

Spring 2018

Legacy Winter 2018

Southern Adventist University

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A photograph of cherry blossom branches covered in snow against a clear blue sky. The branches are dark brown and adorned with numerous small, white and pink blossoms. The snow is piled up on the branches, creating a soft, white contrast against the blue background. The overall mood is serene and wintry.

Legacy

Winter 2018 Issue

Legacy

Bittersweet

Sierra Emilaire, editor

Clarise Nixon, writer's club sponsor

Editor's Note

Sierra Emilaire, senior English professional writing major

Hello again and for the last time,

It has been a privilege being your Legacy editor for the 2017-2018 school year, but since I am graduating it is now time to pass the torch to someone new. I would like to thank everyone who submitted to our Fall edition and to this semester's edition as well. Next year, we will continue to hold a writing contest during both semesters with an individual magazine being published for each semester.

This semester's theme was bittersweet. It was difficult trying to come up with a theme as universal and poignant as vulnerability, but once we decided on bittersweet we knew it was the perfect theme. As the transition from winter to spring is among one of the most drastic of changes in nature, causing the death of much for the rebirth of much more, this theme seemed fitting. This final semester has been bittersweet for me in many ways. I have lost many friends, but gained friendships with the most unlikely of individuals. I struggled with balancing classes, work, social life and love life for possibly the first time ever, but I made it out. I was faced with many obstacles that made the end seem unattainable, yet here I am ready to graduate in just a few days. I never thought saying goodbye to Southern would be as emotional as it has been, but although I mourn the end of this beautiful experience, my arms are open wide to what the future has to offer me.

I hope that these pieces will mutually evoke emotions of loss and gain for you and that you will choose to open your arms to change no matter how hard that change may seem to be.

Thanks again for exposing yourselves to my team and to the readers of this magazine. I hope you found peace in writing these pieces.

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Poetry

Closed

Melissa Osadchuck

It was a stubborn yellow rose
With full intent of staying closed
That a lark swooped past one early summer's day.
But, as he flew his usual flight
The lark took note of the strange sight
And so conceded to a moment of delay.

After puzzling for a while,
His face an enigmatic smile,
The lark addressed the blossom in such way:

“Dear rose, you must agree
You are a sight for one to see -
Still wrapped tightly in your petals made of gold!
Have you problems with your leaves?
Or are you cumbered by some griefs?
Why do you not your petals yet unfold?”

The yellow bud, so tall and grim
With thorns encompassing its stem,
Replied with utterance of woe untold:

“Oh, my dear lark, what you ask
Is certainly no easy task;
O! The half of what it takes you do not know!
For to let my radiant hue
Into the world's indicting view,
I must learn to deal alike with friend and foe.”

“But, dear rose, you aren't admired
For remaining tightly spired -
Opening your petals draws the show!”

“But opening up to passers-by
Ensures I'll shrivel up and die,
And then all the world will look on me with scorn;
For once my blooms have bloomed away,
Before the night engulfs the day,
The twilight leaves sight only of the thorn!”

So, with such sentiment expressed
The lark was highly unimpressed
And left the budding rose-to-be forlorn.
For there are those who will not see
(Says the lark to you and me)
That their colors are to joyfully be worn.

Immersion

Anthony Nelson

The rushing waters wracked my shadowed form,
While chains of iron hindered my ascent.
I writhed and clawed to flee the raging storm,
But only proved to further my descent.

With vain endeavor and with wretched pains,
I looked up to the surface with dismay.
(Still, when I'm gone, the waves will rent my chains,
And let my body up to be displayed.)

But then a vision of my dad arose,
Reminding me of when we last embraced.
I saw his empty eyes, then saw them close,
As fingers hushed the terror in their case.

I realized, as the rain drove out my breath,
I, too, had urged the dying to succumb,
And stop the fruitless struggle against death,
So with this thought I relaxed and went numb.

Towards the surface of the sea above,
I expel all my air and watch its flight.
It bubbles up and rises like a Dove,
And through the Way is ushered into Light.

