven years? If I were in their shoes I'd ask questions.

I love when people ask me get the look on their face like, "Wow, I could never do that." The vegetarian part is hard enough for them to understand until I tell them I have never had bacon and that about gives people a heart attack. I really think the reason people have this amazing fascination with people who willingly do not eat meat is for them it would be a sacrifice. I just do it because I have no craving for meat.

If people ask me why I do not eat meat, my friends sometimes chime in and say, "Oh she's not allowed to eat meat." Ok, well I totally missed the memo that I was not allowed to make my own food choices.

When I was little I would always watch kids chow down on ham sandwiches and pepperoni pizza. I would always say to myself and wonder what it would be like to eat meat. I would

become so curious. I started to wonder if I really wanted to eat meat the rest of my life. So one night as I put the food out on the table before dinner I took a mussel off my dad's plate. That was one of my favorite meats when I was little and still ate it. So I cracked the shell, put it in my mouth and spit it right out onto the floor. "Um... no" were my exact words.

I mean sure, it is easier to go to restaurants and just order instead of having to go into full detail about what and what not to put on my meal. Then I normally deal with the look like, "no meat, who are you." I mean it's not just me, it's my mom and grandma, too.

It's different but I would never trade it. Every Saturday my mom and I go to a farm where I see cows, chickens, and turkeys. And I always say the same thing to them, "Don't worry; I'm not gonna eat you".

Days of Peace

Katie Hanslik

Grade 10

The day will come when families
Haven't a notion that's for war;
When sustaining love is a subconscious choice,
And nobody wants for more.
The day will come when nations stand
Together, all for peace;
No one would fear to lend a helping hand
And truth shall bring us release.

It might start now, or it might not —
You make the choice, you weave the plot.
Choose now: Do you wish to help the lot,
Or shall your purpose cease?
Will you heed the calling, be a light —
Will you strive to show others the way?
Or shall the highest truth within you
Wait in fear for some other day?

The day will come when children
Shall walk among the trees
With bare feet upon the softest leaves,
Their hearts brimming over with hope.



Cesar
Francesca Alguire
Grade 6

The Wisdom of Eupha

Kellie Pleshinger

Grade 11

I look around myself.

No one else.

Inhale. Exhale. Deep breaths, deep breaths. Heart in my ears.

Slowly I reach my hand out. I should scream, should find someone else. Doors don't just appear from nowhere. That doesn't happen. Especially not in rural, small towns. Especially not in rural, small town, coffee shop back rooms.

I have been working here for four months, at The Baker Brew. Thomas—as in Baker—thinks he's hysterical. Not a baker, but a coffee maker. I only laughed to get the job. At seventeen with a single dad, I needed the money.

But now, a door. Next to the shelves of the grounds and the old croissants we microwave and the packages of sandwich ingredients. An old, oak door, across from the metallic freezer. I was just closing up after a seven-hour shift, and I was in the middle of walking to get my keys when I noticed it.

I put my keys down, and now, for some strange reason, I'm reaching for the old, brass handle. I reason that the only way to find out how it appeared is to open it and find out what's on the other side. I nod to myself, shaking my short hair back and forth in its ponytail.

I turn the handle, slowly, slowly, slowly. Then, in a burst of confidence, I throw open the random, weird, possibly **magical door, and on the other side... darkness.**

I let out my breath I didn't realize I was holding in a semi-satisfied sigh. Looking farther, I see through the door a glimpse of light on the other side of another, surprise, door. But the room between the two doors is vast and cold but pitch black. Suddenly, I remember the drawer in the kitchen with the flashlights. Our tiny town occasionally suffers from power outages due to the lack of any power resource anywhere near here; the nearest is a nuclear power plant three towns over. Welcome to the real rural America.

Grabbing a can of coffee grounds, I set it at the end of the oak door, not wanting the mysteriously appearing door to disappear just as mysteriously. I jog over to the kitchen, suddenly excited as I dig around for a flashlight. Five minutes, three flashlights, and two packs of AA batteries later, I'm re-approaching my mysterious door. This time, I let the beam of the flashlight guide me through. Four hesitant steps in and I realize the room isn't just cold, it's freezing. But the flashlight beam shows me why.

The room is an old, circular library. Books upon books are all I can see as my flashlight beam travels upward. Looking around, there is only one chair and desk, not comfortable though.

There is also a pedestal with a huge book on it, the binding reading something in an unknown language. This old library looks nothing like I've ever seen; it's cold and... medieval. Antique books are stacked on the ground, on the table, on a bench by... a window! I stare in wonder, and while I walk over to it, I look behind me, still seeing the coffee shop through the door. As I pull the long, flowing curtains aside, I notice the window is archaic, explaining the cold in the room, but what is outside the window is more than astonishing.

The twilight of the evening gives everything a beautiful orange glow. And everything— everything is a castle. A medieval castle that has just jumped off the pages of a children's fairytale. My library is at the top of a tower overlooking at least twenty others, all of different sizes. Then beyond is what could only be called the main castle, beautiful towers and statues and architecture like I've never seen or even read about. Beautiful silver with that orange twilight, the castle seems to stand proud on a lake with great plains surrounding it. Further in the distance I can see mountains and a few forests.

After the initial shock of having stepped through a door in my coffee shop in America to a castle in some land or world

other than ours, I start to really study the castle from the window. Just like everything else in the library, it seems older than old, like the castles of Great Britain I've read about in history class. But it also is rundown, with entire towers that have toppled over and huge chunks of ceiling missing. Abandoned, it seems, for hundreds of years, maybe centuries.

And that's when I start to laugh.

Hesitantly, at first, but it gains speed and confidence. A castle! I found a castle... in my coffee shop! I slowly lower myself onto the ancient, rickety chair. For some reason, I'm laughing more than I have in a while. A year of depression from bullying, an unemployed father, and a shocking move to the country for this. I found a castle.

It feels good to laugh. I keep at it, and I decide I'm going to start doing it more. A lot more. After around five minutes, I stand. Still laughing, I nearly run to the door opposite my magic one I came in. **And behind Door #2 is... a hallway.** Slightly disappointing, but I'm still laughing all the same. A medieval hallway with spots to put torches in the walls and an old musty rug somehow builds my excitement. I run to the door at the end of the hallway.

"And please tell us, what is behind Door #3?" I say to myself in my game show host voice.

"Our prize is... a long, winding staircase! Probably leading

down the tower! Let's have a round of applause for our winner!" Still laughing.

Continuing down said long, winding staircase, I look out the periodic, small windows. I can't help but let my imagination run wild; my inert teenage girl comes out as I imagine balls, dresses, handsome princes, beautiful princesses, fantastic love stories, etc. But I also can't help but wonder who built this castle, where they are now, how did I get here, why is everyone gone... Suddenly I slow as simultaneously that last question comes to mind and I reach the door at the end of the steps, out of breath and out of laughs. Why is everyone gone?

I proceed slower, not quite as excited and five times more cautious. I seem to be growing closer to the middle of the castle, and as I travel I start encountering first paintings, then statues. The first statue is of two young boys and two girls, all clustered together in a separate, empty corner room. Each person has a different set of jewels instead of eyes, creating a creepy, glowing effect. One boy seems oldest, with red eyes, but not red intimidating, a soft, warm red. The other boy I can tell is youngest of all, with a sort of yellow eyes that seem almost white. One girl has blue crystals that seem to house a fire and that glow the brightest, and the other girl has the deepest shade of green. Each is holding something with a weird symbol on it; red boy a sword, yellow boy a stone, blue girl a book, and green girl a miniature horse.

I stare for a while, contemplating the meaning behind the statue, when I hear something. The room has three doors: the one I came in, one opposite the statue, and one opposite the door I came in. Before I can blink, someone stumbles out of the door opposite the one I entered. Eyes wide and halfway through a gasp, I study the stranger as he slowly takes notice of the room and me.

