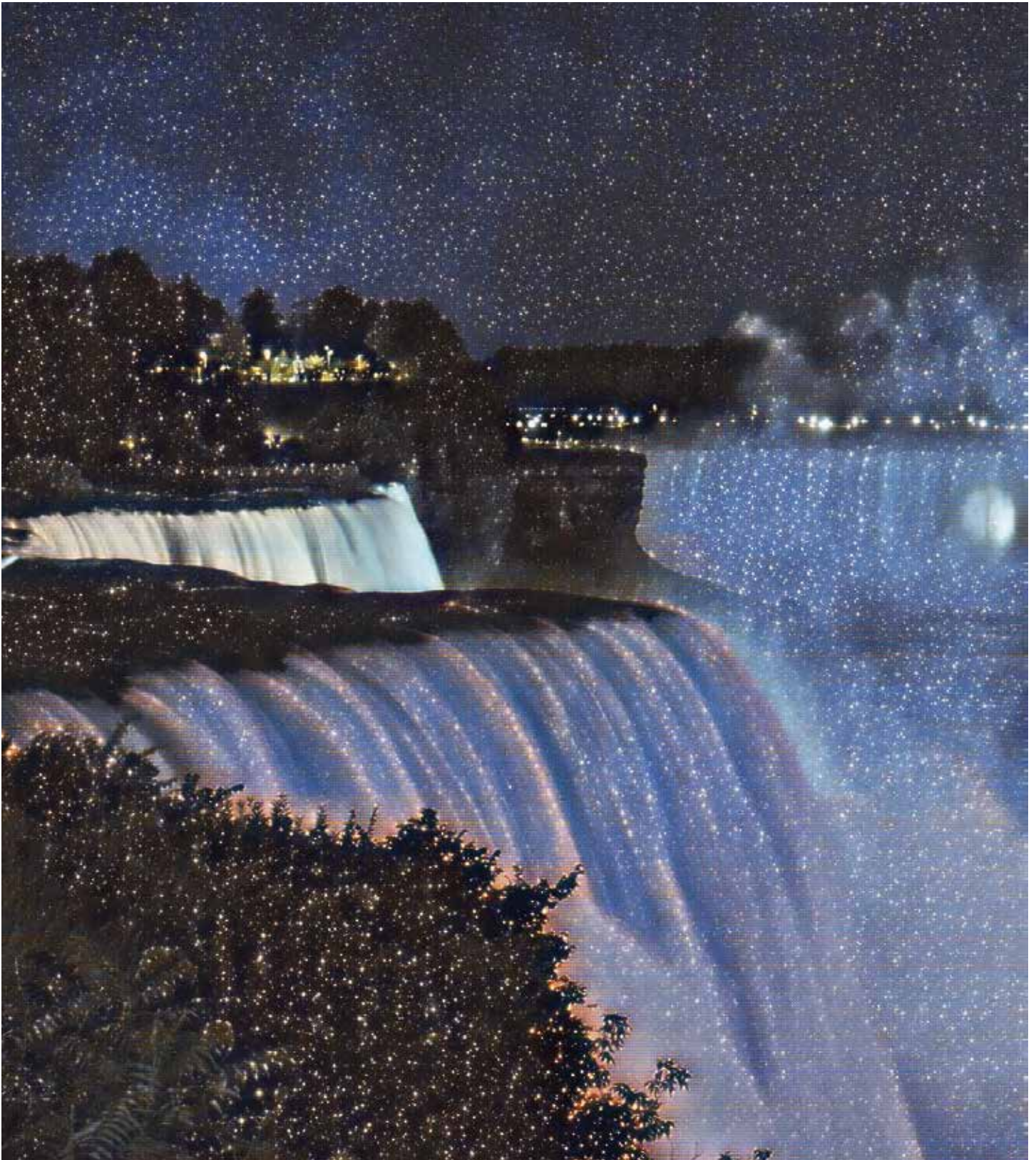


PhiladelphiaStoriesJR.

a community of young writers and artists from the Delaware Valley



FALL 2025

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You MUST visit our website, www.philadelphiastories.org/junior, which features the SENSATIONAL digital edition exclusives: *What She Could've Been* by Savannah DiDonato-Garr, *Her and I* by Alina Martinez, *That Wasn't Oscar* by Grace Staab, along with additional work by Kayla Sharp, Abby Kucowski, Amayah Marrero, and Kayden McClain, the full versions of the stories *The Fearless* and *The Golden Glean of Power*, and more!

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ART

COVER ART: (ART)

By Kayden McClain
Kayden McClain is a 14 year old student that is currently attending Julia R. Masterman Laboratory and Demonstrations School, located in Philadelphia, PA. He has aspirations of becoming a seasoned martial artist. More of his work can be found online at www.philadelphiastories.org/junior.



