



SPEAKER'S

AWARD FOR YOUTH WRITERS



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About the Award

The Speaker's Award for Youth Writers was launched in 2015 to celebrate the writing talents of Ontario's youth. Each year, students in grades 7-12 are invited to submit their short stories and personal essays to this writing contest. Original fiction and non-fiction submissions are welcome and a winner from each of the following three grade categories is chosen:

Grade 7-8

Grade 9-10

Grade 11-12

Selection Committee

Adam Shoalts is a professional explorer, adventurer, and published author. He was the recipient of the Speaker's Book Award – Young Authors (for published authors aged 18-30) in 2017 for his book *Alone Against the North*.

Melanie Williams is a Teacher and Extended Essay Co-ordinator at the St. Paul Catholic Secondary School, in the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board. She currently teaches both History and English.

Franco Gutierrez is completing his Masters of Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. He is currently doing an international teaching placement in Costa Rica, where he is using his language skills and instructing students in English, Spanish and French.



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2017-18 Speaker's Award for Youth Writers

Grade 7-8

WINNER

Anna Noseworthy-Turgeon - *Waffles on the Screen Door*

HONOURABLE MENTION

Grace Glosnek - *The Stars Aligned*

Grade 9-10

WINNER

Tudora Rada - *Clouds*

HONOURABLE MENTION

Alisa Miniovich - *Rose*

Grade 11-12

WINNER

Abby Kaneko - *A Canary Called Constance*

HONOURABLE MENTION

Elizabeth Rodenburg - *The Colour of Lilacs*

WINNER (GRADE 7-8)

Anna Noseworthy-Turgeon

Waffles on the Screen Door

Sometimes, you hear about disasters that you think will never happen to you. And then, when it does, you are *completely* unprepared.

The rhythmic pitter-patter-pitter-patter of the drops hitting the roof and the sidewalk was calming, and I was almost falling asleep. It was like being in my own little world, away from people and their beloved pets and computers. This was a place where none of that existed, just me, alone with the rain.

"Ellie! Wake uuup! Earth to Ellie!"

"What?" I snapped, annoyed.

"Come on, it's your turn!", my friend Jessi shrieked in that high, shrill voice I found incredibly annoying, but had learned to live with. "Oh! Ummm....", I stammered. I had actually forgotten what we were doing, but I didn't want to admit it to any of my friends. I looked around at them, all sitting in a semicircle in front of me. Talia and Lillian, the twins, had dark brown hair and icy blue eyes that, with one look, could pierce right through you. Larissa had long blonde hair, always in a braid that stretched all the way to her lower back. She, too, had blue eyes, but hers were softer, much like her personality. Jessi had lightish brown hair with purple streaks that she wore in a messy bun, and her brown eyes were shielded by a pair of bright blue glasses she had worn since the age of four.

But despite their differences, they all had one thing in common: they were all looking at me like I was nuts. I thought, frantically, and tried to remember what we had been doing moments before. *Think, Ellie, think! Oh.... I almost have it.... Right! Telephone!* (Telephone is a game where you whisper something into someone's ear, and they pass it along until the message gets to the end. Then, you see how it has changed) I remembered how, moments before, Talia had whispered some random words in my ear. It sounded a bit like.... "Waffles on the screen door?" My friends all burst out laughing.

Talia and Lillian laughed the exact same way, a muffled snort followed by uncontrollable shaking. Meanwhile, Larissa would just giggle to herself, while Jessi would just let it all out: HA HA HA HA HA! I was getting kind of annoyed now. I looked at the dusty old grandfather clock my mom had inherited from my great-aunt Theresa. (In a way, it kind of resembled her.) The time said 6:31. "Um, guys, don't you have to go now?"

"Oh, yeah!", said Larissa, and she ran to put on her bright yellow rainboots, and everyone else followed. "Bye guys!"

That was when it started to rain harder. Now it was like harsh, pounding footsteps on the roof, instead of the soothing pitter-patter I had heard before. Just as I got up to call my mom, the lights flickered, then shut off completely. "Oh noooooo!" I groaned, then flopped on the couch, very much resembling a dead jellyfish. "Well, I guess I'm not reading a book," I said remaining motionless.

Then I heard a weird sound. It sounded like a mix between breaking glass and splitting wood. I sat up quickly and looked around. I felt a slight chill. Then when I turned to look at the front wall, I realized that half of the

window was missing! What's more, the road and my front yard were filled with about a foot of water, and the water level was rising quickly. Water and wind started coming through the space where the window used to be at the speed of lightning. Thinking quickly, I ran to my room in the attic of our immense, historic house. Once I was there, I blocked the windows with my mattress, so no broken glass would come flying. I felt like I was preparing for a hurricane, but then again, maybe I was. I grabbed my numerous throw pillows (all different shades of purple and blue) and hid in the corner.

That was when I heard the door open, and Mom shout, "Ellie, come quick!". I ran downstairs, bringing all my beloved throw pillows with me, and saw Mom standing by the kitchen table. Her once perfectly ironed dress that hotel employees were required to wear was soaked, and one of the sleeves was blown right off her shoulder. There were shards of glass stuck in her dress and shoes, and there were a couple rips and holes here and there. Her auburn hair, usually swept into a tight bun, was blown everywhere, and it too, was sopping wet. I could see that there were tears in her jet-green eyes.

"Ellie! The mayor called everyone to the hotel; everyone's homes are flooded and management is letting everyone stay in the upper floors of the Hampton until this crazy storm stops!"

"Well... then I guess we've got to go!" We rushed out of the door and into the car. Right now, I was so glad that we lived at the top of a hill, so we weren't trying to drive through a huge puddle (more like LAKE!) of water. The car was really slow, though, because the tiny wheels had to fight through all that rushing water flowing downhill. On the way to the hotel, I caught a glimpse of all the destruction this storm was causing, and a single tear escaped from my eye.

