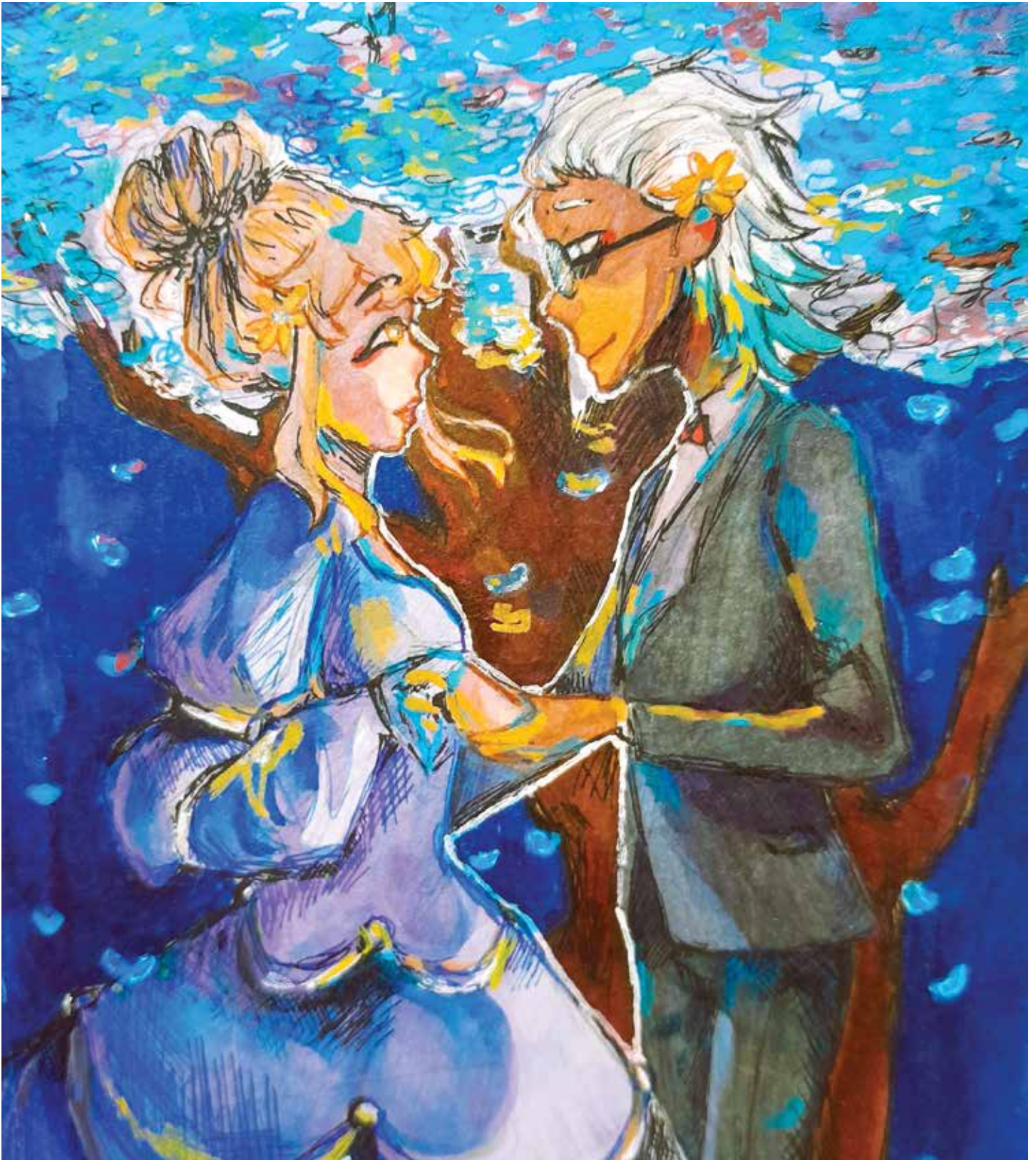


# Philadelphia Stories JR.

a community of young writers and artists from the Delaware Valley



SPRING 2024

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a community of young writers and artists from the Delaware Valley

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Please visit our website [www.philadelphiastories.org/junior](http://www.philadelphiastories.org/junior), which features more SPECTACULAR work by Jazmyne Moseley, Kayden McClain, and Fiona Gallagher, the full versions of the stories Dave's Diner, The Money Mix Up, & He Is My Slither of Sunshine, and more website exclusives!