He must be my age, maybe a year older. He's tall and seems almost to have just outgrown a lanky stage. Not buff, not skinny, not hot, not ugly, and very average. He takes notice first of the statue and then of me. And as cliché as it sounds, when we share a look, I feel like I know him. We study each other in silence for a long time, both taking note that neither are from here, as we both are wearing jeans. He wears a plaid button-up unbuttoned with a white shirt underneath and brown work boots. I wear a plain red t-shirt with Converse.

"Um. Hi," He says eventually. I let out a quick laugh at the ridiculousness of saying hello in the middle of this otherworldly castle.

"Hi." I clear my throat.

Awkward silence.

"So this is weird huh?" He says. Suddenly, we're both laughing and sharing our stories.

His door appeared in his barn. He's from Texas. He came through in an armory. Swords, shields, bows, maces.

"Freaked me out. I was overly confused. You said you came in a library? Talk about easier!" He laughs. I like the way he laughs, just like I did.

Ten minutes later, after recounting my story with the window and his similar one with a courtyard, I finally realize something.

"My name's Sophie." I say, laughing at our oversight.

"Oh? Oh! Oh, I'm Jacob." He laughs again, embarrassed.

"So... so who're they?" He nods to the statue.

"Wish I knew," I say wistfully, "but I have no idea. I saw paintings earlier that were probably royal families, but I don't know about this one."

We decide to keep going and see if we can run into a throne room or an entrance or an exit or something. Instead of prying and sharing like normal people do when they meet, we instead start to collaborate our theories of what this place is, and I share my horrifying question I came up with earlier: why is everyone gone? Jacob doesn't respond to that, and he grows quieter after I bring that up. I can tell from when we met that he has a thirst for adventure and that he wants this to be some grand story. Asking that question makes it more serious, makes it more real, and he, like my dad, does not want to face reality

but prefers the fantasy and mystery of life.

Eventually, we reach a hallway bigger than the rest, with more archaic statues and paintings. We walk along, gaping at the people of times long gone.

"Wow, to think," Jacob whispers, "all these people."

"Yeah." I nod, also whispering. The hallway resonates with a sort of reverence, compelling us to whisper.

Jacob starts babbling in whispers about all these people, starting to get lost in the stories. He doesn't notice when I stop and turn to my left, mouth dropping open.

"Jacob." I whisper as he keeps walking and babbling.

"Jacob!" I say in a normal voice, stopping him in his tracks. He walks back over to me, about to ask what I was looking at, when he sees it.

Two giant, ornate doors on opposite sides of the hallway that just look like the kind that lead somewhere important. The designs swirl and swirl of gold and silver, with gems that oddly resemble the statue children's eyes woven in between. The magnificent entrances loom over us, and it takes the both of us at least a minute before we realize that one is cracked open. Jacob and I share a glance and a shrug, and he pulls the door with a slight groan from effort as I push.

"Well, I think we found what we were looking for." He whispers, and I'm tempted to shush him. This castle could not run out of surprises.

It was quite possibly the largest room I had ever been in. An open expanse with six giant pillars holding up the ceiling in three rows of two, there was no mistaking the throne room. On either long walls to the right and left were beautiful paintings of legends of this long-forgotten society. The wooden floor contrasts with the beautiful silvers and blues of the pillars and walls, but the opposite end takes the cake. Four thrones—one red, one green, one yellow, one blue—were raised on a dais about a story above the room. A staircase straight down the middle of the opposite end leads up to the thrones and behind them stands a beautiful sculpture of what must have been the land in its glory. On the raised platform in front of the bottom of the stairs was another throne, but this one is different. This one is darker. A deep, dark blue with many other colors mixed in, the throne gives off a black-ish hue. And someone is sitting in this one.

Because she sits so still, she has to be another statue. But this one is different. She seems alive, but motionless. As we walk toward the front of the room, speechless, we see that the statue upon the throne looks out through the giant entrance. She has a crown upon her head and a sword across her lap; she is beautiful in a terrifying way. Striking blue eyes and dark brown hair are her major features, and she wears a look upon her face of pure defiance. After we draw closer, I gasp; she

couldn't have been older than me.

"She's just a statue." I remind myself out loud.

Jacob nods, as if my comment was meant for him. We are just below the throne with the statue when we realize, we are not alone.

It takes so long to take in the room that Jacob and I only now notice two other people standing in the room. At the crown of the staircase in between the four thrones stand the two others. A slow sort of silence creeps between our two groups, Jacob and I and the two of them.

"Well, who're they?" says the boy in a British accent.

"Gavin, they're like us!" the girl to his left squeals, and she races down to the two of us.

Jacob and I share a look and a half sigh of relief. The two kids seem to have stumbled into this castle the same way we did. As the girl approaches us, I can tell she can't be older than thirteen, maybe fourteen, in a cute floral dress like something I would never wear. The boy follows more slowly, around the same age but almost directly opposite from the girl's light, blond-hair, blue-eyed look.

"Hi!" the girl squeaks excitedly. I can tell she's one of those girls with that sweet sort of innocence that everyone seems to

like.

"I'm Abigail!" she explains, visibly bouncing up and down. "Isn't this just the coolest? Where are you guys from? I thought Gavin and I would be it but I guess it makes sense there are four with everything!"

"Whoa, whoa, slow down." Jacob manages to interject when Abigail stops for a breath. "Did you guys, like, come here through random doors?"

"No, we live here. What do you think?" Gavin says, walking up and trying to look bored with the whole situation. He's failing.

"I'm Jacob, and this is Sophie." Jacob continues. He pauses and sends me a glance, unsure. I nod to indicate we should probably tell our story first.

Jacob and I then explain our individual experiences, with many small interruptions from Abigail. Eventually, we find out that they both came similarly, but Abigail came through her door to empty stables and Gavin to an overgrown garden. They're both thirteen, and Abigail is from Boston while Gavin has recently moved to New York with his uncle.

"Wait, hang on," I say after ten minutes of get-to-know-each-other before it went too far for my liking. "Abigail, what did you mean that it made sense there were four of us?"

"Well," she says like it's obvious. "Look! Four thrones, four colors, four statues. Did you guys see those things? Mega creepy, am I right?"

Jacob and I share a glance as we realize just how right she is. As Abigail babbles on, we try to communicate with our eyes, signaling not just realization but also worry. Seeing patterns can sometimes be a good thing, as Abigail probably thinks, but sometimes it's not. Sometimes when you stumble into an abandoned castle that was probably abandoned for a reason, seeing a pattern between you and your fellow travelers and said castle is a very not good thing.

"Well, I say good riddance." Gavin says, as the four of us continue to explore the throne room whilst sharing our many theories and ideas. "Whoever they were, they're gone now. Now we have a freaking castle to ourselves! A whole land even!"

"I don't know." I mutter, examining the paintings on the right wall. "Doors don't just appear out of nowhere to other worlds..."

"Yeah, we've got to be here for a reason!" Abigail interrupts.

"Maybe ..." I zone out as Abigail theorizes fantastically about this place. Soon, Jacob joins in, and they're making up stories of this world and the people long gone. I walk the length of the room, studying the legend of some nobleman who

apparently traded secrets of the court to another kingdom. I turn back, walking back toward Jacob and Abigail on the steps. I laugh softly at the stories they're telling and imagining, and I stroll over to Gavin, who's investigating the throne with the statue.

"So, what do you think?" He asks me. "You don't seem to have a lot to say on this whole castle thing."

I hesitate, and then whisper, "I just... don't know."

Carefully, I reach my hand out and touch the statue's arm. I gasp and jerk my hand back. "What is it?" Jacob says after a second, and he rushes over. "Sophie?"