Bittersweet

Avery Kroll

Sea foam flies
On salty breeze
Of the oceans in your eyes

Melting stone
Bending iron
Trace each mile
With every curve
Of that crooked smile

And to the sweet sound
Like velvet line
Make silence break
Without a choice
With the warmth
Of your voice

But you'd never know
I'd never say
But try to hid the torture
Burning deep inside

And you
Your hand in hers
That smile
The glow of your face
She knows
Farther away
She takes you
To another place
So I
Sit in shadows
Of burning silence
Pulling apart
In my hands
This bleeding heart
For you
I try
For I let you go

Growth

Anthony Matos

static
stuck inside
trapped within
afraid of the dark
is there anyone there?
am i silent as well as blind?
my screams are muted by the dark-
ness
but from the dark comes the greatest
peace striving for an opportunity to
express
the pain drives me forward
fear becomes a friend
enjoy the isolation
forget what was
breathe new
alive

Bitter Cold

Jacklyn Ruth

The world seemed to be laughing,
Tossing snow and shining for all to
see.

But I wasn't happy.

Grab your pitchforks! I cry

It's time to do battle

But

Outside continued to shine, allowing
the sun to send beams of light in all
directions
The cold air felt like a weird blanket,
comforting and invigorating.

A single tear slides down my cheek.

What do YOU have to be happy
about?
I ask

Outside keeps shining.

And, somehow, while standing in the
cold

My heart melted.

Reality

Melissa Osadchuck

I'll paint it as I see it
Without changing any hues,
Without blotting out the
 burgundies
Because I love the blues;
Without speckling an inky sky
With drops of glistening white
When really all the guiding stars
Are hidden from my sight.

Yes, I'll paint it as I see it
For no lie is ever told
That leaves a person smiling
As the days on Earth grow old.
For deception is two-faced
Leaving everyone with griefs,
Turning angels into demons –
Robes of light to mere fig leaves.

So, I'll paint it as I see it
And though all may disagree,
Their opinions will not alter
 The profound reality.
And when doubts assail my being
And conceal all that is there,
I'll still paint it as I see it
Led by faith and hope and prayer.

A Dichotomy

Melissa Osadchuck

I felt a lonely tear today
 Slipping down my cheek,
 Sliding surreptitiously
 As if to hide the leak;
And when I asked her why she slipped,
She didn't wish to speak.

I felt a pleasant thought today
 Lighting up my eyes,
 Stretching lips from side to side
 In admirable size;
But when I probed the honeyed thought
She simply smiled, all wise.

I only asked so I could find
 The reason for the tear;
 The reason for the pleasant thought -
 That smile from ear to ear -
And how it was that both in peace
Could dwell together here.

So I fell silent with the two
 But soon, with muffled starts,
 The lonely tear and pleasant thought
 Began to share their hearts;
In perfect harmony they spoke
As if they'd practiced parts:

“To feel is both the highest gift
 And most enchanting pain,
And tears of sorrow and of joy
 Both leave an equal stain;
Yet, though there is dichotomy
 That makes a soul distraught
 The chance to feel at all
Outweighs the fate of feeling naught.”

Next Time

Sara Danese

A child stands attired in black
Beside a fresh-dug grave
While Autumn whistles sharp
about
And grasses bend and wave.

His mother lies beneath the earth,
Her race in life well-run;
Rejoice for her who rests in peace—
Mourn the grieving son.

The child kneels beside the grave
With head upon the stone;
Thinks long upon an empty
House that used to be a home.

The boy's heart in chaos rolls
As he takes a trembling breath
And lifts his voice in childish trust
To the Lord of life and death.

"This is bad, Daddy God,
But I know it's not the end,
'Cause Mommy often talked of you
And called you Dearest Friend.

"So please be my friend too, God,
And keep me by your side;
Teach me what I need to know
To cross the Jordan wide.

"I miss Mommy an awful lot
But maybe that's okay,
'Cause one day You'll make all
Things new and wipe my tears
away.

"Next time I see Mommy
We'll be in a better place
Where we can see our Dearest
Friend
Face to shining face."

Dance of Spring

Avery Kroll

Secrets hidden
Once to show
After winter cease to blow
With the fade of stainless white
Shoots of violet
Lime green light
Dance the wind
Of ancient time
Just the same as those gone by
And just as come
Even soon they go
Dance once again
After winter snow

Bittersweet Goodbye

Elaina Holway

I don't remember just when,
I discovered we were not related,
I didn't want to believe it,
I was utterly devastated.

But you showed me through time
That blood didn't matter.
No one need know that I'm
Not your granddaughter.

You spent many years,
Proving the facts wrong.
You were there to erase my tears,
You showed me that I do belong.