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(ART)

By Kayden McClain



7

(ART)

By Kayden McClain



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(ART)

By Artis Bellamy

Artis Bellamy is a young artist at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Bucks County, PA.



11

(ART)

by Monte Troup

Monte Troup is a 10 year old Philadelphian who enjoys trains and building lego creations. He is currently in 5th grade and loves science class.



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(ART)

By Kayden McClain



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(ART)

By Kayden McClain



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 to become a member today!

BETRAYAL IN THE SHADOWS

by Irellynne Guinup

Bella was a normal 18-year-old girl living life. She was a cheerleader, and her senior basketball team, representing Central High, was playing against the Bulldogs. The game was fun, but she wasn't in the happiest mood. Her dad, Robert, was stuck at work as usual, and her mom Katie was staying with her sick grandmother, taking care of her since she was very ill with a heart disease. Normally her parents were always at the games, so Bella was quite disappointed. At least her dad wrote her a long text. "Have a great game lovebug, you guys will do great, can't wait to see you!" he exclaimed...but she didn't respond. She just felt drained.

The game was down to 4 seconds, and it was her team with the ball. Hunter Jackson, her teammate, had the ball ready to shoot. He scored with ease, and the crowd went crazy. Bella's sadness immediately turned to joy.

"I'm so proud of you guys!" said Coach Amber.

Bella wished that those words came from her parents, but after THAT victory, she was content enough to just go home and tell her parents about her team's amazing win. Anxious to spill the great news, she got in her blue Bronco and drove homebound, all while California Girls, her favorite song, boomed through the speakers.

Bella pulled up into the driveway and went into her house, which seemed eerily quiet.

"Hello?"

No answer came, much to her dismay. She called her dad, and it went to voicemail. A call to her mother followed...which was answered to the clear sound of tears.

"What's wrong mom?" she spoke.

"Honey, I need you to listen to me carefully."

"What is it, tell me"

"We just got a call from the police and medical professionals"

"You are scaring me"

"Dad has been killed."

Bella's heart dropped, feeling a pain in her chest like she was just shot. She slumped downward to the ground, on the floor in silence. She felt nothing, absolutely nothing.

The cops reported that there was an

investigation. They said they found him by the creek where the family used to go fishing. There were no stores or cameras so they investigated everyone they could think of, and Billy, her dad's best friend and business partner, helped too in any way he could. Unfortunately, there was just never enough information, nor were a few missing items ever found, in particular a watch that she gave her father for his birthday. Her entire life



Kayden McClain © 2025

had changed, and there wasn't a single lead to bring justice and closure.

As time passed, Bella's mind had sunken. Her depression led to many absences from school, resulting in a transfer to online education. Still, her grades were failing and the pain and tears got worse every day. As she grew older, she tried to get her life together. She started studying criminal justice and preparing herself for a better future. Bella got a scholarship to Temple University, and graduated with high honors. She eventually began a job as a detective at the local police department where her dad had worked.

Bella's job was going well, as she was figuring out crimes and reporting them in days. She was making pretty good money and getting great compliments from everyone, especially the officers

who knew her dad. "Your dad would be proud," was a common compliment, and that made her feel great inside because she always wanted to be just like him.

During this time, on a relatively easy workday, she realized they hadn't spoken to Billy in a while, and soon after found out that he had quit. She asked around and they said he didn't have a reason, he just wanted to leave. Maybe because it made it hard without Robert. Well, that's what she hoped.

When her mother Katie got home that night, she told her mom how she had realized that Billy had quit.

"Oh gosh, I'm a terrible person," said Katie.

"Why?" asked Bella.

"That was one of your fathers closest friends, and we have not checked on

him in a long time."

"Well it can be the other way around, and it was my dad who died, not his," Bella retorted.

After the conversation Bella went to her room and thought it would be a great idea to look for apartments, as she was now 22 with her own money and job. She didn't want to stay as her mom's responsibility. Bella found a condo for fifty thousand dollars on Broad and Fever street, right next to the old coffee shop she frequently visits.

It took a little time to figure everything out, but she ended up buying it. She had two weeks to officially move her stuff in and pay in full. She was so excited.. but it gave her flashbacks..a deja vu event. She couldn't remember why, but something was weird. She continued to move into her new home until she saw something that surprised her.

"Billy?" she said.

"Well, hi, long time no see," he responded, looking equally surprised to see Bella. They hugged and laughed awkwardly.

"How have you been Bella Bug?" he said.

"Could be worse but I'm making progress."

"We're going to have to catch up sometime, maybe over dinner."

Bella continued to walk upstairs to her apartment, but something felt off. The vibe felt off. Her apartment room was big with glass windows and dark grey walls, and her bedroom was cream colored with a queen-sized bed. It felt great for her to have a big bed to herself, but she always had these nightmares where her dad passed away, and they haven't gone away in a while.

One day, Bella hears a knock on her door. She opened the door slowly, and it was Billy.