It takes me a while to get the words out. Looking back and forth between my hand and the statue, I manage to whisper, "She's warm. Oh my gosh she's alive!"

Gavin immediately rushes back from the statue that is not a statue, and we all gather in front of it, astonished. It seems Abigail is for once in her life speechless. Jacob gives me a wary look, and then reaches slowly out for the statue himself. Placing his hand on her forearm, exactly where I did, Jacob relaxes.

"She's definitely a statue, Sophie. You must have imagined it." He sighs, stepping back and giving me a concerned look.

I shake my head slowly, perplexed. "But she was definitely..." My thought trails away as I step up to the statue, and I place my hand back on her forearm.

My eyes widen as I feel the warmth of life in the statue. I look around to the three others, about to say something, when a hand grabs my wrist. In a split second, I jerk around and see the very much so alive not so still statue with her hand on my wrist. Her face jolts up in one movement, looking directly at me.

Gasping, I try to wrench my hand out of her grasp, but she won't budge. Staring for a few seconds at me with those wild blue eyes, she seems to begin to wake up, moving her head and looking around, flexing her fingers and stretching her legs. Gavin and Abigail both jump down off of the dais, suddenly frightened. Jacob runs over to me, attempting to help me pull my wrist free as the statue awakens.

Then, she seems to notice us for the first time, looking first at Gavin and Abigail, then trailing her eyes up to Jacob and me. Silence permeates through the room, with only our heavy breathing to be heard. After a small eternity, statue girl looks down at her hand clenching my wrist, and she lets go.

Jacob and I stumble back a few steps, clinging onto each other and getting a safe distance from statue girl, who is now looking straight at me again. She opens her mouth, as if attempting to find her voice.

"You." She manages, rocky and shakily in an accent. "It's you again."

Shuddering, I try to respond, but Jacob beats me to it.

"Who are you?" He says. I don't even know how he can speak, he's shaking so badly. Or maybe that's me.

She wrenches her head again to look at him.

"Ah. And you. You are all here." I swear there's laughter in her voice. "Yet again."

"Who are you?" This time, I'm the one who said it, louder than I intend as I'm trying to sound brave.

"Do you not recognize me?" She creaks, looking back at me. Irish. The accent is Irish.

"How on Earth could I recognize you?" I say exasperated. This whole castle is one thing, a statue in it who knows me is another. I am just about over all these mysterious things today.

The statue girl cringes up her face in a... smile? She puts her hand on the sword on her lap, and I feel Jacob tense at my side. But all she does is stroke it, up and down, looking as though she might be remembering past times. Eventually she

looks back up to me, slower this time, as if she is getting more used to her own limbs.

Softer, she says, "I am you. And you are me. We are one and the same. It may not seem possible, but yes, I am you."

Jacob, Gavin, and Abigail all turn to me, studying with wide eyes. Uncomfortable, I try to find the words to respond, but statue girl continues without me.

"Except not really, I suppose. I am... no. No, I was. I was Delaney. And I was foolish..."

Delaney looks down at the sword, lamenting. Gavin, Jacob, and I share confused looks, but Abigail looks like she's contemplating saying something.

"Um..." Abigail says uncertainly, approaching not-a-statue-anymore girl. "So, I have no idea what you are talking about or why you're here or why we're even here but... uh... it's okay."

We gape at her trying to... cheer this Delaney up, and Abigail just gives us a small shrug. Weirdly, it seems to work, as Delaney looks up at Abigail and almost smiles.

"Of course. Aine would also always try to keep us happy." Delaney responds.

"Well, my name is Abigail," She smiles that her attempt is unbelievably working, "and this is Gavin, Jacob, and Sophie."

"Is this really a good idea, introducing ourselves to the statue lady?" Gavin mutters to Abigail.

"Of course, she's got a sword, got to keep her happy right?" Abigail laughs under her breath.

"You needn't be afraid of me." Delaney says, obviously hearing their mutterings. "At least, not anymore."

"This place is called Eupha, and this used to be a great and noble kingdom." As Delaney starts to explain, we relax a little, deciding to just hope she wouldn't kill us. "You came to this place through doors, is that right? They appeared before you, **just as they did for me and... three others, many years ago.**"

I'm shocked, but at the same time, oddly unsurprised.

"I came through the door to a library, as you did, Sophie. The exact same. The three others came to an armory, a garden, and a horse stable. We were each of different Celtic tribes back in the Old Land."

The four of us share a glance, and I say, "The Celtic tribes existed, what, a thousand years ago?"

Delaney does not seem surprised. "I have been here long. But when we entered Eupha, it was a beautiful land in the middle of

a golden age."

She gestures to the grand sculpture behind her and the paintings on the walls as she describes the kingdom of Eupha and the days gone by. Apparently, this world is in between worlds with a thin veil between Earth and Eupha, creating many disturbances and causing many unexpected journeys between the two. In its prime, the kingdom had been the greatest of all the stories and everything the four of us—and Delaney's four—had dreamed about.

"The kingdom welcomed many travelers from our world; we were not the only ones. The people had a far-reaching sort of religion. The Four—two young boys and two young girls—they believed had long ago adopted Eupha as a home, and they protected the people with all the power they could manage."

I could feel Jacob next to me suck in a breath. What she was describing is exactly what he and Abigail both want to hear: a beautiful, mysterious fairy tale.

Delaney shifts and points to Jacob, who shifts his feet awkwardly at the intensity in her gaze. "First, the Fera. The young boy, the fire, the hearth, the courage, the warmth. The god of young men going to battle, young women in childbirth, and elders in home."

She moves her pointed hand to Gavin, as he raises his eyebrows. "Second, the Avra. The youngest, the innocence, the life. Related to the earth as the origin of all life, the Avra was

prayed to by young couples seeking a family and anyone seeking a foundation or a cause."

"Third," Now Abigail, bouncing with excitement. "the Ona, the younger goddess of nature and light. Anything concerning nature or animals or the natural quality of human life was related to this goddess."

"And last," Her hand points to me. Right at my chest, to my heart. "the Tela. Goddess of wisdom, fire, passion, and magic. She was prayed to for the gift of intelligence, and the story goes that she would pass her wisdom on to those who most needed it, for whatever purpose."

Curious but also worried, I ask softly, "What does that have to do with us?"

Delaney sighs and returns her hand to her lap. "It has everything to do with you. The people also believed that their gods would come down in certain times throughout history to protect or lead the people in times of need. They believed **that we were those Chosen. Those gods. So, my... friends and** I did just that; we led their people—our people—through a time of confusion and war. But, eventually, peace reigned over the land. And then, I ruined it all."

The four of us are breathless as Delaney recounts her story. She, living up to her goddess's ideals, pursued further and further knowledge. But this knowledge made her turn against

the gods and everything they stood for. And the only thing she was left with was defiance. "I gained terrible knowledge, and I betrayed my friends and my people. I was convinced that only I could save the land from the destruction I invented." Delaney hesitates.

"This was the sword of the Fera, my Bel." She stumbles over the name. "I first destroyed him with his own sword, and then the Avra and the Ona. I killed my friends because I thought I could bring peace, but I created this."

She gestures to the ruin of the castle.

"I destroyed Eupha."

Jacob, Gavin, Abigail, and I step backward at the shocking revelation. We weren't sure how to react, how we could react, so we just stood and heard the end of her story.

"You are the new Chosen, the new Fera, Avra, Ona, and Tela," Delaney continues, softer. "I was punished by the gods in their world to wait, rotting away, until you came."

"So what?" I voice all of our thoughts as I begin to rant. "What are we supposed to do? Just because you screwed everything up! I can't be chosen for anything; no one would choose me!"