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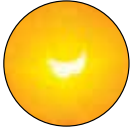
**Asuka & Akane At Their Wedding**  
by Saileana Peterkin  
Saileana Perterkin is 16 and lives in Roxborough-Manayunk. She is often found practicing guitar or playing with one of her three younger brothers. Writing has always been a hobby of hers, alongside drawing her characters.



3

### Solar Eclipse

by Kayden McClain  
Kayden McClain is a 13 year old student that belongs to Independence Charter School, located in Philadelphia, PA. He dabble dabbles in the Chinese Martial Arts.



6

### (ART)

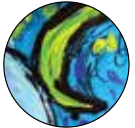
by Liam O  
Liam is a 4th grader at Durham Nockamixon Elementary in Bucks County. As well as his artistic talent, he is full of energy and loves to create things like paper airplanes and science experiments.



7

### (ART)

by Fiona Gallagher  
Fiona Gallagher is a spirited, 7 year old, first grader who enjoys being creative with many mediums including dance, singing, jewelry, and paint. Fiona lives in Hatboro and attends Crooked Billet Elementary school. She has a keen eye and notices even the smallest details in her surroundings. She is a master "eye spy" and "find the differences" game player. Her artwork is as vibrant as her soul and the way she views the world around her.



7

### Clouds over Westtown Lake

by James Madonia  
James Madonia is a 12th-grade music and photography enthusiast currently residing at Westtown School in West Chester, PA. He loves playing guitar, going hiking, and baking marjolaine.



8

### "The Hills are Alive"

by Elle Morgan  
Elle is an 8th grader at Pen Ryn in Fairless Hills, PA. She's interested in computer-aided drawing, loves to snowboard & play volleyball, and do volunteer work. She's a musician and an artist, aspiring to be in the design industry.



10

### The Perfect Leaf

by Monte Troup  
Monte Troup is a 3rd grader hailing from Philadelphia, PA. He is currently reading the book series "Wing of Fire". He loves trains and math.



11

### (ART)

by Talia M  
Talia is a 4th grader at Durham Nockamixon Elementary in Bucks County. She likes to draw and she recently participated in the school play for the first time.



*Philadelphia Stories* is a non-profit literary magazine that publishes the finest literary fiction, poetry and art from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware and distributes free of charge to a wide demographic throughout the region. Our mission is to develop a community of writers, artists and readers through the magazine, and through education programs such as writer's workshops, reading series, and other affordable professional development programs for emerging writers and artists. *Philadelphia Stories* is a 501c3. To support *Philadelphia Stories* and the local arts, please visit [www.philadelphiastories.org/donate](http://www.philadelphiastories.org/donate) to become a member today!

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# DAVE'S DINER (EXCERPT)

by Jenna Holton

---

Dave's Diner is a shabby place just on the outskirts of Brock Valley. It sits directly behind an old Sunoco gas station. Sometimes the lights from the gas station illuminate and reflect themselves off the rusty windows of the old diner....

The leaves shook from the trees and the wind whistled in the distance, as Jeffery Sargino walked up to the old diner. He remembered this place; he met Maria there. Jeffery had worked at the front cash register when Maria waltzed in with her friends. It had to be about 1965, the diner was all the rage, and it was a crowded Friday night. Many teens filled the room, but he stared in a trance at her. The way Maria smiled and batted her eyelashes while she laughed at jokes her friends made, everything about her was perfect to Jeffery. Much simpler times back then, but when Jeffery skipped town weeks ago, time soon came to a halt. Maria died while he was gone...and nothing was the same....

Jeffery shifted uncomfortably in his seat, he uncrossed his legs and placed his hands gently on the table, "It's your mother, kid, she's-"

Dave sprung up at the sound of his mother, "She's what?" He finally sat across from Jeffery, with his head hung low.