"Oh, hi." "What are you doing here?" said Bella.

"Well, I wanted to know if you wanted to have dinner with me tonight?"

"Sure, what time?"

"You can come by 7."

Bella showered and put on a black shirt with blue jeans. She got her purse and walked to room 207. That was

The Children's Traveling Circus

By Kayla Sharp

As I move from place to place,
I discover the secrets of the wannabe mothers,
The temporary ones showing off their best deed,
After three months or so they were filled with greed.

As the new circus act, I show off my tricks,
"Oh, that poor girl" the audience will applaud.
The ringmaster smiles knowing it's all fraud.

The latest "selfless soul" becomes a ringmaster,
"I hope the new acrobat isn't a disaster".
I repeat my stunts, the audience says, "it's great of you to foster support",
The ringmaster nods, nefariously knowing it's just a short sport.

The acrobat's magic has faded away,
I wish I could be the lion I say,
At 17 the act is almost through,
Adulthood is near, it's too good to be true.

Kayla Sharp is a 17-year-old high school student, just starting her senior year at Franklin Towne Charter high school. She has loved writing since she was in elementary school, but throughout the past year she has been engaging more often with her passion for writing. She recently attended the Drexel writing conference and is currently in a creative writing class at her school. A majority of Kayla's writing is based on her experiences in foster care and other events that have happened throughout her life. To see more of her work, visit <https://philadelphiastories.org/junior>.

Billy's room.

She only had to knock once before he opened the door.

"Hello Bella." "I made chicken alfredo," said Billy.

"Ok smells really good."

Bella sat at the table and waited for Billy to bring out the food. It smelled great, like it would be at a fancy restaurant. He placed the plates down with the food and gave her a knife, but his hands were shaky.

"Are you ok?" said Bella.

"Yeah, I just haven't seen you in a while, and I feel awful about everything

with your dad."

"Well it's in the past, and he is always missed."

"Where's your bathroom?" Bella asked.

"Down the hall to the left."

Bella walked down the hall to the left. She was peeing when she looked up and saw that the ceiling was somewhat open. Initially ignoring it, she washed her hands but something just felt weird. So she climbed on the toilet and put her left hand inside. She felt a box.

"It's not my business," she said to herself.

Still... something made her want

to open it. Pulling it towards her, she looked inside, but she instantly regretted opening it. She found her dad's watch in the box along with his chain and wallet with what appeared to be old, dried blood.

There's a knock on the bathroom door.

"Is everything good in there?"

"Uh yea one sec."

Bella took everything and put it in her pocket. She unlocked the door and Billy was standing there.

"Are you ok?"

He had a weird look on his face... like he knew something.

"I got to head on out" she said.

"But wait."

The watch had fallen out of her pocket and to the floor. The silence that came after was loud and weird. She was scared, and so was he.

"I give up," he said.

"What did you do to my father?!"

"He drove me angry, and I couldn't take it."

Bella grabbed her stuff and ran, but he followed and chased her. She fell and he was right behind.

"No!" she screamed...as everything went black.

Irelynne Guinup goes to Franklin Towne High School. She is a cheerleader and a softball player. Irelynne would love to go to college to major in nursing.

Ode to Progress

By Kate Simpkins

In a blur of gears and a haze of steam
Frequently feeling like a feverish dream
The whistle's hiss, the motor's whirr
Oh, Industrial Revolution, you make my heart stir

Gone are the days when we arose with the sun
Our time on the farms is over and done
Clouds shift, white to gray as smokestacks dot the sky
The world transformed without anyone asking why

Oh my heart beats like a brand new bride
When the whistle screams out, calling me inside
As the steel gates rise before me,
Workers flow into the building like a wave in the sea

Large looming factories now grow from the land
In the places where corn and wheat used to stand
The hum of machines fills the world with a song
Like a melody of progress where I belong

Steam engine! Telegraph! Cotton gin!
You are modern and sleek, filling my heart to the brim
While some may lament your pushing us to progress
Oh, Industrial Revolution, I must confess
I love how you brought us into a new age
Releasing us from our agrarian cage

Kate Simpkins is in 9th grade and loves to read, write and walk her dog, Obix, an incorrigible yellow lab. Kate lives in Wynnewood, PA with her two brothers and parents. Kate is a citizen scientist for Monarch Watch and spends her summers tracking the migration patterns of Monarch butterflies.



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

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

FIREFLIES

by Brandon Tu

A big willow tree once sat in this garden, on top of this small hill, capturing the hearts of hundreds. Even among the beautiful peonies and tulips that surrounded it, few would deny its unparalleled beauty. One fateful day, THE fateful day, when the bombs from

the continent over flew their way down, the people were still laughing, smiling, living.