When we pulled into the parking lot of the Hampton, Mom whispered, "I never thought I'd be coming back to work after hours."

"Oh geez.... Mom, it's okay."

"But Ellie, there's nowhere for me to park!" She was right. It seemed like every single parking space was full, and Mom was almost crying. Then she just gave it all up and parked in the middle of the road. As we climbed out, I could feel the rain beating down on my back, and the wind almost blew me over. We sprinted into the crowded and wet hotel lobby, where an employee wearing the same purple dress as Mom greeted us with a room key.

"Room 435. By the way, you're sharing with the Robertsons. The top floor rooms get filled up first, 2 beds per room, 1 bed per family. OK, good."

"Fantastic!", said Mom enthusiastically. She took the key from the purple-clad employee and we ran up the stairs, not taking the risks of an elevator in a bad storm like this.

When we reached number 435, the sweet perfume of roses wafted out from under the door. It was like finding an oasis in the desert. Mom opened the door, and we walked in. Mrs. Robertson greeted us with a worried smile. "Hi Sherrie, Ellie. Come on in! It's a bit cramped, but we'll have to work with what we've got." Mr. Robertson was sprawled out on the extremely boring, coffee-brown couch, a worried look spread across his face.

The TV was turned to the news channel, where a reporter was describing the storm that was going on right outside our window. "Trees have fallen and knocked down power lines and roofs, streets are flooded, and as far as we can tell so far, there will be much more destruction to houses in the very near future. Currently, most of the residents of Elliot Lake, Ontario are staying in the Hampton Inn due to damage to their homes."

No duh, smartypants! I thought. This reporter was *extremely* annoying. Mr. Robertson just sighed and turned off

the TV. I wasn't sure *what* he was thinking. "I just want this damn storm to be over!", he said sadly. "I just finished building my new garage, and now the entire roof is caved in." He sighed again, and Mrs. Robertson went to his side, and placed a gentle hand on his shoulder. "It's okay, Jeremy. Lives are more valuable than objects," she said lovingly. Mr. Robertson just looked away shamefully.

It seemed like I slept forever. Everything that was going on around me just seemed to hit me and bounce off. I hoped that when I woke up, this whole thing would just be a dream.

I awoke the next morning to Mrs. Robertson's sweet voice in my ears. "Ellie, dear! Wake up! It's time for lunch!"

"Has it stopped?" I grumbled, hoping for good news.

"Not yet, but they're saying the storm will be over by tomorrow," replied Mom. That seemed a good enough answer for me, so I rolled out of bed and pulled on the jeans and t-shirt I wearing the day before. I grabbed my sweater, then Mom, Mr. and Mrs. Robertson, and I walked down to the hotel's kitchen for lunch, which I hoped was crispy lime cilantro wings, my favorite meal. They were actually serving ham sandwiches, but I was hungry, and food was food, so I took it.

After we ate lunch, there was pretty much nothing to do except watch for weather updates, and keep an eye on the rain. So, this was the way I spent my day, sitting at the window, waiting for the storm to stop. Sleep was the only way to escape this dreary, destructive rain.

The next morning, I woke up well before everyone else, and I crept downstairs, quiet as a mouse. As I expected, the ballroom and lobby still had a small layer of water coating the floor, smooth and shiny as glass. I looked outside, and the scene saddened me. It was just like the reporter had described the day before. I slowly went back upstairs, and into our room. I must have sat on the couch, staring off into space, for several hours.

When Mom woke up, she opened the curtains and smiled from ear to ear. The storm had stopped, though it had left a lot of destruction in its wake, and as soon as she realized this, mom's expression went back to normal: the same expression that had been painted on all of our faces for several days.

As soon as Mr. And Mrs. Robertson awoke, they went down stairs to see the manager. Mom and I awaited the news eagerly, but grimly. As soon as the Robertsons got back to the room, they announced together, "They're letting us out!"

"Oh..." I said. So, there it was. We were being thrown out with no food and destroyed homes. But that was that, so, in the blink of an eye, we had the room looking exactly the way it had before, and we were heading home.

When we got back, the first thing we noticed was that the railings that were supposed to be on the porch were torn off, and lying in the driveway. We walked inside, and everything was a mess. Tables were overturned, glass was shattered, and, to my surprise, the bent- out-of-shape screen door lay on the kitchen floor, with a box of soggy toaster waffles sitting on top of it.

I thought about that game of telephone, only a few days ago. Strange to think that it felt like a lifetime had passed since then. Surprisingly, I started to laugh. You know how they say laughter is contagious? Well, I laughed so hard that Mom started laughing too. We laughed so hard that we fell over. We rolled around on the wet floor, making our clothes soggy too, but we didn't care. It's funny how something so silly could bring light to the darkest situation, but there, laughing with Mom about the strangest thing, waffles on a screen door, was the best feeling I had had in days.

HONOURABLE MENTION (GRADE 7-8)

Grace Glosnek

The Stars Aligned

The clock struck eleven. It was September 1935. The low-pitched bells rang and bounced sound waves off every edge and crevice of the museum. Rows of lights flickered off one by one in a foreboding, synchronized manner. It was now pitch black and quiet. In that moment, time and space had stopped as little 6-year-old Nova looked around at the exhibits that surrounded her. Knowledge had engulfed her once again, as it always did when she stepped through the grand front entrance of her second home, The New York Museum of Natural History.

It was silent at this late hour, unlike the constant ruckus when visitors and curators weaved in and out of the museum in a constant flow. Now, the only noises were from rain tapping against the many tinted glass windows and taxis honking at one another outside in the heart of the concrete jungle. The air was stuffy and thick and there was an ominous feeling in the museum at night. However, Nova shrugged it off, pushed up her glasses and continued on her way.