Delaney lifts a hand to stop me. I'm breathing hard with

confusion and, for some reason, anger. I'm not angry at anyone; I'm just... angry. Jacob grabs my forearm to steady me, the boy I just met like an hour ago but I guess I've known for ages.

"But you are," Delaney continues, "and in time, you will come to realize your true selves and potential. But, it is too late for Eupha. Eupha is gone. But Earth stands. Earth still needs saving, and with the powers and knowledge you will gain from this castle, all that is left of this world, you will have the means to do just that. Save Earth from the dark powers that destroyed this land. Save Earth from people like me."

Delaney sits back down on her throne. And girl is statue once again.

The four of us sigh in disbelief. I look around myself. "I guess," I say, "we have work to do."

Higher Purpose

Katie Hanslik

Grade 10

The stair ascended softly;
Upon it I did tread
When the night's shadows had fallen,
In search of mysteries I was led.
That divinity has touched my soul,
Of this, I'm clearly sure;
Yet where exactly I shall go,
Is unknown; but I feel the lure
Of a higher purpose calling to me,
A screaming restlessness in my veins;
It awakens this yearning, to do what I'm not sure,
Yet I respond eagerly at the mention of my name.

Which is Genuine:
Person to Person or Screen to Screen?

Katy Duncan

Grade 11

I love you. The teenage girl smiles at the words. The words on the screen. Her iPhone screen. Don't worry. She is texting her boyfriend, the one she's never met. Well, she's never met him in person. They met on the Internet, through one of those fancy dating websites. True love, right? Exactly how can she love someone she's never met? How can that relationship be real? It's not person to person; it's screen to screen. Regardless, the teenage girl is not the only one misled into online relationships. In fact, entire communities are being born: virtual communities. Computers, apparently, are the key to finding one's own community. One doesn't need the people around him; his computer can connect him to people exactly like him, albeit oceans away, but they are exactly like him! A community made in heaven! This wonderful community-creating innovation called the Internet is challenging the meaning of communities everywhere. What does it take to be a community? Are virtual communities beneficial or detrimental to society? Online communities are delusions; they aren't real; they debilitate personal relationships; they exclude members of society.

To begin: what is a community? According to the Merriam-

Webster dictionary, a community is "a group of people with a common characteristic of interest living together within a larger society." Do members of virtual communities live "together within a larger society?" It's hard to say.

Sure, the Internet creates new communities, but they're virtual. Society has delved into the new world of online communities, but is it in that community's best interest? What is the cost of nurturing the artificial Internet-based community when the traditional community—the one consisting of neighbors, families, friends—is deprived of its nourishment? Is society going to lose that person to person familiarity? In online communities, a person can portray himself however he wants. He can plan his response. He can edit his pictures. Do people prefer technology to people because they have more control in non-personal settings? What about the real world?

While non-personal settings may be socially "safer," non-personal relationships are a threat to humanity. Online communities connect people, but the robotic dependence between the relationships is unhealthy. People participating in online communities rely on their computers, smart phones, whatever kind of technology; they rely on that technology to find a sense of community. People all over the world are sitting on their own technological devices at the same moment, typing well-thought out words and experiencing emotional connections to words they read off of a screen. Many argue that the relationships developed through

technology-based communities hold the same significance as real-life communities. That is absurd. Can a person feel the same looking at a screen as they can hugging a dear neighbor? Will a person ever feel the same connection to a series of symbols as they will to a friend's smile? No! Virtual companionship creates an "abstract [sense of] trust [that] alter[s] social contacts in ways which have not been measured" (Mousoutzianis and Riha). Society has no idea what the cost of the virtual revolution will be. It hasn't happened before. Would it hurt to be a bit more hesitant before drenching oneself into the Web's social sanctuary? People dive into the ocean of online communities—Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, to name them all would be impossible—but people don't consider the possible consequences.

Will people replace face-to-face conversation with online messaging, or will they use their social resources to get together with friends more often? People claim that the Internet allows an individual to be involved in his community by messaging his neighbors, his local leaders. But why would he opt to message them when he lives in close proximity to them? A study by Putnam in 2000 documents "a long-term decline in social capital since the 1960s. People are increasingly disengaged from civic organizations and community life in general, choosing to escape it all by spending hours watching TV [or] surfing the Web" (Harwood and McIntosh). People aren't using their technology resources to get together with their community; technology has taken

over in full force, and people are going out less. So instead of going out to community events, like a high school basketball game for example, society tends to choose the computer or television instead. Well, at least we have online communities...

Perhaps a community doesn't have to be face-to-face. Maybe it's old-fashioned to want to talk with friends in person. After all, people still argue that the Internet extends community. Alright, say it does. The Internet may extend some communities, sure, but are these online communities including entire communities? Are all community members represented? The Internet includes all kinds of people. That's why the elderly are known to be tech-savvy; it's not like they are left behind in the technological revolution. Look at the statistics: only two percent of people participating in online communities are over the age of sixty-five; only six percent of people between the ages of fifty-five and sixty-four. The average age of an online community member is thirty-seven (Hampton and Goulet). How can the Internet be an extension of a real community when certain groups are left underrepresented? Technology is not extending all of community, only parts of it.

Society may leave the elderly out of the technology era, but adolescents are enveloped in it. People actively involved in online communities aren't automatically accepted. As stated previously, online communities are not face-to-face. Apparently, it's much easier for people to confront another

Which is Genuine: Person to Person or Screen to Screen?

person when they don't see him in person. Thus, society cyber-bullies. Like all other forms of bullying, cyber-bullying is most prevalent among teens. Twenty-two percent of adolescents admit to being cyber-bullied (Cyberbullying). Thanks social media.

People claim that online communities allow socially shy people to find their voice. No. These people happen to be wrong. Shy people don't find their voice in online communities. One finds his voice by speaking, not by typing. One must know what he wants to say before he says it. Entering an online community doesn't make a person come out of her shell; it doesn't make a person find her voice; it doesn't zap a voice into her. In fact, shy people aren't the ones using social media: "The heaviest [online community] users are among those with the strongest social network" (Mcintosh and Harwook). Imagine that. Introverts resist all social activities: online and in person. Social networking is not a safe haven for the quiet, excluded members of society. Social networking is just another form of community for them to be left out of.

Even when people do get together, technology impairs the real life community. People constantly check their phones, afraid that they will miss something in the virtual world. Picture a group of friends, all sitting together drinking coffee or something. One of the friends has a serious problem, but while talking to her other friends, they all fail to keep eye contact and continually check their phones. The friend with

the problem feels like her friends are too preoccupied to help her, yet there they are, sitting around her, "giving [her] the impression that [they're] there for [her]" (de Lange).

Communities would be stronger without social media getting in the way. Society is forgetting the important aspects to community: relying on each other. Technology is creating "companionship without the demands of friendship" (de Lange).

Society depends on community. We cannot neglect the human part of our relationships. People can't come to the aid of a social-media friend who lives miles away. Even though they are part of the same online community, they live in different communities. A person can be in infinite online communities and still have no one to count on. People need to turn off the social media and focus on their relationships within their community. Their real community. The one based on location—based on neighbors, local school, churches, anything but technology. A person needs to depend more on the people around him than the people on the Internet. Maybe social networking does extend communities. But what happened to talking? Is society "losing the raw, human part of being with each other" (de Lange)?

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Half Pure

Katie Hanslik

Grade 10

The first instants are blinding, numbing. The resounding boom and resultant shudder of the earth send me sprawling, and I hit the floor, stunned. Blood—I've broken a vase on my way down, and my hand is sliced, but I can't tell how badly.

Noise rushes in again, screams and shouting. I rush to my feet and scramble to the door, yanking it open. At that exact moment, it happens. The earth shakes again, only a hundred times worse. The next moment I've fallen to the ground, and the walls are trembling around me. The third bomb falls.