Only but a single moment later, the tree, alongside its onlookers, succumbed to its unfortunate fate: charred black, burnt to a million particles of ash. The

smoke never did vanish, only collected into a thick fog that perpetually surrounded the premises. A faded sign peeked out of it, reading "Firefly Garden."

A gaunt man emerged from that mist, eyes opening as the gray returned to his vision. The plethora of dried blood seemingly held his white dress shirt together. The black suit he wore had numerous holes, varying in size like moon craters, but never small enough to fend off the cold. Overtop hung, to well below ankles, a long trench coat, reminiscent of the forgotten western sheriff. The one rickety, chipped cane he held in his left stopped him from toppling over. He had the grim expression of a starving vulture, with eyes that saw in monochrome. Orange-hot ashes stained the dirt around him, but his leather-torn boots provided him with little protection.

He felt no heat.

Unintelligible groans forced their way out of his esophagus, alongside a harsh fit of coughs. Memories flickered in his mind like light bulbs in a pattern lost to time. His home, his family, his name, all whisked away. No, it's more accurate to say he had no need for it, like a lost cave-dweller accepting their fate and whisking away their lantern's light.

The man shambled through the night until stumbling into this place. Hungry and exhausted, he set up camp there, eating torn bark from the grand tree he sat in front of. He paid no heed to the charcoal bits. A rumbling could be heard from his stomach, yet the lack of sustenance proved to be an afterthought for him. Rat skeletons littered the lot surrounding him, skeletons he used his cane to kick away. He looked to the sky. Gray clouds had long since made their home up there. Weariness sat in the

Through the Maze of Mind

By Abby Kucowski

Beneath the surface, thought swirl, collide-
The clock ticks loud in the silence of my mind,
Anxiety crawls, a heavy weight inside,
Each breath a struggle, each thought unkind.

I hold my fists tight, as anger burns,
The world spins too fast, too hard to bear,
Sadness leaks out, as the body yearns,
For something, anything – someone to care.

I wear my mask well, but the cracks do show,
The damage beneath, too raw to hide.
Smiles slip off, leaving shadows below,
A heart caged – afraid to collide.

Stress pulls at my skin, tight and taut,
Each step forward a mile too long,
My head aches with questions I haven't sought,
While my silence hums a desperate song.

I reach for hope, but it slips through my grasp-
Unseen, unknown, lost in the fog,
Yet somewhere in the dark, there's a gasp,
A whisper of light, hidden in the smog.
But even then, the fight is far from done,
My mind's a battlefield – no place to run.

Abby Kucowski is a poet who lives in Philadelphia, attending Franklin Towne Charter High School. More of her work can be found online at www.philadelphiastories.org/junior.



Kayden McClain © 2025

ridges of the man's eyelids.

Droplets began to fall. He searched around: all the shelter had crumbled to scraps. He tried to form some sort of shelter, but the sawdust and pebbles proved too brittle for materials, trickling down into the ground as particles. The man stomped them in frustration. He resorted to using his coat as tarp, which he drew over the nearly-broken-off branches of the willow tree. He curled up and laid down on his side, with his coat a few centimeters from his body. His eyes saw what could've been a beautiful landscape, yet the rain turned it into a fractured, inky mess, like an old television with static. From the top down, the tarp formed a long hexagonal shape. From the heavens, it looked no different from a target, as the small droplets transformed into a furious torrent. He gazed at the sight one final time before shutting his eyes.

The man opened them back up. His eyes seared with intense pain, yet he did not care, as he stared at the lost sun flourishing above him. Wind, real wind, like the wind that whisks by your shoulders at your mother's house, wind that excites the hair on your arms, sat snug around his neck. The sky shined a deep pearl blue, while the terrain

had a blinding vibrance that caused a vibration in the man. A vibration that felt more like a shove with each passing moment.

The man awoke from his dream. Disoriented, he shot up, his head hitting his coat and bumping it off. Just before it covered his entire sight, he caught a glimpse of legs. His survival instincts almost kicked into gear, before realizing they were strangely hairy.

The coat dropped to the ground as the man stared at the dog in front of him. The man wore an expression of distaste and shuttered empathy. His eyes went up and down, as if he was some museum curator judging a product. Its yellow fur was reminiscent of a golden retriever, although much sicker, with dirt and grime caked in. Dried bandages wrapped around its body, stained with blood. A silver dog tag hung crooked from its neck.

Suddenly, the dog leapt toward the man. He put his hands up, but the dog's legs pinned his arms down. "You-" he yelled, his limbs clambering around, before spit and saliva trickled down his face. Sputtering in surprise, the man tried to scramble up on his feet, but his bad knee did not allow him to. "You dirty...filthy mutt!" He forcefully pushed

him away, the dog landing on its hind legs before assuming a seated position.

The man felt exasperated, his chest tightening into unfamiliar knots. He turned around, swiped his cane from beside the tree, and turned back to find the dog strolling toward him. He raised his cane, poised to strike down as a judge would with a gavel. Just before nailing him, the man stopped.