She crept down many hallways in her bright yellow, buckled boots attempting not to make a squeak. Nova remained cautious of her every move as she passed first by the new dinosaur exhibit, then the marine biology exhibit with its iconic blue whale dangling midair from flimsy chains, and finally one of Nova's personal favourites, the extraterrestrial exhibit that unfortunately would be closing soon. As Nova was passing by that very room, a ticking rhythm came from the museum's large imposing spruce grandfather clock.

Tick, tock. Tickety tock.

The rhythm welcomed her as she entered the room. The room was a chamber of many undiscovered secrets. Now, however, the room was past its glory days as it now resembled an abandoned storage closet. But Nova still loved it for one specific reason, the feeling she got deep within her that allowed her to feel sheltered from the crazy, hectic world. This feeling of security was especially strong when she held a small, grey stone with many rough but rounded edges in the palms of her hand. The stone was a fragment of a fallen star. Nova liked to believe that the stone was from a foreign galaxy especially because of the tiny, unique crystals throughout its grain. There had to be more to the stone. No other artifact conveyed this indescribable energy that was both intangible and undeniable. This stone had to have fallen out of orbit with an intent of something more.

Even though Nova was focussed in her thoughts, she still somehow heard that same old "tick, tock" coming from the clock. She immediately snapped her out of her trance. Nova gently transferred the stone from the palm of her hand into the pocket of her glossy, red slicker and set off on a steady march.

As Nova ventured further into the heart of the museum, a gravitational-like force pulled her towards the museum's core. Its nucleus. Its galactic center. The force knew exactly where Nova was headed. Then almost psychically, Nova heard footsteps from afar in the dry, still air. Nova feared who was coming, the night watchman. He had steady, brisk steps that Nova knew from his daily rounds. As expected, a broad-shouldered figure had arrived. Standing tall, in a commanding tone, he spoke into his walkie-talkie. "Major Tom to ground control, the room's all clear." Nova knew where he had just come from as it was where she was headed.

His thumping steps and his merry whistling eventually faded. Nova sighed with relief as she emerged from behind a gazelle diorama. Nova was unable to let go of her scrunched-up facial expression as she grasped how

close she had come to getting caught. Nova was getting closer and closer.

Nova came to an unexpected halt at a heavy wooden door emblazoned with the words “In Progress”. As she had done many times before, she pulled out an ID badge attached to a key with a photo of a middle-aged woman with wide, adventurous eyes much like her own. Nova stood up on her tiptoes, reached for the handle and inserted the key. But the brass knob smoothly turned without the need of the key. Why?

Beyond the door, Nova entered a dark room with a visible yet faint circular outline. She then used her key to lock the door behind her. Nova ventured to a complex-looking machine. Having been raised alongside a projector and a telescope, Nova simply flicked a few switches and focused a lens and ticking and rolling sounds filled the room. Nova began breathing heavily. She couldn't believe it. She had done it!

Nova quickly moved towards the center of the dome-like room and closed her eyes as she began counting backwards from ten. At one, she opened her eyes to images of a well-lit sky filled with twinkling stars that flushed the sky. A deep, raspy voice began, “Have you ever wondered how it all began? Life, the earth, the cosmos? Beyond the skies and the stars? Because the further out we look into space, the further back we are looking in time.” Mid speech, an ancient shooting star made its way across the dark, shimmering sky. It then morphed into the image of two stars, one much brighter than the other, orbiting around one another. The reflection of the two stars could be seen perfectly in her eyes. An emotionless expression swept over Nova's face. She was possessed from the beauty of the great unknown.

After 10 seconds, one star grew brighter until it was blinding. Then, there was a burst of white light which transformed into an abstract, galaxy sky. Pink, purple, blue and green hues swirled and the perfect illusion created even more wonder in Nova's eyes. Billions of years of the world's history were hovering in those stars, in that very sky. The colours steadily began disintegrating into the darkness of the heavens above, but its many fragments still floated softly through the sky, as high as it was wide.

The voice carried on, “Each star follows its very own complex system, a binary star system to be exact. Binary stars are two stars that orbit around the same point. When one of the stars, which is a carbon-oxygen white-dwarf star, steals too much matter from its companion star over time, the over accumulation of matter results in an explosion called...” The film cut out abruptly, and the room turned to a pale black. Nova had discovered the last missing piece to her puzzle. At last!

In a jolt, she pushed up off the floor and rushed through the aisles, benches and chairs. She placed the black silk cloth that was over the projector exactly the way she had found it. She then turned left instead of an expected right. With her legs thrusting forward, one in front of the other at light speed, she stopped not in front of the forbidden “In Progress” door, but beside a metal grate releasing a cold, dry draft. She popped the lid right open and didn't look back.

At the end of the dusty, dark shaft, there hung a sole flickering light. Nova lurched herself forward out of the compact enclosure and twirled her head around. There was just enough light given off by the dim bulb to reveal an enclosed room full of cobwebs, wooden shelves and a checkered tile floor. But that wasn't all. The walls were plastered in hundreds of sketches of small dots being aligned with fine lines. They were constellations. That's what they were.

In particular, the four most-beautifully-crafted sketches of them all were hung on a cord of twine that flew diagonally from one end of the room to the other. Each individual paper was attached by a clothespin and each image represented one smaller part of a much bigger picture. The first sketch showed an image of two stars orbiting around an intense orb of energy. The second focused on the one star specifically. It was circular and had pure white rays shooting out of it at every angle. It was evident that the star was dense and powerful. The third

image was of the star attempting to latch onto the other. Then disturbingly in the fourth, there was a gruesome image of the larger star sucking the life out of the other as it multiplied in size.

Nova knew her mission was to draw the fifth and final stage. She recited to herself stages one through four in a low, murmured whisper, and then she said the fifth with the word she thought was used. It all made sense to Nova. The explosion of a white dwarf star in a binary star system was a supernova. A supernova was the cosmic rainbow eruption she had just seen just minutes earlier in the sky.