"Well, she won't be coming home Dave." As soon as the words left his mouth, Jeffery wished they were not true, like this was some sick joke he had to play on Dave.

"What do you mean, she's not coming home Dad?" Dave was too old and too tired to play these games with his father and just wanted him to spit it out already so he could get back to work. Jeffery feared for how Dave would react, he would not take it well. Dave was a loose cannon; he could erupt at any



Kayden McClain © 2024

moment with seething rage, and this might just push him into an explosion.

*Jenna Holton is an 11th grade student-athlete at Franklin Towne Charter High School. She enjoys playing field hockey and lacrosse, which she has been competing in for three years, winning spring athlete of the year for*

*lacrosse. Jenna lives with her parents, older brother, and her two dogs in Philadelphia, PA. She is in her school's mentor program that allows upperclassmen to help new freshmen ease their way into a high school experience. She likes to read and watch movies, as well as write.*

---

# THE MONEY MIX UP (EXCERPT)

by Julia Lobb

---

The words on the page in front of me were exhilarating, line after line I read about the forecast. Although I'm not super interested in the weather, I was grateful to be working at such a popular news station, like LYZ News.

I only graduated college a year ago, and my mom had connections with the Tanning family who could get me a job. John Tanning was my mother's boss; it took years for them to form a friendly work relationship and even that was a struggle to keep. My boss was John's

son, Adam Tanning, and it seems like arrogance and ignorance ran rampant in the family. The Tanning's don't care about anyone but themselves and their money....

....I looked down with furrowed brows, attempting to distract myself from the attention and continued to do my work.

**"Welcome back, this weather report was brought to you by Chelton Farm, the fresh farm,**

**the fun farm. On a hot day like this the Chelton Farm is great for family activities providing..."**

As I continued to read my script, I heard the glass door of Mr. Tanning's office creak open.

"Isabella, my office," Adam said, staring directly at me with a mean nasty look on. "Now." *I wonder what he wants now, to yell at me about my clothing, to tell me my segments cut down again. It's always something with him. It's always something for me!*

I pushed out my chair, and began walking towards the glass box in the middle of the office, which is around 15 feet from my desk. Our office is big, but the reporters only had a small section inside the building. There are nearly 20 desks around Adam's room that are about 4 feet apart.

As my tan wedges slammed against the marble floors, I reached the door that Adam was holding open to signal my entry.

Adam took a breath before accumulating a harsh, "Take a seat, Miss Marshall."

I sat down on the tan chair in front of his wooden desk. Usually, I would be nervous if my boss called me in that tone, but Mr. Tanning is different. He always speaks like he's mad at the world.

Adam began his lecture, "So, there is a very important matter, we need to discuss. Last Friday, the financial department announced that someone has been illegally laundering money. There has been \$1,300 in total taken."

I furrowed my eyebrows in confusion.

## Spiral

By Rue Huang

In March, our hearts begin to unfurl.  
When the first peony is coaxed out of dark soil,  
you will find an endless thing inside. It will be  
warm, still soft, still aching. On rainy days,  
it will watch girls in lakes, making sure  
they are still there to whisper *loves me,*  
*loves me not,* the seams of their hearts hung low.  
It is something I have yet to find a name for—  
It could be the girl watching the eclipse  
and not knowing what to do with the sun in her hands;  
Maybe in summer, it's everybody coming back as a  
poem, the curvature of the spine and  
hollowed belly redrawn with tenderness, splitting  
over the horizon like a promise. Or a secret, like  
looking up and crying because you're so sure  
you belong in the sky. Grief, my peony, perhaps  
for the rebirth we cannot have, and in time,  
grief for the home we do.

*Rue Huang is a writer from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Youth Poet Laureate of her city. When she's not writing journal entries on bus rides, you can find her consuming her body weight in blueberries, playing jazz piano, or running competitively. Her Instagram is @rue.huang.*

-----  
Before I could stop myself, my thoughts were being spoken out loud. "What does this have to do with me?"