And then you taught,
Me to trust God in the pain.
I watched how hard you fought,
Full of faith and peace within.

The last few weeks,
your grew frail still,
Until one day you were to weak,
To stand at all.

Slowly I bend over,
and give you a kiss.
your gentle eyes closed in sleep,
the time we spent together I will
miss.

When I pull away,
with this pain in my heart.
I don't want you to leave me,
I don't want to be apart.

But I know,
this goodbye doesn't mean forever,
we have so many memories,
that I will always remember.

The drive back home,
was the saddest I ever had.
I cried so hard,
I felt so sad.

I prayed that God,
would let you stay.
We all knew it was soon,
But hoped it would wait,

Then I got the call,
My Grandpy was gone.
You were free from the pain,
And resting in peace.

Your battle with cancer
took a toll on your body,
but no one could say that you
were not ready.

You had peace
And a hope.
You knew exactly
Where you were going.

You would rest
In the ground
Until that last

Goodbye continued on page 9

Trumpet sounds.

Then You will wake
And meet Your best friend.
I can't wait
Till we are together again.

One day soon,
Our Jesus will come,
You will wake up
And we will go home.

But until then,
I will follow your lead,
To trust in God
For All of my needs.

You left me a legacy,
Of faith and
Tenacity
Even through hardships and pain.

The Truth

Melissa Osadchuck

Truth is what we fight for,
Truth is what we preach -
Truth is what we seek to find
And what we strive to teach.

Oh, but Truth is often covered
With a silken thread of fear;
Concocted by the one whose love
Is Javelin and Spear.

For though he loves his weapons
He cannot use them all,
For such a blatant show of force
Would certainly appall.

So, since we loathe the bitter
And often crave the sweet
He meets us where our interest lies
And sugar gives to eat.

Yes, Truth he bathes in falsehood
And mixes up the facts,
And washes off all reason
From his deceptive acts.

And though we know in theory
His tactics that beguile
We often fall into his trap
And wittingly defile.

Oh, then wake us from our slumber!
From this lethargic sleep!
And help the Truth transform our
lives
That we our lives may keep.

~ End Poetry ~

Short Stories

Also Known as Duke

Nicole Dominguez

Mondays are hard enough without death. I hung up the phone. My mother hadn't stopped talking but I had stopped listening. A numbing pain settled within me--an out of body experience--like the take off on a plane when you somehow feel weightless, yet never more dense. I slowly got up, and in this weightless haze walked to the dresser and took out a black suit, a black tie and church shoes. Grandpa himself was never one for church clothes, he preferred flannel shirts and dungarees. I could just imagine him in stony silence in the pew of the church, hearing the eulogy spoken over him, face never changing, eyes saying everything. I packed the clothes I needed for the service and the journey home. Through the entire process: packing my clothes, sending the email to my boss explaining my upcoming absence, I felt like I had entered into autopilot, my muscles moving to do the actions my mind could not process.

The next morning at 6am I packed my beat up 1994 Ford Explorer and set out for home. One mile rolled into the next, and soon the beige suburbia: matchbox houses, commercial stores, and cardboard buildings fell away into the tree lined exits and back roads that I'd memorized in the commute between my present residence, and home. He drove me here. I had asked him to, even though I knew that dad or mom, or even my brother Matt could have taken me, but I wanted him. In a way I needed him to be with me, to show me the exits that would get me to college and a new life. I needed his blessing. When I asked him he didn't say anything, he just nodded and left the room, but the next morning he was up at dawn ready for the drive.

That was when it hit me. Grief, pain, anger, all crushed me. It hit so hard I had to pull over to the side of the road and park the car. And there, on the side of the highway, I wept. A grown man of 26, 6 ft 5, hunched in a car his grandfather helped him build, weeping, screaming and hurting.

A day later, I reached Van Buren, Michigan. I could always tell when I was coming up on the town, because the smell of fruit would hit me, like that one relative who always wore too much perfume, suffocating you with its familiarity. It was an agitating comfort. I sped through the orchards, rolling down my window and watched the peach, apple, and pear trees blur past me. Matt and I would play in those orchards nearly everyday. When we were 10 and 13 we'd sneak out and run through the rows, living for that thrilling fear, and even hope that someone would jump out of the trees and scare us, or that we'd witness a grave robbery; hoping to fulfill our Tom Sawyer dreams. If I went in those fields now I could probably still navigate the ordered rows.