Nova laid down on the floor and sketched in quick, hasty strokes the image she had seen only minutes before. She then rushed out of the storage room and secretly snuck to a window on the first floor. There she slid past the guard into the foggy night, pulled up her hood, placed her sketch underneath her slicker and dashed out of sight. Her next stop, Grand Central Station. Her mission had been completed at the museum.

It was only a short 30-minute ride home from Grand Central Station to the lower east side of town and the 15-story brownstone building that was her home. Unfortunately it was now 12:30 in the morning. Nova had arrived over an hour late. She unhooked the black fire escape ladder to her building and quickly climbed the 100 steps to the top floor. As she had practiced, Nova tugged at the window latch but it wouldn't budge. Then she saw a dark figure turn the light on in her room.

Nova's father, Samuel Trowbridge had just woken up, worrying about the next day's events. He was shocked to find a made up but empty bed that was missing a sleeping girl.

Nova entered.

Samuel asked where she had been.

Nova showed her dad the sketch and a look of shock came over him. He knew exactly what the picture was, and although unprepared, especially at this late hour of the night, he had been hoping that nothing like this would occur any time soon. Tired and stressed, Samuel decided to take his young apprentice outside to view the real stars in the sky.

Nova and Samuel ascended a flight of steep stairs from the attic up to the roof. It was now one in the morning and, in the calm and tranquil air, Nova confessed,

"I went to see your and mommy's project again."

Samuel smiled a hearty smile.

"Daddy, I'm sorry I didn't ask you. I'll never do it again."

Samuel let out a deep sigh and replied, "It's okay. Mommy would be proud of you. It was both her and my dream to complete the planetarium. It's all we ever wanted, of course until you came along. I'm glad you enjoy it just as much as she did. Your presence keeps me close to your mother. Now you and I get to finish what your mother and I started."

Samuel continued on. "Nova, you have always been special. Your mother and I always wanted to share our passion of the stars with the person we both loved so profoundly, our Nova. That's also why the first show's about you, our little supernova. Also, this is why throughout the show's creation, I would bring you with me. It's as if our family was being reunited. As you got older, I never told you what that explosion was in the sky, so I thought I'd leave it as a mystery for you to unravel. I knew you'd eventually figure it out."

Nova was so young and innocent, but she still grasped every single word being said. Nova responded by asking yet another tough question. “So what did happen to mommy?”

Samuel quietly shed a tear. “Your mother passed away when you were only one week old. Money was getting tight and she couldn’t handle the struggles of the world any longer. She always wanted to follow her dreams but sometimes money was too big an obstacle. So one night, sadly, she chose to end her life, to end her struggle. She loved you so dearly Nova and now she’s among the stars.”

The stone Nova held, at first felt warm but now became burning hot. It was a sign. Nova’s mother would always be watching over her.

“So then why did the two of you name me Nova, Daddy?”

Samuel paused.

“Your name is a tribute to your mother. When she passed, you had no name yet so I thought long and hard. Then it dawned on me. At the end of a star’s life, when it runs out of fuel and the core cannot withstand its own gravitational force, it collapses. This is what occurred to your mother, and the collapsing of the star results in a supernova.”

Nova still remained puzzled.

“Your mother’s explosion was tragic, but it brought me to a new beautiful watercolor-stained sky. You, my darling Nova.”

Nova was very confused. “But I thought a supernova was caused by...?”

“You’re right. There are two ways” Samuel stated. “But I couldn’t bear to use the real reason. I changed it to lessen my hurt.”

The next day, at the first show, Nova stood behind her famous father, the architect and astronomer Samuel Breck Parkman Trowbridge, who designed the Hayden Planetarium at its opening at The New York Museum of Natural History. He delivered a powerful speech on how our children were our only future, and how he hoped that generations to come, such as his daughter Nova, would never give up on chasing their dreams, because if they shoot for the moon, even if they missed, they’d land among the stars.

Nova stood tall on the platform alongside the generous banker who had provided the grant for the planetarium. She looked into the sea of people at the opening and she noticed Major Tom. While glancing in his direction, he shot her a wink and a smile. It was now apparent that the door the night before had not been left open by accident.

Carefully listening to her father’s speech, Nova realised that she was truly inspired to be just like him, and that she would never give up on her dreams. In the following years, Nova Trowbridge would play a big role in some of the Museum’s biggest discoveries, such as the first radio-wave emission from the planet Jupiter being received in 1955.

But what mattered even more was that Nova’s memory of her mother would live on in her heart for eternity and the stone in her hand warmed her soul.

The stars had truly aligned.

WINNER (GRADE 9-10)

Tudora Rada

Clouds

(The original submission was written in French. This is a translation.)

Trash litters the ground. A house stands next to a recently cut tree. A little town known as Blueville, Ontario was once a miracle, just like the towns of Redville, Yellowville, Greenville and Purpleville. Unfortunately, none of Blueville's inhabitants thought about adding the colour back into this sad city.

Blueville was named after the coast, which had once been so blue and beautiful, but was now charcoal black. It was as if the ashes of all those executed there over the years had been scattered over the surface of the muddy water. How could residents take deep breaths of the factory-polluted air without suffocating? I guess they had grown used to it.

It was a morning just like any other. The sad grey sun woke the hearts of mothers, but one step outside of the house and they all saw the horror that stretched out before them. It was drizzling, as if the clouds, even darker and gloomier than usual, were crying slowly to show their pity. The unacceptable acts of Blueville's citizens were a constant source of sadness for the clouds that watched over the town.

It could almost be seen as a cry for help from the clouds. But no, no one in Blueville seemed to understand the seriousness of the situation. And soon, it would be too late...

Suddenly, an incredibly violent tornado was set loose. The clouds were angry and wanted to punish the people of Blueville. Total chaos ensued. Trees fell, crushing everything and everyone that had the bad fortune of being underneath them. Electricity surged into the dirty air. It was right then that the people understood for the first time how sad, miserable and dirty their home had become.