*Oh my, I just said that out loud – to my boss.* I looked at Adam in fear of his reaction. He stared at me so intensely, almost like he's was reading my mind. To my surprise, Adam laughed. He did not scream and scold me, but simply laughed out of pure humor.....

....Before I could finish reading, Adam abruptly started to ramble.

"Izzy stop reading that like you don't know what you did. Stop acting all innocent. It is in writing that someone saw you the day before the financial department reached out." Taking a short breath Adam continued. "This would be an awful coincidence, and it is not. This is the truth Izzy. Admit it. Admit that you are a thief, just like these other women."

That sentence made me lose it, "Are you serious? I wasn't even here on Thursday night but, I bet you didn't check that. You assume it's me because I'm a woman. Because you have been looking to fire me, the only woman news reporter here."

Adam sighed, "If it pleases you, I will open an investigation"

Yes, I thought, *I did it*, I finally got

## A Man Named New York

By Violet Binczewski

What if he leaves  
What if one day he packs his suitcase  
And walks out the door  
I would be floored  
The cement dripping down my chest onto the hardwood  
With broken plates scattered around me like a garden  
Flowers from the fight  
The light over the counter  
It's all planted in my head  
Growing like weeds  
Vines in my hair and all down my arms  
What if he leaves  
Kisses me on the cheek and turns away  
Fading into the rain  
I'm left standing on the sidewalk  
Remembering that none of them ever stay  
Just me and my red raincoat in the blue city  
Slipping into a yellow taxi to take me back to an empty apartment  
The big apple took a big bite out of me  
Sweet, red rotted fruit when you left your key  
What if he leaves  
What if he left it all behind  
The kisses, the fights, the wonderfully wasted time  
He was the thread sewn through the skyscrapers  
Holding me together  
He used to put the city that never sleeps to bed  
But I'm forever awake in Manhattan  
A man named New York bustling in my head.

*Violet Binczewski is a sophomore at Mount Saint Joseph Academy. She is a published author, releasing a book of poetry in 2024 titled "The Ocean and Her Shadows" with Vanguard Press. She won the Patriot's Pen Essay competition locally in 2019, and her work has been published in Notre Dame's Preparatory School's The Hampton Review, as well as Mount Saint Joseph Academy's The Muse. She is also an editor of The Campanile, the student-generated news site of Mount Saint Joseph Academy. She lives in North Wales, PA with her family, and when she is not writing, she is usually reading or listening to Taylor Swift.*

## If I Ruled the World, Imagine That

Edifice poem in response to If I Ruled the World (Imagine That) by: Nas ft. Lauryn Hill

By Mia Haas

Life, I wonder  
Will they take us under?

Imagine walking around  
In fancy, flashy dresses,  
plenty of people who  
actually wanna deal  
with all the messes.

mothers and fathers, more conscious  
of who is talking to their daughters-  
and let's not forget about the sons,  
who don't wanna be one with society.

What the heck is this economy?

no one talks about their friends  
who wanna pretend like  
they respect their elders,  
and listen to their mother and father,  
but they really out here messing with somebody's daughter.

these kids might as well  
feel like they some kind of foster  
no one around to help  
they'll only do it when  
they see a whole bunch of wealth  
of course that's why heads out here moving stealth

cops harassing for unreasonable reasons  
let's not forget about MLK,  
What did he say?  
"This isn't the way" I bet he'd say  
He had a dream, everyone got it all wrong,  
so it seems.

Stop worrying,  
about the materialistic things,  
remember when you and your friends,  
used to play on the playground and swings?

Being a jerk doesn't show your worth.

It's a serious crime,  
the government wasting their time,  
worrying about all the wrong people,  
they're the ones who know their equal.  
World War II, this might as well be a sequel.

Let's bring peace to all the people.

*Mia Haas is 17 years old and lives in Pennsylvania. She has been expressing herself through poetry since she was 12 years old. She published her first poetry book on her 17th birthday. She enjoys music, playing sports, and loves performing arts.*



Liam O © 2024

through to the evil Mr. Tanning. He is starting to believe in me. "Thank you, that's all I was –" Before I could finish, I was cut off with the harshest voice to ever register.