Then everything goes black.

My next sensation is not pain, surprisingly, although plenty of that would come later. It is a horrible, terrifying sensation of suffocation, and as I come to my senses, my lungs gasping for air, I instantly know why. I'm buried in rubble, covered head to toe—suffocating beneath layers of earth and ash; my lungs scream: I need air, I need air, I need air. Then I'm clawing to the surface, my entire body trembling from the immense

effort. I clutch at my throat; my eyes are glued closed with grime: a mixture of ash and mud. I rub at them hastily, scrambling from the pile and sliding down the side of it.

I scream. The pain in my leg is unbearable.

At first, I don't realize that I'm the one screaming. When I do, I stop at once, but the pain is so excruciating that I merely lay there, tremors of exhaustion and hurt passing through my body. I realize I'm drenched in sweat, and what other filth covers me, I've no desire to know. Gradually, my breathing steadies. Then it hits me.

Sia.

My gaze flickers about, wildly searching. *No. No, no, no, no...* "Sia!" My voice is terribly hoarse; I barely understand myself, and the word comes out as a croak of despair. I clamp my eyes and mouth shut. I need water. I am parched, and every swallow feels like knives in my throat. I can't move; and worse, I'm not sure if I want to.

"Oh, Sia," I sob, clutching my abdomen, which feels severely bruised. I vaguely wonder if any vital organs have been punctured. But the thought seems insignificant; completely irrelevant to the current situation, to the slaughter surrounding me.

I finally look up again. The place is a wasteland, the entire

village reduced to a wreckage—a jumbled heap of still-smoldering ruins. The city is completely indiscernible. Far off, distant hills can be glimpsed past the tatters of smoke. Twisted, mangled bodies lay strewn about, most of them half-buried in the rubble of our once-beautiful city. I avert my eyes to avoid the painful thought of seeing their faces, of recognizing one of the lifeless corpses surrounding me. Somehow I know, without searching, that I must be the only survivor. My heart, despite this realization, is void of panic or fear. There is simply pain—pain, and the overwhelming desire—no, the *need*—to sleep. And so I do. I sleep, to block out the pain; to avoid the death, but I relive it all in my dreams.

The carnage. Bodies strewn about, bloody and mangled beyond recognition. Men, women and children crying and screaming and calling out.... But now, they are dead. All of them—dead.

I jolt awake, trembling and sweating, my tongue dry as sawdust. Ash fills my lungs when I try to breathe. I cough it out, my body racked by painful fits, until my airway is clear. I drag in several relieved breaths. This body is still kicking, still fighting to live, even if my soul isn't. My sister and mother are dead. I know this, sure as I know that I am alive. But I don't understand it. I can't wrap my mind around the full meaning of it all. The emptiness in my chest is just that—empty.

I know that I'm in shock. I also know that I am in physical

pain—and plenty of it. I take a shuddering, halting breath, and brace myself to move. I have to get out of here. There's nothing left. Nothing but ash... and bodies. I don't dwell on the thought.

What is beyond this mess, I don't yet know. It seems the wreckage stretches for endless miles, all of the land laid to waste. Who has done this? My mind is blank. I can't think of that now; I have to act. Have to move, find water. I glance at my leg, which is totally ruined. The bone protrudes, sharp, clean and white; the sight makes me want to be sick, but I push the urge away, knowing I'll need all the food inside my stomach if I am to last this out. Slowly, painfully, but ever-determined, I begin to slide along the ground on my buttocks. I hiss in pain with every breath, for my smashed, useless leg is seared by scorching agony. It must be on fire, and I look, but of course it is not.

My leg is fine, I try to convince myself. You're fine. Keep moving. And I do. I must have only moved a few yards, but it feels like half a mile. I pause, catch my breath. I need water. If I don't find something to hydrate me soon, I will die. My instincts are sharp and very clear about that fact.

So, I push on.

I think I will die of exhaustion, or thirst, or pain; in fact, I quite welcome the prospect. Yet I survive to see the new dawn, and despair nearly chokes me. Why am I here? Why am

I still moving? Why didn't I just lie there, and die peacefully? Allow the dark abyss to swallow me up? Then I'd be free. It would be so easy.

I finally work up the strength to inspect myself. My injuries are numerous—a swollen hand, caked with dried blood (I remember the vase I'd smashed into), bruised (if not broken) ribs, a slice in my scalp—from broken glass, I assume—and, of course, my mangled leg. I stare down at it. It seems foreign to me, lifeless, useless, yet for some odd reason, still it clings stubbornly to me.

A wave of anger swells inside me so violently, it quite shocks me. I realize that, outside of myself, there is no living thing upon which to release my pent-up anger, fear, hurt, confusion—any of it. And so I've taken it upon myself to become my own personal tormentor.

* * *

I am again disoriented when I awake. Is it later, or the next day? The moments are all blurred together. I have no sense of time anymore. I check the sun's position; it's sinking westward. Sunset. I'm surprised by how invigorated I feel, as though a few of my burdens have been taken away.

I set to work. I pull my hair away from my face, tying it in place with a filthy scrap of fabric lying nearby. I try not to think where the cloth has come from—*who* it's come from. I

try to ignore the blood that stains it.

This place is beginning to smell; or, perhaps, I am beginning to notice it. I have to move on. I check my leg absently.

And do a double take.

The wound is healing. The bone protrudes less, and—amazingly—when I move, the pain is much duller, softer. I'm healing. I sit there for a moment, dumbstruck. That's when I officially conclude that I must be delirious. There is no other explanation. I crawl as far as I can, bumping into the occasional obstacle—or, god forbid, body. I don't look at them too closely. Nonetheless, it is still utterly morbid. I move on as fast as my damaged body will allow me.

For a fleeting moment, I think of crying. Of curling into a ball and sobbing over everything I've lost, even though I still can't remember the full extent of what that is.

But the urge to survive is even stronger, tugging at me, insistent; the growing hunger in my stomach pulls me away from my ramblings. I focus on the pain. It grounds me, for the moment at least. Every inhalation of my lungs is harsh against my bruised ribs, yet it promises life.

Somehow, it gives me hope.

Hope, I think dourly, as the hours pass, eating away at my

sanity, the waves of despair trying to pull me under. The night closes in, and I sleep. The next morning I wake slowly, through a haze of heaviness. Yet I wake, nonetheless, and I have a shot at another day... but what if I don't want another day in this misery?

This time I do weep; all-consuming, full-body convulsions, tears spilling down my ash-covered face. My bloody hands reach to brush them away, and the sight of the filth covering me makes me flinch, squeezing my eyes shut.

Despite everything, a selfish part of me is glad to simply be alive, injured and hopeless as I am. Then the weight of my predicament slams into me again. The world—or, at least, *my* World—is in tatters; and it seems I am a lone survivor. With a heavy heart and tears falling again, further smudging the soot that covers my once-clean face, I trudge onwards.

The noise wakes me, sending icy slashes of fear through my heart. I'm dazed as I scramble upright, caught in the bright glare of yellow headlights, unable to escape.

I'm trapped. Surrounded. By what, I am not sure just yet.

The fear fades, replaced by a sudden, strange calm. *It's better this way*, I tell myself, certain that I am about to be killed. *I have nothing left in this world, anyway. Let me move on.*

Something pricks my arm, sharp and quick. A gruff male voice is shouting above the noise. My vision is going hazy now, my body falling limp, yet I am conscious long enough to realize that it's a helicopter I'm being hoisted onto.

Then I succumb to the blackness.

I come to thoroughly disoriented, but in considerably less pain than before. My leg is partly numb, the pain dulled to the point of being almost nonexistent. Whether it has actually healed, however, or if it is just the fact that they've drugged me, I have no idea. I try in vain to sleep, but fail enormously; I am horribly nauseous, so I roll over, stifling a groan.