As the sky's fury spread across the city, it seemed that no one would get out unscathed. The end was near. A few hours later, the city had been destroyed. A pile of waste was all that was left.

Soon after the natural disaster, there came a surprise: a young boy arose from a heap of broken wood. A piece of metal had pierced his leg to the bone. Clearly in shock, he couldn't even feel the pain and slowly stood up, a confused look on his face. "What's going on? Where am I?"

After looking for other survivors on his own for a few hours, the child decided to abandon his mission. There was no one left but him—him and the rubble. Surrounded by thousands of rotting bodies, he had trouble getting a hold of himself. He decided to leave everything behind to go off and save the world.

He had been walking for a few hours when he thought he saw a girl his age.

- Hello! Yoo-hoo?
- Am I going crazy? Is there really someone there?
- Yes, my name is Philippe. I believe I'm the only survivor of a catastrophic tornado that hit Blueville.
- I am actually in the exact same situation.

Together, they continued hand in hand down the black path towards a new world. A world where the grass is green and the clouds aren't mad. A world where everyone helps each other out in order to live in harmony.

HONOURABLE MENTION (GRADE 9-10)

Alisa Miniovich

Rose

My nightmares, I can't escape them. They haunt me every night. I try to run, but my legs give up on me. I try to scream, but the sounds are hollow, disintegrating. These are horrors of my imagination, my deepest fears. When I open my eyes, my nightmares awaken.

My life; my darkest nightmare.

My name is Rose.

I didn't choose this life, nobody did. It wasn't always like this, Warsaw. Before the war, I had a home, I used to run into the little forest near my apartment, its peaceful presence filling me with awe and tranquility. The silence, the wind, they became parts of me, the soft whispering of the trees overhead was my lullaby. Every night, I gazed up at the sky. It was dark and quiet--I was alone, it was my place. At dawn, luminescent rays flowed through my window, the streams of light striking my silver Menorah. It glowed in the darkness, its profound radiance lighting up my whole room. It was always just my mother and I. Mama. Every night, we would curl up in my mother's bed, her arms around my shoulders. She held me, told me everything was going to be fine, I was strong, we would survive whatever happened.

I wish you had been right.

I had a best friend, Faye. After school, we raced to the forest, and listened to the trees. We would lie on the freshly fallen leaves, our laughter drifting far through the bare, lonesome branches, into the sky, echoes falling. She used to look at me with her deep blue eyes, and I at her, with my hazel green, and we basked in a sense of belonging. We would look up at the sky, whisper how we wished we could rise up into it, our feet never touching the ground. We used to cry in each other's arms, holding one another. Only the trees knew our secrets. She would take my hand into hers, and it was a promise to never leave. It was our place, forever.

Forever wasn't long enough.

Faye. Faye.

I've lost you. It wasn't your fault, it was the war's. It was the night we got sent here, to the ghetto. They shot the ones who were too slow, afraid to move. You were protecting your parents, your father walking with a cane, your mother with gray hair, fear raining over them, over you. They killed the disabled first, knowing they wouldn't survive. You watched the man shoot them. You couldn't let go of those seconds, the sound of the shots replayed in your mind, the stabbing in your body. Pain rushed through you, shattering your heart. Your scream, so powerful, that the world went silent. And then... you fell.

If only I held your hand longer, whispered it was all going to be fine, you could have taken one more step. If only I could look into your deep blue eyes one more time. I could have disappeared into them, lost myself inside.

My heart cracks, with every breath I take. I am sinking down into a dark despair. I wish you were here to hold me while I cry. My tears, drops of ice, though they feel like fire against my cheeks.

Now, my mother's laughter, once unforgettable, seems to be slipping away. She doesn't laugh anymore. The life in her is gone. The life in me, following the path of hers, is slowly vanishing.

Every night, I look up at the sky. I feel it closing in on me. With my every glance, the blue is draining.

I feel my mother's heavy breath on my neck, I sit up. The dusty, grey air surrounds me. My eyes water, tears escape down my face. My feet touch the cold floor. Fear penetrates me. I am not alone. There are four of us in the room: my mother, me and the Krichevski's on the other side. They are both old and kind, but weak. They have seen many nightmares in their day. Every night, we sit by the fire, the smoke soaring into the air, listening to their stories. The floors cry with every move we make, the peeling wallpaper, revealing the naked grey wall. The fire in the fireplace crackles; pages of the last book we own curl in agony. I sit, watching the golden and crimson flames rise, the warmth consuming me. I stand, trying not to wake the floors. I make my way to the door.

Outside, the sky is the reflection of our reality: dark, miserable, suffocating. A faint morning sunrise is snuffed by the darkness. As I walk out, the streets of the ghetto are still, soundless. I walk, just walk. Bodies of both the young, and the old, lie in the middle of the sidewalks, motionless. Disease, starvation, fear and loneliness have taken lives. Children pressed to the ground, with nothing but skin on their bodies, begging for food. They are alone. In this place, there is endless suffering, children with no childhood. War.

Tears roll down my face, dropping on the yellow thread of the star sewn onto my chest. There is hunger in my bones, a never-ending feeling. Hollow. Empty. It's hard to think. The light-headedness takes over me. It has been two years, nine months, and four days. The silence is broken by the agonizing screams of terror. I still hear the painful cries of the terrified Jews, coming from the depths of their sorrows. The buildings around me are broken, torn apart, slowly falling, just like the lives of the people who live here. Hunger becomes the overpowering sensation, pushing us down.

My hands start shaking, then my legs. My body falls effortlessly. The ground, shaking with its own fear, holds me. Beside me, lie the bodies that couldn't take it anymore. The ones who gave up. The ones who let themselves slip away; they knew they didn't have a chance to survive. Loneliness drapes over me. Fear implodes inside my body. They couldn't fight anymore. They couldn't keep their eyes open, they couldn't watch the world burn another day.