By now, I had passed the orchards and entered town. For the most part it hadn't changed: the same stores were there, with exception of a few billboards that were newer here, but 3 years old everywhere else. One store had a sale on Canadian maple syrup in honor of the 2010 Winter Olympics. As I crawled the 25 mph speed limit through Main St, I noticed black ribbons hanging on almost every door. I furrowed my brow.

"Could this be for Grandpa?" I thought.

I knew he had passive involvement in the town, but never one to elicit such a response. I didn't have time to contemplate it as I drove away, finally reaching the end of town. I made my way through the long road till I reached the bend that led to the farm. To the left of me I saw our orchards and the corral where Grandpa kept his horses. He had a supernatural power over the animals and I remember watching in awe at his confident skill in summoning them with a silent click, and wishing that I too could have his cool cowboy quality. I drove down the dirt road and parked outside the house.

I love this house. It's one of the only things that lives up to the splendor of my childhood memories. White and beautiful with an L shaped porch that's screened in, and windows that stream light throughout the

day; I could still see the Frisbee my cousin Chuck threw, perched on the roof. I smiled. This was home; even through the pain and hurt, this was my safe harbor. Before I even left the car, Mom burst through the screen door and jogged over to me as I stepped out. It amazes me how a woman who is almost half my size is still able to wrap me up in a hug. She smelled of perfume, dish soap and sunshine, her cropped back hair flecked with white and flour on her blouse, meaning she was baking. She did that when stressed or overwhelmed with emotion: our family collectively gained 10 pounds when Matt enlisted.

“I’m so glad you’re home,” Mom muffled into my jacket.

“I’m glad to be home to Mom.” I said, squeezing her a bit before I let her go.

She pulled back but kept her arms on my shoulders, looking me over with her large green eyes that melted motherly concern. She began what Matt and I called “The Mom Script” :

“Have you eaten?”

“How was the drive?”

“Have you lost weight?”

I nodded and smiled weakly, “It’s okay Mom, I’m fine.”

Her brow furrowed slightly, knowing that it was a lie but said nothing. Whenever my mother spotted a lie during my youth she would call me by my full name of Eugene Richard Ross. I always hated my name, just hearing it was punishment enough. But now she just took my arm and walked me inside the house saying, “Come inside, Mary is on her way so she’ll be getting in right before the service tomorrow.” I nodded as she told me more about the upcoming relatives that would be descending either later in the day, or the morning of the funeral; fortunately, there weren’t many on my dad’s side of the family except his sister Mary, great aunt Cecilia, and a few cousins.

“Where is dad?” I asked.

Mom went silent and breathed in slowly, her usual preface before using her “practical voice”.

“He’s in the study.” She whispered, glancing at the closed door at the end of the hall. “He’s been on the phone most of the time organizing everything for tomorrow.”

I nodded, giving my mom’s shoulder a squeeze before dropping my bag and walking to the door. I knocked lightly, heard a grunt in response and walked in. My father sat in his large wooden chair with his back to me, his body hunched to where I could only see the curve of his back and the blonde head that had turned towhead white, he nodded and murmured something into the phone; we were entering into the golden hour and the sun began to set illuminating the office from the glass doors behind him, hallowing my father’s hunched form. Seconds passed and then in a regular tone said.

“Yep, okay... okay... Well just make sure that they’re there on time. Bye.”

He hung up the phone, turned around and smiled at me. His brown eyes were bloodshot and had sunken into his face, his complexion jaundiced.

“Hey, Gene.” My father said, voice tired and hollow. “I was just making arrangements with Pastor Judd, some of the fellas from town were hoping to carry the coffin down to the cemetery. Unfortunately there are too many offers and not enough coffin.”

He gave a half hearted laugh that died prematurely.

I too gave a small chuckle, sitting down on the chair opposite and said, “At the risk of sounding like mom, I gotta ask: Have you eaten? Can I help with anything?”

This raised a genuine smile and a low chuckle saying “Your mother has been bringing me some food,” he gestured to the untouched plates of sandwiches and cold bowls of soup that littered the counter space not covered by papers. “And in terms of the funeral I think I have just about everything figured out. He left little to no details on how he wanted the service. Except for one sentence: ‘don’t be fancy’.”