I take in my surroundings. All I can see at the moment is a gray wall; the lighting in this small room is dim, but I think I can make out the shape of a chair next to my bed. Where on earth have they taken me? And who are "they"?

I have the brief thought that perhaps I am dead; maybe the people who found me killed me on sight, or perhaps I slipped into unconsciousness and never re-awakened. Is it possible that this is some blissful part of the afterlife? That would explain the quiet, the lack of pain, even the softness of the bed and the peaceful setup of the room. Hoping for it to be true with all of my heart, I smile and drift off into slumber.

It seems I've only just fallen asleep when they wake me. So, I must not be dead after all. I'm too disoriented to be able to judge how much time has elapsed since my... what? Capture? Rescue? I have no idea if hours or days have passed.

Three of them surround me, their eyes avidly searching my face as though answers are written upon it. They are all men—two young, one middle-aged. Surprisingly, I'm not frightened—obviously, if they were out to hurt me, they would've done so already. Yet, I remain guarded; I've no idea who they are, or what they want from me.

"Hello, Kayla," says the older man, with a strangely welcoming smile. It's as if he's saying, *"I'm glad you could make it. We've been waiting so long for you."* The thought unsettles me even more.

"I'm Dr. Bradley," he continues. "Don't worry; you're perfectly safe, in good hands here. We're going to give you some time to recover and freshen up, and then we are holding a meeting in your honor." He pauses, perhaps expecting some sort of response. I give none. "Alright, then." He's brisk again.

"Please follow me, if you will."

I watch him uncertainly as he rises from the chair he's been occupying and heads for the door, pausing to wait for me. After a brief moment of hesitation, I slide my legs over the side of the bed to follow him. *Wait.* I stop to take in the sight of my left leg, the broken one, stunned—somehow, it's whole

again.

I gape at Dr. Bradley, speechless. He gives me another kind smile, and I'm finding it increasingly hard to dislike this guy. "Everything will be explained soon," he promises me.

I nod, and follow him.

They lead me down a hallway with cold white walls and soft yellow lighting. The two younger men walk behind me, to prevent me from turning back, I presume, though I've no idea why I would want to do that. There's nothing back there to return to. I suppress the crushing feeling of despair as I again remember all that I've lost; if I dwell on my family too long, it feels that it shall cripple me beyond repair.

I try to shut out my building unease as we continue making our way down the hall. After a few more paces, we stop at a closed door, and Dr. Bradley motions towards it as though inviting me inside. "Take your time getting ready, and then my associates here will lead you to the dining hall. This"—he waves towards the closed door—"will be your personal living quarters, for the time being."

I nod. There isn't much to say—he's already promised me answers, and I know all that's left to do is go along with things until he decides to shed some light on the situation.

Dr. Bradley frowns at me, his brow wrinkling. "Not much of

a talker, are you?"

"She's most likely in shock, Bradley; how do you expect her to respond?" says one of the guards behind me. I'm surprised by his words; I don't know if they're meant to be condescending, or if they are spoken in my defense—or perhaps neither.

Dr. Bradley sighs. "I suppose you're right." He gives me a wink. "Well, hopefully we'll have you feeling better soon." He goes to leave, just as I speak.

"My family is dead." My voice is dull, the words hollow even to my ears. "How do you think I should feel about all of this?" Without waiting for his response, I brush past them and enter the room and close the door quietly behind me.

My emotions are in turmoil, so I just stand there a few moments, allowing my breathing to deepen and my thoughts to calm. Finally, I know it's time to get this over with. I glance around at the room, which apparently belongs to me now, at least temporarily. It's rather large, to my surprise, and the bed is neatly made and soft-looking. It's so inviting that I'm almost tempted to crawl into it and let sleep take away everything that's going on.

Yet, despite it all, my curiosity has been triggered, and I fear I won't know peace—or any semblance of it—until I have some answers. Stuck in this godforsaken place, my entire world shattered, I know that it is up to me to put the pieces back

together; it's the only choice left, the only thing I could possibly do to make anything better.

When I've taken a few more deep breaths to steady myself, I wipe away the tears gathered in the comers of my eyes and glance once more at my reflection in the mirror. The girl I see there appears aged, fragile, worn; she doesn't seem to be who I once knew, not even close. Yet somehow, somewhere inside, she's still me. And I know that I must still look after myself. It's what my family would have wanted me to do. *My family...*

I manage to shut down that thought with a painful finality; it's not going to help me here.

They take me from the room as soon as I've showered and dressed. The clothes they laid out for me are a pair of worn jeans and a faded gray shirt, and it seems as though they're the most comfortable things I've ever experienced. My leg, as I discovered in the shower, is completely and utterly whole again, leaving not even a trace of a scar behind. Wounds like that are supposed to take weeks—months—to recover from fully; and even then, the bone might not set right, and one **could be scarred for life...** so why has it healed so miraculously?

It feels incredible to be washed clean of all the mud, ash, and blood that had coated me head to foot, and I'm trying

desperately to wipe away the memories of the bombs as neatly as the muck has left my skin.

The guards are silent as they lead me back the way we've come; our footsteps echo throughout the deserted halls. Why is it so silent? Aren't there more people living here? I refrain from questions, however, knowing I won't get satisfactory answers from the guards. Yet, for whatever absurd and ridiculous reason, I continue to trust them. With nothing else to do, I let my mind wander, and begin to wonder absently what my purpose is here, and how I'll fit into their "society," if that is indeed what this is.

Finally, we come to a set of doors on the left; the same bland white as the rest of the room. I suppress a shudder as I imagine what might be waiting for me, then reluctantly step inside. It's a huge room, packed full with people all seated at long, plastic tables, talking over each other. There's a strange quality to the scene that sets me on edge. I blanch, the sick feeling twisting in my gut. In my current state, I can't fathom facing all these people right now.

But apparently, I'll have to. I allow myself to be led forward by the ever-cautious guards. My eyes scan for escape routes, but I find none except the door we've come through, and as I glance back, I realize there are guards posted there, too. Jeez. What are these people expecting, an uprising?

A sudden hush falls over the room as Dr. Bradley appears,

walking beside a much older man with graying hair and sharp green eyes that seem to notice everything. I begin to sweat nervously, though I'm not sure why; I don't have anything to hide, do I?

"Kayla," he greets me, with a small, formal nod. I return the gesture. "Welcome to our home... welcome to *The Rebellion*."

The Rebellion... against whom, precisely? The bombers of my city?

"I'm sure you have countless questions," he continues, in a sympathetic voice; yet I don't buy it. I scrutinize his every move, gauging his body language, tone of voice, choice of words; and most importantly, I watch his eyes. Eyes don't lie, and I can tell that he is actually quite excited to meet me, which comes as a surprise. There's a greedy, ambitious curiosity there that I find unsettling. It's as though I'm something of a new plaything to him, soon to be ruthlessly subjected to his every whim. I begin to realize, with a horrible lurch of reality, the true meaning of the situation.

The crowd has fallen silent, and his next words echo throughout the stillness of the room with a haunting finality. "You are now one of us, but not just that; you are the one who will lead us into the light of a better future." Suddenly the assembled crowd is cheering, their faces alighting with glee, as though they've broken from a trance. They chant my name, but it sounds wrong on their lips; distorted, magnified

beyond the limits of its current persona. I feel fear rising in me, thawing the initial shock.

They expect *me* to lead this rebellion? Are they mad? I turn back to their leader, my eyes wide with disbelief.

"I am Zeke," he continues. "And each of us are Impurities; yet collectively, we are known as W.I.N.G.S.—World's Impurities Negotiating Global Synchronicity—or, less formally, as The Rebellion." His features darken, now quite un-amused." We fear that we may be the last."