"Until further notice, you're terminated."

*Julia Labb is a Philadelphia resident and a senior at Franklin Towne High School. She enjoys binge watching television, reading, and exploring creative writing. Julia hopes to double-major in journalism and event planning in college, as she would love to plan charity events for those who have struggled similar battles that she has faced.*



*Do you have a story, poem,  
or drawing to submit? visit*

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stories.org/junior](http://www.philadelphiastories.org/junior)**



Fiona Gallagher © 2024



James Madonia © 2024

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# BLADE

by Zoey Krezelak

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Elle Morgan © 2024

Father returned from the military when I was in grade school. He looked at me with timid disdain that I had never seen him with before, and figured he just had a sad face. He visited for three weeks, during which time he spoke to me twice. The greeting was one. The second time, he came into my bedroom

and saw his picture on the nightstand. He was blond and smiling and quite young. "That's an old picture," he said woefully, then turned off my lamp and left.

He spent his time huddled in his office, a room which had been locked my

whole life. On the last night, before his scheduled return to the military, while Mother was asleep, I, in my pajamas, snuck quietly into the office. The light was off, and I heard a thud atop the desk. I crawled beneath and saw a leather sheath on the carpeted floor. Engraved on the leather were the words "US Army." Next to the sheath was a shiny, slender knife, with a splendid wooden handle and a black blade. I picked these items up, held them to my chest, and slipped out of the room. I failed to see in the dark the blood on the knife, or Father slumped over on the desk.

Lanzano's Butcher Shop was my first job. I lasted a month. Tony, the old man behind the counter who used to give me a slice of salami every time Mother and I went shopping, effortlessly hacked up whole pigs in an instant, could slice by hand thinner and more precise than any machine. I stocked the shelves, mostly, but wanted to learn the craft. I was a lousy butcher. The little scars on my fingers still show in the right light. I wanted to be the best with knives. I still had the Army knife, but had never told Mother.

I committed my first crime with the knife —after Luigi Canaveri, the older kid from the building next door, paid me two hundred forty-four dollars and seventy-two cents out of his pocket —prying open the mailbox for Apartment 2A to steal and bring to Canaveri the large, orange envelope. I didn't think of it as a crime —that was the way things went in our neighborhood, Canaveri had an influential family, and I was glad to have the money. This wouldn't make me a monster.

I walked Luisa home from the club, still giddy from the music and the fact



---

## Where Philly Never Falls Apart

By Samrithaa H.V.

10

When the sky started to fall,  
it's not the sirens, but it's the *screams*  
that made the call:

*Our universe was ripping at its seams.*

It's not hell that's broken loose,  
*but all of life*, in just a single breath.  
It's the universe's final introduce,  
the final steps, to death.

9

The walls of the world,  
come tumbling down.  
This life's last minutes unfurled,  
in Earth's every temple and town.

City Hall's on fire,  
but not one soul to pity it.  
The water climbs up and higher,  
as the ground beneath me split.

8

But even then, my feet ran  
over the shaking ground,  
past every dying woman and man,  
through the city's cries in surround.

Every mother's plea, a tale I'll never know.  
And every home, a temporary grave.

7

I was much too young,  
when my heart was 25,  
yet with the end among  
I've grown to be a tall child, unready to die.

I don't know if there's a sky,  
beyond this storm.  
This could really be,  
where Philly falls apart.

6

I breathe once more,  
the moment I see you.  
Even at the end of time's score,  
There's only one soul mine belongs to.

5

Running into your arms again,  
*my only home*,  
I knew right then,  
*I'd never let you die alone.*

4

You weren't down for forever,  
and we were,  
never meant for each other.  
...but we face the end  
*together.*

3

The old song's words,  
*"nothing ever lasts forever."*,  
But it's the end of the world,  
and we're starting over.  
For it's not always the end that's *thus*.  
Because sometimes, *the apocalypse is within us.*

2

I climb into the dark, *for you*.  
hoping you'll wait in the stars, *for me*.  
And into the plunge of light we go,  
holding hands so tight, a forever-rope.