I laughed at that, practically hearing grandpa say them, with his deep thunder rumble voice, his sun-burned brow furrowing, and his clear blue eyes showing a storm. At that moment Mom popped her head through the door and said that dinner was ready, looking pointedly at my father, challenging him to decline. My father nodded, knowing he wouldn’t win the unspoken argument; we both stood and made our way to the dining room to eat. We ate in communal silence. No one needed to mention how yet another chair had become vacant.

The next morning, we all woke at dawn, even though the service wouldn’t begin until noon. We moved around each other in choreographed silence, cherishing it before the rush of “I’m sorry’s” and “are you okay’s” and “If there’s anything you need’s”. We made it to the church by ten and by eleven thirty the floodgates opened: everybody within driving distance fell into the small church until we were wedged side by side, it got so bad that a few people even had to sit on the pulpit.

My father was with Pastor Judd and the pallbearers on the other side of the church, preparing to carry in the casket. My mother stood at the door, receiving waves upon waves of sympathy, and of course, casseroles given by all the church women who channeled their grief by pouring cans of cream of mushroom soup onto noodles, and God knows what else. I sat near the front of the church, my head lowered in an attempt to avoid eye contact and the pity of what seemed like the entire town. I could barely manage my own grief without thinking of the grief of those around me. As I sat there, I heard people shuffle into the pew behind mine. After a few seconds passed I heard a gravelly voice say

“It doesn’t seem real, him being dead. I don’t know, I never thought a man like that could die.”

“Come on Gabe,” Another voice said, this one as rough as his friends “He wasn’t immortal.”

“You know what I mean. I feels like good men shouldn’t be allowed to die.”

There was a pause before the first man spoke again, this time his voice was hushed and taut.

“You remember about twelve years back when Hannah got sick?”

I assumed his friend had given some indication of understanding because he continued, saying

“I wasn’t able to do much, cause I was at the hospital with her, and Laura and Everett were still only eight. The farm kinda fell apart since I wasn’t able to hire help...you know... with the hospital charges and such.”

He stopped, I heard him hide his crying with a guttural cough.

“Anyway, Duke came by and said he’d help, and he and his grandsons worked the orchards. I didn’t ask him to. Heck, the man even fixed the barn door and you know I didn’t care about that. I tried saying thank you, but he always just nodded and said he was just doing what needed to be done. I mean, I thought that breed a’ man had died out with John Wayne.”

“Yep,” I heard the other man say. “He would always say that. Same thing when Bud Clarett nearly had his store foreclosed on, he just sent him a check and didn’t talk about it. Only reason anybody knew was cause Bud’s wife told her entire church circle. That woman shoulda been a newscaster, I swearta God.”

I heard the men chuckle before falling silent again. Meanwhile, my mind was racing. I remembered when I was fourteen and grandpa told Matt and I at the dinner table that we’d be helping him work Gabe Richard’s orchard. When we asked why, complaining that our summer would be filled with work, he looked down at us with his clear grey-blue eyes and said

“Cause he needs a hand, and we got six.”

We didn’t ask anymore questions after that. I wonder why I didn’t notice the strained look on Gabe’s face, the brief conversations grandpa would have with him, illuminated by the porch light as he returned from spending the day with his wife, and as we were piled into the car, exhausted from a day’s work. I suppose when your fourteen, you have yet to learn how to look beyond your own problems. Before I could think more about it, I saw the shuffle of people preparing for the service to begin.

Pastor Judd walked up and said “Duke Ross wasn’t much of a church goer, but he was the best Christian I ever knew. What made him so, is that he lived what he believed. He was a hard worker, and a genuinely good man who invested in the people around him. I know that we’re all here today because he had touched our lives in the manner of his character: with quiet authenticity. Duke was never a man of many words, so I think in honor of that we’ll keep it short and sweet.”

With that the choir sang, a verse given, a prayer spoken and we piled out, whispering words and stories of the man that was my grandfather. Everyone was making their way to the cemetery, but I cut away, moving in the direction of town.

The day was beautiful and it felt like I was standing on a deserted movie set. In the window of one of the many closed stores it said “Gone to mourn a friend”.