"The last?" I echo. "Against whom?"

He shakes his head. "Not now. When you are finished eating, guards will recruit you and bring you to me, and I will explain everything behind the reason those bombs were dropped."

I stare at him, judging whether I believe he plans to uphold this promise; and I sense that he does. This is clearly a serious matter to him, and I trust him to give me the account of how I shall play into things here, if that's what is meant for me.

What else is there to do? I wonder, feeling defeated and deflated.

I'm hesitant to mingle with the crowd, so I'm glad when the two guards assigned to me (they've been switched with the

ones from earlier) stick to me like glue, fending off anybody who comes too near. The people, for the most part, view me with an obvious near-reverence, and it makes me feel both uncomfortable and curious. Just who exactly do these people think I am? Why do they seem to have placed all their last hopes in me?

I'm snapped out of my thoughts by one of the guards handing me a plate, eyebrows raised questioningly. Looking at her young, yet battle-hardened face, I feel a sudden rush of sympathy and comradeship; I think I could get along with these people, if I tried.

The question is, why try? My skin is crawling with the intense desire for answers, but I suppose that for now I'll just have to play their game, succumb to their rules, in order to get the information I want. So, I go along with the ritual act of eating and engaging in small talk, though my heart isn't in any of it.

I'm relieved beyond belief when the young female guard rises from the table at last, beckoning for me to follow. I practically leap to my feet and scurry after her without a backwards glance. The clamor of unfamiliar people combined with the stress of everything has worn me out and made me feel claustrophobic and edgy. I can't wait to get out of here.

She leads me wordlessly out of the room; more hallways, yet more turns; and then we stop before another door. With my heartbeat in my throat and a sick feeling in my stomach, I

follow the woman inside.

I'm met by the sight of the man—Zeke—whom I assume to be their leader. Zeke glances up at us and motions for me to take a seat, waving the guard away. "I have a story to tell you," he begins, and then immediately launches into it.

"Several years ago," says Zeke solemnly, "The Government started a project to 'modify' the genes of ordinary humans. Their goal was to tamper with the genetics of regular citizens right under our noses, without us knowing about it, which they succeeded at. They called their new creations "Purities" for their genes were supposedly pure from any previous flaws.

"The Government saw it as a beneficial project, because the side effects included a hunger for knowledge and awareness of our earth. The greater population indeed became interested in reversing the damage we've done to this planet since the dawn of humankind. However, the experiment soon saw an unplanned side effect: The Purities became soft. This wasn't necessarily a bad thing, until the military found out that it couldn't function using people who no longer commended the slaughter of others. Similar problems arose until the Government attempted to fix this issue. They began their trials all over again until they believed they'd found the perfect combination of skill, knowledge, compliance, and bravery in a subject yet he remained almost utterly submissive to those in higher authority than him. And so the next stage of horror began: The destruction of the first generation of Purities,

whom no longer served the needs of the increasingly dictator-oriented Government.

"That's where we come in. Most of us are from the original human population, although the number of the original stage of Impurities here is growing. You, Kayla, are also one of us." He takes a moment to gauge my reaction before adding, "Your leg's rapid recovery is an effect of the Pure genes you carry. None of the original humans could heal that quickly."

I take in the last bit of information with very little interest, for it pales in comparison with the rest of what I've learned. "So," I stutter after a moment's hesitation, "you mean to tell me that I'm part of the Rebellion now? Is there a plan to take down the Government already?"

He leans back in his seat, away from me, the passion leaving his eyes. "We don't have a perfect plan yet. We've had hardly enough time to sort anything out. But you're going to be the key in this."

"Why me?" My voice breaks with the weight of the words.

He is quick to explain. "You're the perfect age, body condition, and you're a quick and ready mind. Most of the people here are scarred, either emotionally or physically. Plus, you'd make the perfect insider. We have a few candidates chosen, the two men who escorted you earlier included."

The realization of everything that I've lost once again assails me. I don't have a home or a family anymore. I don't have the life that I used to; it will never return to me. And somehow, I've now been dragged into the mess that is the Rebellion. What will they ask me to do? If I helped them, what would that really accomplish, other than more slaughter and possible failure?

"I—I need to think about it," I reply, rising from my seat and hurrying out of the room. Hot tears begin to roll down my cheeks, and I run down the hallways, my footsteps echoing in a lonely pattern as I make my way down the winding corridors and back to where I think my room must be.

The days pass in a mind-numbing stillness, me doing nothing but lying in bed or showering only to fall back into restless slumber again. I barely eat, even when they bring the food to my room and leave it where I won't be able to miss it. All I can do is ponder the future and mourn what I have lost, what shall never be mine again; I cherish each beautiful memory of **Sia, my mother and I... in the world before, in the world that has crumbled to darkness before my eyes.**

I know that I should move on, that it's the only next logical step. Yet my heart resists with every ounce of energy within me, leaving me drained and tired, until I'm forced yet again to sleep and escape the horror of reality. Yet even that brings no peace, for my dreams continue to haunt me with nightmares until I wake up trembling and sweating.

There, in the dark recesses of the room, I teeter between madness and hell. Which would be easier, I can't decide.

The young man paces the halls back and forth, torn between guilt and urgency, his frustration mounting so that he wants to lash out at something in anger. With each day that comes and goes without hearing from the girl, his exasperation with the entire situation has grown. How could Zeke continue giving the order to wait for her, when it's clear that she is trying to starve or sleep herself into oblivion? Can't he see that she's mentally and emotionally unstable, and that their plan would work just as well—probably better—without her? Of course, Zeke will not see reason. Never had, never would. The man is too soft and too slow for his own good; this Rebellion is in need of a new leader soon, or it might cease to be a rebellion at all.

Just then, a loud, hollow sound—the unmistakable closing of a door—reaches his ears, and he stops his pacing to wonder whether it is the girl, for it comes from the direction of her **room. Surely not... she's been incoherent for days... Against** his better judgment, the man slips down the hall quietly, in the direction of the closing door. As he rounds a corner, he sees her.

Kayla appears clean, alert, and calm. Her face is edged with a roughness that has come from the grief of the past weeks; yet

she carries herself with a dignity, head held high and shoulders straight. She's tired and worn, yes, but no less than the rest of them.

She looks exactly the same as Zeke had claimed she would: The rebel angel, bringing death with a swiftly dealt blow, her eyes hard and unwavering. There is still a certain softness about her, but that can be worked out of her later. The important part is that she has come on her own. She glances up to meet his gaze, appearing a little surprised, and then continues down the hall... heading for Zeke's office.

Their angel has come. And now, the real war would begin.

The Little Gray Elephant

Becca Duncan

Grade 8

The scorching hot July sun beats on my worn down fur. My big gray ears and snout are tattered and patched. I was warned this day would come, but I ignored them. Ann would never forget me!

Boy was I wrong.

As I sit on the card table, glanced at, grabbed by sticky fingers **only to be yanked back by parents' firm grips**, I slowly **replay** what a good life Ann and I had together.

She was born on a bitter December day 18 years ago. She was crying, wailing for her mother as she was measured and weighed.

Her father came in, grinning like a madman. Back from informing the family of her delivery. He held several pastel pink balloons, blankets, and cards. Tucked under the mass was a fluffy gray elephant. Ann was back at her mother's side, but wouldn't stop crying. Try as they may, none of the pink toys would silence her. Grabbing their last hope, her parents gave her me.

Confused little Ann didn't know what I was. Even so, I was the toy she registered as comforting, and she stopped crying.

For years after that, Ann and I became inseparable. Everywhere Ann went, I went too.