The dog's eyes were rigid, unwavering, not too unlike the raised stick above, but still soft, gleaming, like little marbles reflecting sunlight. They started to roll around in the man's head: where has he seen those eyes before? Suddenly, a muddled flash of images rushed through him, like an overclocked film reel. Frames of the past left just the same as it came into view. He started to thrash about, protruding his cane further above him and cutting the air into haphazard bits, before a single word focused it all.

Here, on this patch of baked soil, in this vitriolic garden, the man remembered his name.

Some time passed. "Sol, huh?" he finally said, looking at the name on his tag. "Hope you like tree for lunch" he said monotonously, climbing onto his feet and down the hill, his chest

unraveling a bit, his cane bearing the weight of this decision.

Sol was a strange dog, the man thought. His bandaged legs creaked with every step, yet he continued to jump at every stick the man threw, bringing back the ones he could. One time the man faked his throw, and he cackled at his confusion. He did it once more, and again, he had a fit of laughter that bellowed throughout the garden. Finally, he poked him with his cane. "Looking for this?" he said mischievously, holding up the stick he palmed in his hand. Sol, without missing a beat, hurled himself toward the man.

He ignored the stick, landing on the man's chest and began to furiously lick him. "Oh, you-" he started, his hands raised up defensively, before grabbing Sol's sides and flipping him onto his back. "Gotchu!", he exclaimed, smirking in absolute confidence. His grin gradually blurred as he noticed the firm feeling in his hands.

Sol's rib bones stuck outward, like boomerangs stuffed into a balloon.

The man grimaced. He turned sideways and flopped onto the ground. He gripped his cane. The sky overhead looked just the same as yesterday, and the day before that, and the year before that. Dead. Lifeless. Like the closed curtains of a shut-in, never to be opened again.

The film reel started up again, sputtering and spitting. The same images rolled by, one, of two children running past, with a cool breeze flourishing through an open window. And then it all burnt away.

It pained him to remember, the knots in his chest tightening into elaborate catacombs. His grip on his cane tightened and tightened, until, eventually, he let go.

Hesitantly, like approaching a terrified deer, he reached toward the sky. Time had swollen the skin on his hands, his knuckles had caved in long ago, and his fingernails were permanently filed from a lifetime of survival. Still, he kept reaching.

"Come back..." he quietly muttered, his eyes dimming and closing.

Then, the man felt a sharp sensation

pulsate through his hand, shaking the knots. He opened his eyes. From his side, Sol had placed his paw on his palm. He had closed his eyes, silent and still. His claws were sharp and uneven, digging into his skin. Despite this, the man smiled.

"Where are we going, boy?" the man shouted. Sol had taken it upon himself to lead the man somewhere. He barked in response. A surplus of mud had collected and piled onto the

ground. Both Sol and the man strolled through it. The constant gray skies have robbed any exact indicator of the time of day, only with the slight change in light could the man guess it was around evening time.

Sol stopped in front of a wall of fog. He turned back to the man, who was unsure of continuing. "Sol, it's kind of scary in there," he remarked, pointing at it. Sol kept his smiling expression, while turning around and shooting into

Blinked

By Gavin Fry

I held your hand in the mornings light
The breeze was soft and slow.
By dusk you vanished from my sight,
Too fast for time to show.

Regret, a guest I can never suppress
Sitting beside my every breath
Reminding me of all I failed to guess

Your coffee cup waiting alone
The steam's warmth still quietly lingering
The silent spoon a soft groan

Laughter shared on that ordinary night
Now echoes in the kettle's scream
A fleeting sound too frightening to rewrite.

Chasing the sun through the cracked blinds
In the dust memories unwind

A robin hops along the garden path
It sings, nothing touched by grief or wrath.

The wind is blowing softly. Curtains lift then fall
I promise I hear you humming throughout the hall.

So now I watch the sky turn blue
Enjoying the mornings stay
The world still spinning without you-
But somehow, that's okay.

Gavin Fry is a junior at Franklin Towne Charter Highschool. He enjoys writing poetry, and believes that it's a way to express suppressed emotions in methods we originally wouldn't try.



Artis Bellamy © 2025

that thick mist, disappearing.

The man felt the heat from his feet, as he propelled into the fog. "Sol!" he shouted, blindly scrambling in. Desperation and anxiety perched on his shoulders, like two crows looking for a man that cheated death, whispering in his ears, a fantasy that could've been.

Then, the man emerged from the fog.

Those two crows flew off as he spotted Sol curled up in the center of a clearing. The "forest", which stretched to lengths beyond sight, looked bare and exposed, like a furious hurricane had torn through the area. From a birds-eye view, it would look like a jigsaw puzzle where every piece was cracked and crumpled. Still, the man felt a tremor in his heart he had not felt in a long, long time.