As I stood in the middle of the empty town, a poem by WH Auden that I’d learned in high school English came to mind. I remembered:

*Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.
He was my North, my South, my East and West,*

*My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.*

My throat closed and I began to feel that pain again. I shoved my hands in my pockets and felt the crumple of paper, I pulled out the program for the service. In the rush of people I didn't even look at it but had shoved it away. I looked at it now. Sucking in a breath and exhaling a choked gasp, feeling joy, revelation, pain, confusion, happiness, misery and the liberating weight of responsibility, I read: *In honor of Eugene Harold Ross, also known as Duke.*

Have I Wasted Your Time

Sierra Correia

When Cesia finds a gray hair amongst his shirts, she knows it's only a matter of time before they fall apart. She knows she should be celebrating this – truly she does – if not for her, then for him. Aging is a privilege granted only to those who have found the other half of themselves. She's got the words tattooed on her heart by now; she's heard them so many times, and she says them to herself now as a reminder that she should feel happy. She knows this but in that strand of gray is an omen of the end of them. Because it's been thirty years since they first met, and she still looks like the same bright eyed and naïve eighteen-year-old who, on the tips of her toes, pressed a kiss to his mouth and declared that they were meant to be. How wrong she was then is clearer to her now than it ever was. Did he too, when she hugged him goodbye this morning, look the same as he did then? Or were there smile lines in the corners of his eyes, wrinkles that spoke of a long life filled with laughter and experiences?

And distantly, she hears her daughter calling for her, little Lacey no older than three, and becomes acutely aware that it's so much bigger than she and her love. Cesia's not a selfish woman, but she wraps that gray hair in a napkin and places it on the nightstand by their bed. She promises herself that they'll talk about it later, about a future that had seemed so certain just a few moments before.

She doesn't mean to forget about it, but it's so easy to get caught up in the push-pull of their lives. There's Tyrian's work and Lacey's needs, and she drowns herself happily in the love that she feels for them. It's not until he storms into the dining room on a cool summer's evening – so cool they'd opened the patio door to appreciate the breeze – with a fire in his eyes she's never seen before that she realizes he knows the truth.

Cesia backs out the door in hopes that he'll soon follow. Their daughter is sound asleep right now and the last thing she needs is to be woken up by the sounds of her parents' first fight.

“How long have you known?” It's a fair question.

“Not long,” she promises. He deflates then, and she shouldn't have to be grateful that he believes her. After all they've been through, she deserves the benefit of the doubt. They stand in silence for a moment. “What are you planning on doing?”

“About my soulmate?” Tyrian seems incredulous, like it's not even a question. But then his face goes soft and confused, and he sighs to himself. “I don't know.”

“I think it's something we should figure out together. I want you to stay,” the words are quiet and barely there, “but it's about more than just me.” Cesia casts a significant glance towards the house where their daughter lay, peaceful and unbothered by the storm brewing outside.

“I know that. Don't you think I know that?” He speaks to her like she's a stranger, and she isn't prepared for how her heart drops at the realization. It's how she knows the truth before he's knows it himself. (She isn't prepared for that either.)

It's why she isn't surprised when she catches him at the door one night, suitcase in hand. It's been weeks since that conversation, and it was almost enough to convince her that they were enough as they were. She thought – hoped, if she was being honest – that he could be satisfied with what he already had rather than chasing after some desired unknown. But that's probably why Cesia fell in love with him in the first place; she can admit that now.

“Were you really going to leave without saying goodbye?” She's surprised at how fierce it sounds, raw like it'd

been ripped straight from her throat.

Tyrian stops almost guiltily (almostalmost), looking at her with an expression she's never seen before when he says, "No, of course not." (Yes.)

Cesia scoffs to herself, getting up from the table to rummage through the cabinets for her secret stash of liquor. She usually never touched the stuff, but the abandonment of her and her daughter by her husband marked a special occasion. She drinks, hoping that the burn will be enough for her to forget the ache in her chest, but instead, she feels unsteady. She wants to scream at him, at his stupid, cowardly face, until he hurts, and she doesn't anymore. But the pain and heartbreak of the years to come are summarized in just a few words: "Have I wasted your time?"

And what kind of question is that? He doesn't know the answer, of course he doesn't. But he's quick to bring himself closer to her, insisting, "No, no! I loved every moment I've spent with you, with our little Lacey. I wouldn't trade it for anything."

"Then why?" (Why leave, why aren't we enough, why?)

"Because I don't want to live the rest of my life wondering what could have been."