There are several milestones I saw Ann through. Her first steps, preschool, even getting baptized! As I braced myself, expecting to be put into the dumpster, one memory surfaces most clearly.

Ann was 9, and her parents wanted to do something special for her upcoming 10th birthday.

"Alaska!" she cried.

"Alaska" her parents responded, confused. After a long argument, Ann won. We were going to Alaska.

We went on several planes, busses, and even a boat. After four days of nonstop travel, we reached Ketchikan, Alaska. The glaciers were enormous! The fresh seafood smelled divine! But the problem happened when we went dog sled riding.

Being stuffed, I never liked dogs, but Ann insisted I come. After a brief lecture I was too nervous to listen to, we were off.

My, could those dogs run! After 15 minutes of running, the driver told us we had gone 25 miles! We then stopped at a diner in the village for dinner.

After the meal, the family packed back onto the sled in a hurry, hearing a storm was coming.

I watched them slide away at top speed from where Ann left me sitting on the diner booth.

For several hours I sat there, longing for Ann to return. By nightfall, I was picked up by the waitress. She inspected me and saw my nametag. Yes! I thought. Ann's dad wrote his cell phone number on my tag!

The waitress called, and the next morning the wet red face of Ann was crying into my side.

We returned home in a week the same way we came. Ann made me a leash out of yarn claiming I was the one who forgot her in the diner.

I smile at the thought. Suddenly, I am picked up by familiar hands.

"Mom," Ann cries, "What is Harold doing in the yard sale?"

"Really Ann," her mom replies, "are you going to keep that thing?"

"Yes, yes I am" Ann snaps. She marched inside and gently places me in a box labeled 'Very Important: College.'

"Don't worry, Harold," she whispers. "I'll never forget you."



Trillium
Katie Hanslik
Grade 10

Keep Your Fork

Kellie Pleshinger

Grade 11

"Keep your fork!"

I whirl around shocked as I hear the words whispered behind me, and I am even more startled when I see no one there. I stare at the autumn leaves whirling through the breeze to land on the concrete of the long, twisting driveway, racking my brain to come up with an explanation for what I just heard.

The voice sounded like...

"Cassidy!" Parson, interrupting my thoughts, yells from about twenty steps in front of me. He marches up behind me and demands to know what I'm staring at. As this is my first week as his intern for the summer, I'm obliged to answer, without sounding crazy.

"I thought I just heard..." I trail off, thinking that saying I thought I heard my own voice may come off as strange. I turn around to face him and quickly mutter an apology, avoiding his eye contact, adjusting my red leather jacket, and questioning my sanity.

We continue up the winding driveway, on our way to have dinner with one of Parson's clients. As the only private detective for the odd town of Apollo, Maine, Parson Ellery

tends to attract clients of all walks of life, in this instance Amaro Blagdon, the well-to-do CEO of Blagdon Industries. Blagdon has hired us because he "needs us for something extremely important" but insisted that we wait to find out until we reach his home.

"Isn't it a beautiful evening?" Parson asks, attempting to create conversation as we stride next to each other in the brisk, seven o'clock twilight. I nod, thinking that if you consider overcast, grey, and cold beautiful then sure, beautiful. We reach Blagdon's manor and are called right into the parlor by Blagdon, who seems even more fidgety and excitable than his usual fidgety and excitable self. As a forty-something CEO of an inventing corporation, Amaro is expectedly unmarried and quite, well, nerdy.

"Ah, yes, good, the private eye! And his beautiful young accomplice!" Blagdon exclaims, shaking our hands in turn. I'm about to say something sarcastic as anyone of seventeen would but decide that it's probably best not to. Just then, I spot something red flash in the corner of my eye in Blagdon's mirror on the wall to my right, something slipping out from the room into the hall. I spin my head toward the door, a bewildered look on my face.

"Oh. Um. Yes. If you saw something, then that was probably just Zeus." Blagdon explains, describing his award-winning Irish Setter and giving a shaky, unconvincing laugh. We all head into the dining room, where we enjoy a hearty

dinner and awkward conversation. Contemplating what happened earlier in the driveway, I slowly remove my fork from my plate and hide it in my jacket pocket, thinking that I am probably just steadily going insane. After dinner, Blagdon leads us ominously to his "laboratory" otherwise known as his **basement. "I've been... working on something"** he says as we march down the stairs, "Something big." In the basement, it looks like any lab from a science-fiction novel, complete with the sparking and exploding. We follow Blagdon past rows of **gadgets small and large until we arrive at a large, futuristic...** doorway.

"Um..." I say as Parson asks, "What is this?"

"Well," Blagdon rubs his hands together. "That is the question." He runs over to the worktable next to the invention and scrambles to pick up a wired small circle. Scuttling over to me, he whispers, "Here," and places the circle on my wrist. I jump as it sparks a little, and I give Blagdon a crazed look. But he is already over to the doorway, fiddling with wires and buttons. Suddenly, his tinkering must be doing what he intends, as the door sort of fizzes, and the bracelet around my wrist starts glowing.

"Yes!" Blagdon yells as the door and the thing around my wrist glow a light green. Suddenly, we're all yelling, but no one is listening to the other as the door is humming and sparking. Before any of us know it, the door and the bracelet simultaneously shudder and radiate a deep red.

All of a sudden, I'm not looking at Blagdon's petrified face. I'm looking at myself. From the back. Flabbergasted, I rapidly scan the room, and myself, trying to see where I am, and then it hits me. I am in the parlor... with myself, Parson, and Blagdon. I see myself look in the mirror to the right of... myself, and I get a second sudden realization. I quickly speed out of the parlor, my red leather jacket whipping behind me as I *in the past* catch a quick glimpse of me in the present. Once in the hallway, I steady myself on the wall, trying to make sense of what just happened as the bracelet on my wrist glows light green again. I inspect it carefully, imagining that green must mean safe and the deep red must mean that the wearer is to take an unexpected journey. I breathe deep, muttering to myself about time travel and idiot inventors. Before I can get my thoughts together, I hear a low humming and glance at the bracelet.

"Oh no." I say in an exasperated voice, with the red light reflecting off of my face.

I blink, and now I'm looking at Blagdon in his parlor with a newspaper in his hands, seemingly stopped in the middle of pacing.

"Who on earth are you??" He cries, obviously stunned at my sudden appearance. It dawns on me that I probably don't have a lot of time before I jump back *in time* again, so I explain quickly how something obviously has gone wrong, with many interruptions from the inventor, who tells me that

it is only about a half hour before I arrive with Parson. Finally, he knows the entire story, and he takes about five minutes praising himself for the first successful time travelling device.

"Oh, here we go again," I whine as the red glow of the device returns.

"Metal!" Blagdon screams at me. "It needs a small metal device to impress the miniscule buttons on the side! That should bring you to your time!"

"Should?!?" I yell back, but then I blink, and he is gone. This time, I'm still in the parlor, but it's empty and the clock strikes seven o'clock. I shove my hands into my pockets in frustration, thinking about what Blagdon said about metal. And then, as I pulled out the fork I completely forgot about, it all clicked together.

"Seven!" I say to myself "We were in the driveway!"

I run like I haven't run before in my life, and as I approach the end of the driveway, I stop and enter the woods surrounding either side. I creep behind Parson and past-me, breathing heavily and knowing that I don't have much time, as the light green of the bracelet is fading. My heart races as I sneak out of the woods onto the driveway behind myself. As the red starts to glow from the bracelet, I take the fork in my right hand and adjust the bracelet to see the tiny holes.

Keep Your Fork

Almost out of breath and the red glow persisting, I whisper,
"Keep your fork."

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Featuring Art, Fiction, Nonfiction, and Poetry
by area Teens in grades 6-12.

From fantasy to dystopia to personal essays,
experience the unique writing of Dover's
awesomely creative young adult population.

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