"Sol, what the hell?" he shouted, although his frustration faded as his golden smile peered through. Sol laid on top of a small pile of dirt. He had a curious expression, as if beckoning the man to do something. The man laid down beside him.

He patted his fur down, trying to remove the twigs and twine. Sol closed his eyes. "You are one hell of a dog, you know that?" he said gently. "I'm glad you are here, right now, right with

me." The man continued to pet him. "I just want you to know that, okay?" Sol's eyes stayed shut. "Sol?" Shut. The man heard squawking around him but ignored it. "Fell asleep, huh? I get it. It's been a long, long day."

The man reached out into the air and grabbed a falling, charred leaf. "Hey, you know, I wish I met you sooner. Before the bombs came. You and me, Sol and Dante, best friends for life!" Dante laughed, his fingers gently feeling the surface of the leaf. "That would've been the best, right buddy?" He tried to shake him awake, but Sol would not respond. Panic began to settle inside his chest, as the squawking grew in intensity. "Sol. Sol!" he cried, putting his ear to his chest, listening for any iota of sound.

He might as well have put his ear up to one of the hollow trees surrounding them.

Dante was quiet. He was quiet for a long time, his shoulders heaving up and down, his eyes widening and closing. In an act of rage, he grabbed a branch from the ground and hurled it into the trees. They did not budge, and neither did Sol. Tears welled up, yet no fluid drizzled out. His heart settled into a familiar dead calm. He looked to the

sky, gazing longingly at the dull clouds, before laying down on his back, and closing his eyes, prepared to fall asleep forever.

...
...
...

Then, blobs of light appeared in front of his shut eyes, like an unfocused camera pointed at a busy intersection. Dante opened them back up.

Fireflies flew all around him like a lantern festival. Kaleidoscopic colors seeped into every pore of the atmosphere. They danced and frolicked around, like children playing in a garden. A low whirring could be heard echo throughout, but all sound faded for Dante as he took in the sight. The clearing looked animated, pure, alive. Even the broken trees regained their youth. Then, in Dante's mind, a single image came into focus.

It was a family portrait, taken into a field of flowers. His two children sat in the center, beaming ear to ear, while his wife and him stood closely behind, their hands on their shoulders. It was sunny that day, he remembered. A tear began its descent down his face. The knots in his chest untangled into roots. He glanced at Sol.

Under all those tiny lights, Sol looked no different from the sun.

Dante chose not to bury him, opting to cover him with his coat instead, leaving his cane next to him. He took off his dog tag and gazed at it longingly. His heart trembled in syncopated rhythms, before he stashed it in his pocket. A cool breeze began to sway around his shoulders. He gathered his composure once more and walked toward the exit of the clearing, the film reel rolling in tandem.

Dante's eyes were soft, gleaming, like little marbles reflecting sunlight.

Brandon Tu is from Philadelphia, a junior attending Franklin Towne Charter High School. He wrote this piece for his creative writing class.

FEARLESS (EXCERPT)

by Haley Brill

PROLOGUE

Large hands coolly brushed away the dust on his suit. Though it hadn't been his suit, and it didn't fit just yet, Jason supposed he would grow into it. But even if he didn't, that didn't particularly matter to him.

He only had to wear it for one day.

Jason adjusted the tie, which had been his, in the mirror of Captain's old bedroom. He swept his hair to the side, which he usually did, only this time he had used pomade to give it shape. Special occasion, he supposed. His fingers rose to the space just beneath his eyes to fix the purple rubber mask that obscured the upper half of his face, specifically his eyes.

This funeral was not going to be easy, and the press conference would be even harder. But Jason supposed that attending the funeral of a man you murdered was never going to be that simple...

Haley Brill lives in Northeast Philly and attends Franklin Towne Charter Highschool, and has always loved writing short stories, altering perspectives, and every aspect of writing. Writing is one of her biggest passions and something she is very confident in.

THE GOLDEN GLEAM OF POWER (EXCERPT)

by Alexia Sanderson

Chapter 1 Finding the Cave

"Good morning. Rise and shine, sleepy head it's time to get to work. There's a lot we need to get done and I don't have all day." I was awakened from my sleep by the sound of my father screaming at me to get up and get ready for the day. It was the last thing I wanted to do but I knew that he wouldn't stop until I was up and dressed, ready to start work...

...After about an hour of wandering around, I finally fell upon this cave. The opening was wide and swinging vines hung over the two sides making the cave look dark and mysterious. I knew I probably shouldn't go in because I had no idea where I was and going into that cave would probably just make me more lost than before. But who said I'm gonna listen to reason. I began walking towards the cave as I got closer the more I felt like this was a bad idea, but I didn't care. Maybe I'd find water in there, so I got to the entrance, paused, and slowly stepped inside.

Almost immediately the atmosphere changed...