1

Because right here, in these two hearts  
This is where, *Philly never falls apart.*

*Samrithaa H.V. is a student at Methacton Senior HS, vice president of Lower Providence's Teen Advisory Board, and director of Zha Literary Arts Magazine. She is also the web admin for Element Literary Arts Magazine, and a certified staff writer for her school newspaper, The Windy Hill.*

that she'd agreed to see me, when an older man emerged from the shadows and started yelling at us in Italian. I had seen him before outside of the bar across town. Stepping in front of Luisa, I brandished the knife, cursing at the man, until he reluctantly left. Luisa squealed and threw her arms around me. I had never been happier. I kissed

her at the doorstep, and she smiled and ran up the stairs.

I married Luisa on the seventh of November, in the church. No one objected; it was a perfect marriage, everyone knew. She didn't look great in white, and I never looked great in a suit, but it was perfect. She grinned the entire

day, and her grandmother, forgetting my name, kissed us both on the cheek. Her grandfather smelled of cologne and cigarettes. Mother, in a green wool dress, held me closely before Luisa and I hopped in the car and left.

On the road out of the city, another car ran into ours. Luisa screamed. We



Monte Troup © 2024

---

had to be at the hotel by six. I slammed the door on the way out of the car and told the man this, and told him that I had a wife, still in her wedding dress, that he had made her cry. The man threw up his hands and said he hadn't meant it. He wrote a check for the repairs and apologized, but I was young and excited and had just gotten married, and when he got back into his car and started to console the toddler in the backseat, I grabbed the knife and slashed his tires, and Luisa and I drove away.

As soon as Luisa left, in a huff, to sleep at her mother's for the night, I pried the knife out from the wooden dinner table. It was stuck in there, and after a while, I decided to leave it and brew some tea before bed. My throat hurt from screaming.

I took the knife, sweat clinging to my forehead, separating my hair into vi-

ciuous strands, and screamed, my throat ripping, and brought the blade down with such ferocity and abhorrence until it sunk into his flesh. Then I brought it up again, and back down into him, and again, until a splatter of his blood burned my eye, and I brushed it aside, and my face was wet with sweat and blood. I screamed again, and lifted his head, and slammed it into the floor, again, again. Luisa's body still lay, half-dressed, face shocked, on his bed. I had only stabbed her once.

In the attic, I took the knife, newly cleaned, and carved her face out of the picture. She was smiling with crimson lips in her teal, two-piece swimsuit, her hair tucked into a modest swim cap of the same color, the bright pastel tones of the Italian coastline surrounding us.

Luigi Canaveri was my first visitor, before Mother even. He had gained

weight in the past year; he looked like his father, small mustache and all. He held both of my hands across the table and laughed. He was always much more careful with his crimes, and had his father's men to look after him when he wasn't.

I never saw my knife again. I would think about it, though, sitting in an evidence locker, rusting, never to be used again, for good or evil. From the military to the suicide to the murder, it didn't deserve what we had done to it.

*Zoey Krezelak is a sophomore at Cheltenham High School in Wyncote, Pennsylvania. She enjoys writing on her own time, has previously submitted to other Philadelphia-based journals, and enjoys reading and writing. She has lived in Pennsylvania for three years.*

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# BLUEGRASS CONDO

by Haley Keebler-Lentz

---

September 2012...a time I will NEVER forget. Up to that point in my life I lived with my mother, Melissa, in my Pop-Pops blue row home house for years. I was consistently bouncing between life with my mother in that row home, and my Nan's Parkwood house with big purple curtains with my father, Bruce. Melissa had met my now stepfather Ricky, and we moved into Bluegrass Condos in Northeast Philly. Condo number 11 with the white door was the perfect size for 3 people: 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, a small box kitchen, and a good size living room with the dining room alongside it. It was extremely comfortable and I always felt safe.

Living in the condo, all I could think about is happy memories and how much love the house was filled with. Dull moments NEVER appeared in that condo. I

was still young and a newborn was on the way. Between how outgoing Ricky was and how funny Melissa thought she could be, there were always laughs and jokes flooding the house. It makes me happy to know I had the chance to experience living there and creating memories. It is now upsetting that I will never be able to go back in time to that period of my life.