I am one of them.

My body, sinks down into the ground, becoming a part of it. I let myself be absorbed.

The howls of the wind send shivers through me.

Feathers from the pillows of ransacked houses dance in the sky. Some get caught in the puddles of blood drifting near. I lay still.

Faint screams, whirling in the distance grow closer. The SS are on our block. We are in peril. Thuds of Nazi boots crack the ground.

"Geh Raus! Geh Raus! Schneller! Schneller!"

The world is falling.

Mama. I pull myself up, trembling, my pale, ash-covered cheeks burning with tears. Sleeves of my ripped charcoal dress drenched in blood. Mama. People are running out of their homes, the Nazis beat them, in front of their children. People are pushing past me as if they can't see me. Mama. My feet, frozen from the holes in my

worn out shoes, start to move. Faster. Faster. I am running now, the wind forcing me forward. Mama. I hear a child's scream. Its aching tone won't leave. Mama.

It's me.

I make my way home. Mama.

My arms, with nothing but skin on them, hold my mother. I am holding her close, as close as I can, never letting go. Never.

Soldiers kick our door open, yelling, "Lass Uns Gehen! Geh Raus!"

My mother grabs an old coat, a torn up blanket, a photograph of me, and my hand. Fear rushes through my body, makes me numb. I am terrified to open my eyes.

It is a blur.

We run out of our home. Before the door closes, my eyes catch a glimpse of the fire. The lonely scarlet flames, sparking in the distance.

Everyone on our block is out in the street. They tell us we are 'relocating,' boarding trains from Umschlagplatz. We start to walk. We walk over bodies, the young and the old, the bodies of Jews who didn't have any more strength. Soldiers watch our every move. My cold face soaked in tears, I can feel my heart throbbing. Mama. She takes my hand into hers, and squeezes it as hard as she can. If only I could melt into the ground and weep, let all my anger out, scream from the bottom of my lungs. Make the world shatter.

If only.

I look ahead. The Krichevski's are standing in the middle of the road.

The SS shout at them, "Schneller!"

They are too sick, too hungry, too old to keep walking. Tears run down their wrinkled cheeks. My hand slips out of my mother's, I want to run to them, to tell them that their story doesn't have to end here, but all I can do is watch. A gunshot. Then another.

I can't keep it in any longer. I drop, the ground digging into my knees. I feel my mother's arms wrap around me. My heart drops, sinks down, the light in it - gone.

My mother picks me up in her arms. She carries me to Umschlagplatz, but I know that the trains to Treblinka are waiting. I can faintly hear the wails of the train, like whispers of thunder rumbling, screeches of each freight car against the metal tracks as if they are resisting, though inside, they are weeping.

I hold on to my mother with all the strength I have left. I let myself seep into her; my whole body becomes a part of hers. Lifting my head from my mother's neck, I gaze over her shoulder, looking at what used to be my home.

I know this is the end.

WINNER (GRADE 11-12)

Abby Kaneko

A Canary Called Constance

The first thing that Constance thought when she received the letter from her husband was that he should have saved the paper to wipe his behind.

“Honestly,” Constance’s eyes scanned over the paper while she stitched purposefully. “Does that man have nothing better to do? If I were out there I would actually be doing something with my time! Not writing these incessant scraps of foolishness. Look here. He says that the other day he nearly shot his own friend’s foot off while playing some shooting game with a rat! What a waste I tell you. Why bother sending any of these men out there if all they’re going to do is just injure themselves instead of the enemy?”

Anne, Constance’s dear (and only) friend, replied that it was nice her husband wrote to her. She did so with a gentle smile and a small pat on her swollen, pregnant stomach. To Constance’s knowledge, Anne’s husband did not write often. Of course he wouldn’t. Constance always thought of him as a loathsome pig with too curly of a moustache, unworthy of being with Anne but she never told her friend this.

“Nice?” Constance scoffed. “This paper he sent me is most likely riddled with disease. He may as well have sent me a dead rat covered in body lice!”

As one could tell, Constance was not an immensely ‘nice’ person at all. She picked arguments where she could, spat on people’s shoes, and only truly smiled around Anne. She would have been beautiful if it were not for her hunched shoulders, curved beak of a nose and permanent scowl with frown lines surrounding her mouth. Children knew not to go near her and adults knew better than to talk to her.

Behind her back she was called horrid (but well-earned) nicknames such as ‘the b---- of Britain.’

“Oh Constance,” Anne timidly shook her head. “You act as though you hate your own husband.” Constance chuckled. “Hating him would require thinking about him and I rarely give him a single thought.”

“Constance!” Anne gasped.

At that moment, Rudy, Constance’s three year-old son, walked into the room having just woken up from a nap. Anyone that saw him felt sorry when they realized who his mother was.

“It’s about time.” Constance clucked, setting down her sewing and getting up to take dinner off the stove. “Now that you have napped for so long you won’t be able to go to sleep at night! You better not wake me up, I have to go to work tomorrow.” She clunked the dinner in front of her child.

“Don’t be so hard on him,” Anne said gently. “ He’s only a child.”

Anne’s older friend, ten years her senior, pursed her lips. “An unwanted child at that. Only had him because my parents pestered me so. Perhaps I would have been alright if it had been a girl but a *boy* of all things!”

Anne sighed. “Do you hate men that much?”

Constance went back to her sewing. "I do not hate men."

That was arguable. She was accountable for multiple slurs and kicks handed out to many of the opposite sex. It was a miracle that she hadn't yet been arrested or attacked.

"I simply dislike them." Constance went on. "I have no need for them and I hate what they become." She used a bit of cloth to wipe some food that had dribbled down Rudy's chin. "Look at this one. He seems sweet now but one day he's going to order me and his own wife around just like all the other men around here. He'll tell us to get back to cleaning or just plain ignore us as though we're the carpet beneath his feet."