Alexia Sanderson is currently a sophomore in high school. She participates in lots of activities, such as competitive gymnastics, track and art. Alexia is an entrepreneur as well, and looks forward to starting her own business in the future with animal care and art. This is an excerpt of the first chapter in a book she's writing.

THE RINGING PHONE

by Addison Fine

Sam is a 6 '3," 22-year-old man with dark brown hair, which is graying from stress, and a long beard that hasn't been shaved in months. He was asleep when a cold hand brushed against him; he woke up in a cold sweat. The sensation felt icy, unfamiliar, and mysterious. He looked around the dark hotel room as his eyes darted frantically. As Sam got up, the moonlight glared into the room, prompting him to look in the bathroom and check the shower curtain to ensure no one was in there.

Sam exited the room, the landline phone on the table started to ring. He cautiously walks up to the phone, filled with fright, and picks it up. As

Sam picks it up, he hears a sound of breathing from the other line. Sam's breath hyperventilates, prompting him to hang up the phone. As he backs away, the phone rings again, this time more rapidly. Sam can hear his heart beating in his chest; he almost thinks it might jump out of his throat. He picks up the phone and once again hears the caller's heavy panting.. When the voice finally responds, he is petrified.

"You have 5 days left to live," the voice says, then the dial tone is the only thing that can be heard.

Sam drops the phone and stumbles over to the bed; he turns on the light

and picks it up to call his brother Kevin. When Kevin doesn't answer, Sam slams his phone against the wall and then suddenly there is a creak from inside the closet. Sam slowly walks toward the closet and opens the door. Once he opens the door and the closet, and the hangers are rocking back and forth ever so slightly. When he goes to shut it, a man jumps out and grabs him and pins him down on the floor. The man has no face, and Sam tries to get out of his grip, but the man won't let go. As Sam looks at the mysterious man, he grabs a knife out of his back pocket. Sam frantically starts to panic, and the man brings the knife up and quickly brings it down to his chest.

And there was a shriek.

Sam wakes up screaming, his chest heaving in fear. Sam finally takes a breath to calm himself down as he looks around the dark hotel room. The moonlight shines through the room, only to realize it's a window. Sam feels a cool breeze and looks over only to recognize that the front door is open. His eyes widen with fear as there's a noise once more, and he looks wide-eyed at the closet that was once shut and is now open. Sam's eyes widen, and tears start to form, as a man steadily approaches...and all you can hear is a scream.

A blood-curdling scream...

Addison Fine is a 16-year-old who is in her junior year at Franklin Towne Charter High School. She is excited to create more stories in the future.



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THE SUMMER YOU LEARNED TO SWIM

by Lilian Walton

5-27-24

The Day You Learned to Swim

Adeline, what happened? We were supposed to get through this together. It's been over 3 years we spent together, and this is what it's come to? They found your body floating there, lifeless. I wish I could've held you one more time. The things I would do to touch your smooth pale skin, to have your innocent green

eyes looking into mine. My heart feels like it fell to the bottom of the ocean next to you, why didn't you tell me? Please baby, come back. Come back. Come back. What do I have to do? I swear I'd give up anything. My baby, I need you. PLEASE I NEED YOU! I've never begged God more than I have the past 3 hours. My eyes burn red every time I think about you. Please tell me you love

me again. I need to hear it.

5-28-24

The Day I Heard Your Voice

I've called your phone 86 times. I'm almost ashamed of myself for it. But I needed to hear your voice. I fell asleep thinking about you. I held your stuffed animals all night long. They still smell like you; it makes me feel like I'm stroking your hair the way it never had any tangles or knots; you were always perfect in that way. Why wouldn't you tell me? Why did you feel like you had no other choice?

5-29-24

The Day You Told Me Why

I was at your house today. They let me take some of your belongings for keepsake. And then I found out why you did it. Your journal told me all about him. He'd never been a man, just a little boy. He treated you disgustingly. And I never knew why. God, my blood rushes every time I read it. The thought of him being out there, terrorizing people, sweet people like you baby, it hurts me. My love was never enough to make you forget. Neither were the substances, or the pain you caused yourself. It makes me wonder, maybe you leaving us was truly the only way to forget. The only way to rid him of your nightmares. I hope you have beautiful dreams, wherever you are.

5-30-24

The Day I Saw You Again

Your Funeral was today. I haven't seen you in 5 days, and God it was so relieving seeing you again angel, but the pain in your face wasn't nearly enough to make up the time I lost with you. You looked so fragile, I felt like I had a mission to protect you from the

A Petal

By Amayah Marrero

I was the petal under a stone.
It can't ever move unless something lifts its weight.
It eventually did. I fell off the stem
Pushed under a stone
But now I don't stand alone.
I was free.

It is not just a lifestyle,
It is an influence.
I had to change
To feel the influence.

I was not me. I was them.
It was like I was a petal to a stem.
Completely attached to something
That only if I fall off, I will stand alone.