What about what's now, she wants to ask, what about what already is? But Cesia say none of that. There's a lump in her throat too thick to swallow, and the cold sting of betrayal has her paralyzed within its grip. She says nothing while he apologizes. She says nothing when he promises he'll be back soon. She says nothing when her love walks out the door to find her, to find his soulmate. (I'm sitting right here, she wants to say. But Cesia's not a selfish woman so the words stay trapped deep inside her.)

In the morning, when Lacey wakes up, she'll have to say something. She'll have to tell her how Daddy went on a business trip (he abandoned us, my dearest), and how he'll be back soon (he never loved us enough to stay). But tonight is for her, for her heartbreak and grief and her love for her perfect little world that will never be.

For, the things loved in life are quickly snatched away. And that's okay. Because people remember the sweetness of it all and not much else. When people think of the greatest love stories, they think of ones with broken endings, with lovers who loved with all the fierce brightness dying stars. She likes to think they had something like that before they fell apart.

Truth or Dare

Anecia Ascalon

Truth or dare is a dangerous game. They dared me to go down the slide upside down. That was easy. They dared me to eat one of the roly polly bugs that crawl underneath the jungle gym. That was less easy, but I still did it. But then they dared me to kiss Olivia Anderson and I decided that I did not want to play this game anymore.

“I can’t kiss Ollie,” I insisted to the class.

But nobody would have it and Ollie was waiting at the top of the plastic playground castle, with shiny lip-gloss coating her timid smile.

With all of fourth grade watching I shrugged, puffed up my chest, leaned in, and felt my lips meet with Ollie’s for one brief moment.

And just as quickly as they had touched, they were apart to a chorus of “Ewws!” and “Ahhs!”

The second it was over the blood drained from my face. In a panic I pushed past Jeremy and Zack, threw myself down the slide, and ran to hide in the fort. Accepting the dare was probably the stupidest thing I had done in my ten years on earth.

The guys came scrambling into the fort after me.

“Noah, you kissed her!”

“What was it like?”

“Was it gross?”

“It’s not a big deal,” I shrugged it off like it was nothing, despite my heartbeat slamming against my rib cage.

“It’s just Ollie.”

Just Ollie. Ollie who I would never be able to think of without remembering the taste of strawberry lip-gloss. Three weeks later, Mark Garcia kissed Rylie Corbin for a whole minute next to the jungle gym and everyone forgot about Ollie and I at the top of the slide.

But I didn’t.

Six years later at sixteen and I had never loved anyone more than the girl who still wore strawberry lip-gloss.

“I dare you to kiss me,” Ollie giggled.

When she smiled at me like that, I had no choice but to comply.

I don’t even remember how Ollie went from my first kiss to my first girlfriend. Somewhere along the course of classes and school dances, we fell for each other. Everyday after sixth period we raced to the top of the playground together. We compared answers on the math homework, shared bags of popcorn, and watched the sunset from the slide. Most importantly, we kissed and kissed until one of us dared the other to stop.

The longer we dated the less I cared about everything else. It was just the two of us in our own universe on the playground. It was a Neverland of sorts. It felt like we would never grow up yet simultaneously couldn’t wait for the future to hurry up and arrive.

“How many kids do you think we’ll have?” Ollie asked me as we rocked gently back and forth on the swings. I thought about it. I could imagine the two of us graduating high school and college together. She would become a teacher and I’d get a degree in I don’t even know. But we’d have a German Shepherd and a big house with it’s own playground in the backyard.

“Three,” I finally answered. “Two boys and girl.”

“I like that,” she beamed and started pumping her legs to swing higher. “I don’t think I’ll ever stop loving you.”

“I know the feeling,” I grinned back and tried to swing higher than her.

The sun was starting to set and everything about her just glowed.

Six years later as a senior in college and fate has not turned out to be what I thought. English degree in hand, graduation day a week away, and I’m supposed to know what to do next. But the future is this blank canvas and I’ve used up my quota of idealism to paint it with.

I believed I would marry her. I believed everything would be perfect once we finished high school and life could finally just get started.

But now life is happening and I wish I could make it stop again.

Ollie, who goes by Olivia now, is dating someone else, some guy with good hair in his first year of dental school. I have also dated other people, all of them cute, but none who have lasted very long.

I don’t think I miss Ollie. I think I’ve accepted that was just a small, but beautiful, piece of my life. But I miss that time. The innocence of adolescence. The assurance that everything would just work out.

Simple. That’s what it used to be. It’s weird, thinking of the way things were.

End