Anne tried to protest but Constance cut in some more.

"You also don't see women starting these blasted wars now do you?"

"You just said you wanted to be in the trenches!" Anne said in disbelief. This was all in good fun. She had grown accustomed to her friend's more than difficult personality.

Constance stood, taking her husband's letter in her hand. "Indeed. Women do not start wars and they don't get to fight in them either. We don't get a say. We fight a different battle and get no praise for it."

"Well, just the other day I saw in the paper that women are getting more involved in the war now. Maybe you can join the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps."

"The women in that don't do anything." A clearly misinformed Constance stated. "They sit around pretending they're contributing and expecting a pat on the head for doing so. I don't want to be a part of something designed just for women. I want us to be equal to men." She ripped the letter up in her hands and threw it in the oven.

It burned black before Anne had even left.

The next day Constance had to go to her job at the munitions factory. Before she got this job she had never worked in a factory or anywhere for that matter. But money was scarce. She managed to put food on the table every night but just barely. Secretly, she gave herself a bigger portion than Rudy.

Before heading to the factory she had to drop him off at Anne's. What a travesty that was each morning. For an unfathomable reason he cried and tried to hang on to his mother.

"Get off! Get off you foolish child! I need to get to work. Do you know exactly what will happen if I do not go to work? We will not have money and without money both you and I won't have food and we'll both starve and die. Now let go!" She swatted at him and eventually Rudy released his grasp of his mother's leg and ran over to Anne waiting at her front door of her small house. It was quite convenient that she lived so close—just down the street. So difficult to find good help for childcare these days.

"I will take good care of him!" Anne waved as Constance walked away.

"Feed him to a pack of stray dogs if you want! See if I care." Constance mumbled.

Eventually, she arrived at the factory. Five A.M. Sharp.

She quickly changed into her uniform and headed to the factory floor.

Her boss noticed her choice of attire faster than she expected him to.

“Winifred.” Mister Lester said, walking as fast as his short legs could take him. “What exactly do you think you’re wearing?”

“I believe I’m wearing my work permitted uniform.” Constance replied coolly.

“Is that so?” Mister Lester eyed the woman’s legs. “Last I checked, *pants* were not a part of the women’s uniform!”

“Other women in different factories are wearing pants. I think they are suitable to wear in dangerous work conditions. More easy to move in than skirts I believe.”

Mister Lester clenched his teeth in frustration. “You know full well that this factory does not allow women to wear pants. We aren’t like ‘other’ factories Ms. Winifred. Now get changed into a skirt this instant!”

“Why?” Constance asked in mock curiosity.

Mister Lester uncrossed his arms and practically stomped his feet on the ground. “Because trousers are for men!”

Constance grimaced defiantly. “Do not think I wish to dress as a man. I wish to dress as me and right now I want to wear pants during work and you will let me because what I am wearing does not affect you or anyone else in this factory. Do you understand?”

If a man that was not as weak-willed as Mister Lester had been Constance’s boss she would most likely have been kicked out in an instant for her attitude and rule-breaking, however Mister Lester was in charge and he was a man with bones of rubber.

“I-I must certainly do not!” Mister Lester sputtered.

Constance stared down her crooked nose at the bumbling twig of a man. “Mister Lester are you aware that many men are dying this very minute?”

Her boss replied that of course he did.

“Our men, the enemies’ men, they’re all being killed. I don’t know about you but I would most definitely be more keen if our men not be killed. If you do not allow me to wear trousers I will go to a different factory to make shells and take the several women I have standing behind me. Your factory will not be known for efficiently making weapons for our troops but instead as a factory hardly making any weapons because a sniveling twit of a man wouldn’t let his female workers wear trousers!”

After this discussion, Constance was allowed to wear pants for the majority of time spent in the factory. She conned her boss into letting her do so with a simple lie. Constance did not have any women standing behind her. She only had herself.

Every day was a whirlwind of the same tedious tasks assigned to the ‘weaker’ sex.

Constance woke up at four, got herself dressed, made breakfast, dropped Rudy off at Anne’s, walked to work, did her job for twelve hours with an immensely short break (barely enough time to eat) and with the knowledge that she was being paid less than men, hoped that it wouldn’t be one of the days that something exploded, walked to the shop to get food for supper, picked up Rudy, made the meal, washed the dishes, cleaned the house, did

laundry, gardened in the winter, knitted or sewed, dressed her son for bed, and then prayed that a shell wouldn't fall on the house while they were sleeping.

It was a life that Constance deeply disliked.

She didn't like her own child, hated the factory because of the noise and potential death, and despised having to sit idly at home while men got praised for something she could do.

She had heard the nasty stories of the trenches but hadn't really sunk in that it was all that bad. She knew about the unhygienic conditions, rats, disease, death and more, but in her head it was something she could deal with if males ever gave her the chance to try.

"What do you think it is that makes us so different Anne?" Constance asked one evening.

"I beg your pardon?" Anne looked up at Constance with her usual doe eyes. Her face was so different compared to Constance's which held scrunched eyebrows. Anne's face was young and pure like a ray of sunlight. Constance sometimes wondered what Anne thought of her. In the girl's eyes she must have seemed like an old bat, just the other day she had found a grey hair.

"Men and women. We try so hard to separate ourselves from each other. Put us in boxes. Say 'males must do this and females must do that.' I despise that. Why is the concept that we're the same— equal even—so hard for some people to understand?" Constance knitted the last pearl on her hat.

A hat for a soldier. Constance made many hats to send to the men in the trenches (in her own words she said dying with a 'little cold' had to be about one of the stupidest ways to die in war). A soldier would wear that hat and not know that the hands that made it desperately wished they could line up with his.

"Where's Ethel today?" Constance asked impatiently. She didn't like Ethel all too much—too annoying and slow at her work.

"I heard she's ill." One of the factory workers said.