Me, Melissa, and Ricky... I was 6 moving in, Melissa was 26 and Ricky's was 29. Melissa became pregnant before we moved in with my first brother Mason. She continued to work through her pregnancy until retiring from bartending at Stadium on Street Road, now called Jimmy's, before going into labor. Ricky was a project manager, working for Villanova University for many years. I went to school at FitzPatrick Elementary

School for kindergarten and first grade while living there. Mason decided to give everyone a Christmas miracle and be born right before our first Christmas in the condo: December 18th, 2012.

Ricky and Melissa were supportive and always made times fun. Ricky has always felt more of a positive and stable father figure to me even though my dad had been and is still in the picture. He taught me a lot about who I am as a person and has always pushed and motivated me to want to do better. Comforting me in times of need, he always took me in as his own child even though he was not with us at birth. Melissa has always been a role model of mine. She has been through all the challenging times with me and taught me what it was like to have a mother figure in my life. Regardless of how difficult it was to grow up with split parents, she always made it easy for me and supported me in my choices and whatever I wanted to be. Melissa has never failed me as a mother, regardless of where we lived growing up, always filling the house with love. Both Ricky and Melissa have taught me what love and support should feel like without having to ask my whole life. No matter how big or small, the things they have done helped create a million amazing memories I carry with me to this day, all from the brief time we spent together in the Bluegrass Condo.



Talia M © 2024

*Haley Keebler-Lentz is a senior at Franklin Towne Charter High School. This short story was inspired by her personal experience growing up and how it was learning to accept new people into her life at a young age. She now lives with her mom, step father and two brothers in Northeast Philadelphia.*

---

# HE IS MY SLITHER OF SUNSHINE

by Saileana Perterkin, Jaimie Schaffer & Kylie Weiss

## (EXCERPT)

---

INT. COURT ROOM. DAY

**JUDGE WILLOW**

The last few people file into the courtroom and take their seats with BAILEY and MILO sitting adjacent from VINCENT at the front.

Alright thank you, be seated.

leap at it, like a pathetic little mouse. All I wanted was to provide for Milo, stupid, stupid, stupid come on Bailey!—I bet you're wondering what this is all about? This conniving lowlife, me, and my kid in this court, completely unknowing of the future outcome. All of this is a result of one unfortunate morning.

**JUDGE WILLOW**

**BAILEY is sitting uncomfortably in her seat in the courtroom next to MILO, who is standing on his chair staring angrily at VINCENT.**

All rise!

**BAILEY (V.O.)**

*(Everyone stands to show their respect.)*

How did I let this happen to me? Of course life finally gives me an opportunity after failing me for years. And I

---

(further in the script)

BAILEY turns to the first page with the title, 'To Prey Upon a Wishing Star' and credits and notices the book lists only one name, 'Vincent Thorne'. She turns back to the cover. No sign of her name still.

## Safety in the Plants

By Jazmyne Moseley

Blue hues of the night scatter the outside  
Big little windows peek on the sky, while sitting in the inside  
A group of laughter hides within the room.  
Plants from every corner dream to loom  
Stacks of lies lay written inside.  
A table that reads every lie  
Which makes the plants laugh and cry.  
The couch of wonders lingers the pain,  
From a girl who never liked to play.  
She sits on the destined couch,  
Waiting for the room to shout  
After all this kind of pain,  
She wonders if the plants will laugh today?

*Jazmyne Moseley is in eleventh grade and goes to Franklin Towne Charter High School. She likes to write poetry and short stories for fun. She also likes to read and build lego sets. Her favorite color is blue, and she enjoys living in quietness. She lives in Philadelphia, PA with her dog, Bailey, and her mom.*

**MILO**

What's wrong?

**BAILEY**

(trance-like)

He didn't credit me...

**MILO**

That stupid guy did a bad thing after all!

**BAILEY**

(scolding)

Milo, I told you about using that word before.

**MILO**

Sorry mama, I'm just so angry- I knew he was a bad guy!