I needed to fall off, so I could be on my own.
I didn't want to be like those other petals attached to that stem.
If I wasn't set free, would I still be,
One of them?

Amayah Marrero, from Lawncrest in Northeast Philadelphia is a junior at Franklin Towne Charter High School. She loves to write, but uses her creativity in many forms of art. Amayah loves to draw, paint, graphic design, and can-do nail art. See www.philadelphiastories.org/junior for more of her writing.

bad energy, the bad things this cruel earth had living on it. I never doubted your beauty. My parents asked why I've been quiet all day, but have they not heard? I've been talking to you my love, I'll talk to you every day. Not one day will go by, I swear. I've always meant it when I told you how much I love you. Don't ever doubt me.

5-31-24

The Day I Went Crazy

For some reason, i can't stop thinking about him. The man that caused all of this. If it weren't for him, you'd be right here next to me. We'd be watching a movie; you'd be eating caramel popcorn with the spray butter that you always needed on top. The fizzy Dr. Pepper next to us, you could never finish a full one, but it's ok, I always got to finish it for you.

6-1-24

The Day I Did Something Bad

I have to confess and you're the only person that can know. I made a fake account, I made him meet up with me. I hurt him. I hurt him for hurting you. Are you proud of me? I did something to protect you, you can't be mad. Baby, I had to. You and me, we agreed on it. I know you've been giving me signs. You've been in my dreams, in my head constantly. I know you were there to help me too, you made me stronger. We were stronger together. I know we've got this now.

6-2-24

The Day I Swam with You

I've been waiting for this day like a madman. I knew you would call for me soon. I've dived deep into my feelings, considering this for days on end. But I think I know what the right choice is... I need to see you. I think the only way is to find you where you last left me. I'm doing us a favor, that way we can still live our dreams together, in peace and integrity. I've been losing my mind for the past week, I'm self-aware enough to know that's a fact. I thought it would pass, perhaps after the first couple days when I started feeling out of touch with my own body, and thought that maybe



Kayden McClain © 2025

it was just grief. But it hasn't gone away, so I'm following after your footsteps. We can both learn how to swim this summer.

Lilian Walton is 16 years old and a sophomore at Franklin Towne Charter High School. Born in Philadelphia, she has lived here my entire life, currently

living with her dad, her older sister, and her cat, Camilla! She picked up writing as a hobby, and was given great feedback from classmates, friends, and her teachers. Lilian likes to read a lot, her favorite book is actually a 3 book mystery series, "A Good Girls Guide to Murder".

I SPOKE TO AN ADDICT BELOW AN OVERPASS, HE TOLD ME HE WAS THERE BECAUSE HE WANTED TO BE LIKE ME

by Grant Boston

I took a walk through my city until I got lost. I made it to a bridge away from everyone. I took a deep breath and jumped. I didn't fall.

I spoke to an addict below an overpass; he told me he was there because he wanted to be like me. I should've fallen.

Before I landed and felt peace, a raspy crackhead voice spoke and said, "You don't really want to jump." I looked puzzled and replied, "You don't know my life." His eyes widened as he realized it was me, the biggest, richest, happiest, most loved rapper in the world. He said, "Why are you here?" I asked the same.

He said, "Because I wanted to be like you."

I spoke to an addict below an overpass; he told me he was there because he wanted to be like me. Why didn't I fall?

I said, "What do you mean?" He didn't have to answer; I knew what he meant.

All I rapped about was drugs, women and money.

Every "bar" used as a ladder to further my addiction, every song an excuse to keep pouring, keep cutting up. My lyrics, his excuse.

He told me I taught him to chase what I said was a necessity.

A fix masked as freedom and power. I asked how old he was.



Kayden McClain © 2025

"20," he said. I would've guessed 40.

I spoke to an addict below an overpass; he told me he was there because he wanted to be like me. Falling wouldn't change my lyrics.

He stayed still through the entire interaction. I could've saved him; I thought of handing him the cash I threw

at my vices and insecurities, but truthfully, he would do exactly what I do with the money. I walked away. I should've helped that young man. I wonder if he's still there waiting. His face, aged four decades, molding and picking—eerie, my creation. I walked away with a new weight on my chest, heavier than ever. I saw that man, and I wonder how many I've killed.

I walked away instead of fixing my mess. Like always.

But his voice stayed with me—
A ghost under every overpass,
A face I'll never forget.

How many more are there?

How many lives paid for my words?

I keep walking, but the weight doesn't fade.

Now I wonder,

Was it him who held me down that day?

Or was it the weight of the lives I'd already taken,

Refusing to let me go?

My chest, heavier than the needles scattered

In the wet dirt below the overpass.

Grant Boston is a freshman at Revolution School in Philly. He likes music, from indie pop to rock to hip hop. He also loves to play football and hopefully will play for a team too.

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