MUSIC UP: Cage The Elephant,  
"Cigarette Daydreams"

**BAILEY**

(mumbling)

This is surely a mistake, or maybe this one just printed wrong!

BAILEY searches through the shelves. She tears book after book from the shelves until she is surrounded in a sea

of books. Her face drops as she realizes this was not a mistake.

*Saileana Perterkin is 16 and lives in Roxborough-Manayunk. She is often found practicing guitar or playing with one of her three younger brothers. Writing has always been a hobby of hers, alongside drawing my characters. She hopes you'll enjoy this screenplay that she wrote in creative writing class with her two classmates, Jaimie Schaffer & Kylie Weiss.*

## "Reflection"

By Skyler Kucowski

There once was a girl,  
A girl who dreamed of a world with unicorns and such.  
This girl was beautiful, but flawed  
She saw her way of walking, her smile, even her laugh as a cherishing indifference.  
In her world she was perfectly imperfect.  
This girl grew and was now a teenager,  
A teenager who broke and cracked  
Took apart her body to find something, even just a mere glimpse of beauty.  
Staring at the unwanted reflection in the circular long mirror that leaned on her wall  
Taunting her with every glance.  
The reflection that looks back at her with a frown.  
There is a teenager girl,  
She's consciously imperfect.  
There is a bully, seeking a defective smile, a wonky walk, or even an ounce of fat,  
Tearing the young girl apart at the seams,  
Destroying her once ever so beautiful perception,  
Of herself.  
There will be a woman.  
She will look in the cracked reflection,  
The reflection that has been staring back with devastation,  
All these years,  
Frowning.  
There is a bully.  
There is a teenage girl.  
There once was a girl, who always saw the glow that outlined her from head to toe.

*Skyler Kucowski is 17 years old and lives in Northeast Philadelphia with her parents, grandparents, and little sister. She loves animals and nature. She loves poetry: both reading and writing it. Poetry is her way of expressing herself and expressing her struggles and insecurities through a beautiful flow of words.*

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## The Devil Came Between Us

By Audrey Chen

"Why the devil came you between us? I was hurt under your arm" said Mercutio,  
As he lay there on the street, dying.  
It must be true, then, that history only remembers the winners and survivors,  
Because while the love story of the two star crossed lovers, bravest Romeo and purest Juliet lives on to this day,  
No one thinks of the children killed,  
The names of Tybalt and Mercutio forgotten.  
While the feud of Montagues and Capulets was raging,  
The future generations were dying.  
In a fit of rage, Tybalt killed Mercutio, and Romeo killed Tybalt, who had wanted to kill Romeo.

A never ending cycle of detestment and hatred and murder,  
And who ends up on top?  
Tybalt, the short tempered Capulet?  
Romeo, the hasty Montague?  
Mercutio, a witty member of neither party?  
No.  
No one ends up on top, no one wins.

If Shakespeare is going to be honored for writing a tale of two lovers fated to meet and die,  
Then he should also be honored for showing his readers the truth.  
The reality of the same cycle we have been forced into.  
Everyone has fought, betrayed and lied.  
Driven by theses temporary emotions,  
We fly into a rage, and though it is improbable we have left physical bodies behind,  
The mental husks of it will haunt us forever.  
Ghosts of our pasts, invisible to the human eye, that impact our decisions,  
Biases,  
And actions.

No one realizes anything,  
Shakespeare, like other poets and authors of the world,  
Has shown us the rare truth.  
And in an earth where life is the stage, and we are the actors, lying and faking emotions that aren't there,  
The truth isn't something we are used to seeing.

Maybe the devil had come between us as well.  
Maybe with us always wrapped up in our own lives,  
We let this rage simmer and boil until it couldn't possibly be faked anymore.  
Friends fell trying to stop it,  
And we fell feeding into our pettiness.  
And just like with the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet,  
No one ended up on top.

*Audrey Chen is a fourteen year old poet and author, her literary works often reflecting on the themes and brutalities of real life. She is addicted to reading Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, and loves putting symbolism and metaphors into her writing.*

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