"I heard her skin's turned yellow." Dorothy, another factory worker, piped in. "Such a shame but it happens you know. We should all watch out. *I* for one don't want to be a canary girl."

"No need to worry. If *you* were a bird you would be a dodo bird because you're such a bloody idiot. Canaries serve a purpose, they let us know when danger is afoot. Like a dodo bird you may as well not exist. Get back to work Dorothy." Constance spat.

Although no one said it, Constance was the true boss. At least in the female workers' eyes she was.

The same thing that happened to Ethel occurred in many munitions factories. A chemical compound known as trinitrotoluene that was used to make explosives became harmful when one was exposed for too long. Symptoms included yellow skin, vomiting, migraines, sore throat, anemia, fertility problems, and in some cases hair could turn green or fall out. It was something that many of the factory workers, including Constance, hoped to avoid.

After a long day of work, Constance headed home, trudging through thick snow because a blizzard was beginning to start. She went to the shop and used what little she had made that day to buy food. Her throat was feeling a bit achy and her head felt a tad dizzy but she ignored it. Sickness was not a luxury she could afford.

After purchasing the goods, Constance arrived at Anne's house. After three knocks Anne still had not answered. Constance was beginning to grow pissed, cold, and concerned.

Snow was beginning to fall heavier.

Finally, she decided to just let herself in. Anne never locked her door, she was too trusting.

Upon entering the home Constance Winifred was greeted by a scream. A scream is about the last thing you ever want to hear when arriving at a house. And this wasn't just any scream, it was bloodcurdling.

"Anne?" Constance yelled and rushed to the source of the noise.

When she found her friend she realized the cause.

"Oh. The baby's coming." She quickly, but reluctantly, went to her friend's side.

Anne was lying on the bed, clearly in severe pain. Rudy was cowering in the corner unsure of what to do.

"Where is the doctor?" Constance asked, noticing the absence of any medical help.

"He probably couldn't come because of the blizzard." Anne was incredibly red and though she tried to not show it her face was a portrait of agony.

"Honestly, what a sodding—" Before Constance could continue her sentence barraged with venom a huge sound interrupted her. The sound of an explosion.

"Oh joy." Constance said dryly but with a shocked expression.

Anne closed her eyes and screamed again. Whether it was because of the explosion or pain, Constance did not know. It was abnormal to hear Anne screaming considering her meek nature. It scared Constance to death.

"Anne we must get out of here this instant. You need help and it isn't safe here."

"It is fine." Anne replied weakly and opened her eyes to stare up at her jaded friend. "You may go if you want to. I wouldn't blame you. In my condition right now I cannot move."

Constance grasped Anne's hand in hers. They were slender but calloused from cleaning. "You know I can't do that. I would never do that! I will never leave your side."

Anne smiled at this. "Then please help me have this baby."

After what seemed like forever, the child was brought into the world while snowflakes and bombs fell from the sky. It was a child that Constance did not want to exist but loved the person who gave it life. This person was dying but her friend didn't know it yet.

"So? What do you plan to name this thing?" Constance said, referring to the baby she had just finished washing and was now holding in her arms.

Anne was very, very pale. And cold. However, she still spoke with a soft, gentle voice.

“I am going to name her after a person I hold very dear to my heart.”

Dorothy? Ethel? Oh! It must be her pathetic husband, Thomas.

“Well, I think a girl with a name like Thomas will get more than enough odd looks but—“

“Her name is Constance.”

Constance, the thirty year-old woman, blinked.

That was her name.

How had she—an unpleasant, ill-natured, spiteful person become dear to such a kind girl’s heart? Things like that didn’t happen. Constance did not deserve to be rewarded in this way. She didn’t deserve to have such a friend.

“That’s an interesting choice.” She said.

“I hope one day both Rudy and her may run side by side together in a field with no fear of shells.”

“So do I.” Constance whispered.

Near midnight the snow stopped its fall. The ringing explosions had long since faded. No bombs had killed them. Anne, however, was losing a lot of blood. Constance refused to acknowledge this.

“You should eat.” Constance said, coming over with a bowl of food. Anne did not open her eyes.

“Anne?” Constance worriedly took her friend’s wrist. Slowly, Anne’s eyes fluttered open.

“Constance—“

“I know my cooking is rather horrid but I do try my best. I bet you haven’t eaten all day. You should build up your strength because once you recover you’ll have to find a job and—“

“Constance.”

“What is it?” She demanded.

“Watch over my baby when I’m gone.”

Constance’s voice caught in her throat.

“Don’t be daft. Gone? Where are you going? Germany? It’s not very nice this time of year.”

Anne feebly wrapped her hand around Constance’s wrist. “There’s something I want you to know.” Her once bright eyes had dulled but they were still as wide and kind as the day Constance had met her. What a fantastic day that was.

“What is it?” Constance swallowed.

Anne took a struggling breath and slowly let it out. Her chest moved very little. “You know, I know sometimes

think that you wish to be a man—I know you are proud to be a woman but at the same time you think it would be easier. I know you Constance. I know who you are. And it's okay. I know no one's ever told you that but it is."

Her friend breathed. "You know, it's the funniest thing. I only wish to be a man when I'm with you and even then I don't really want to be. Not really."

Being a woman was hard. You were expected to do basically only a few things in life: look pretty, give birth, be a housewife. Men talked down to you, bossed you around, and some even attacked you either verbally or physically. Life was not easy. Life is not easy for everyone but it can suck even more if you are forced to continually bleed for five days. And yet Constance was not ashamed to be a woman. She sometimes thought about what it would be like to be a man but at the end of the day, she liked what she had been born as.

"If I were to be reborn and you were there with me—" Anne smiled up at her friend with glistening eyes. "I hope we'll both be reborn as birds. I want to fly. Be free. Wouldn't that be nice? You and I?"

"Constance's eyes shone. "Yes. Yes that would be nice. If I could...I would fly away with you forever."

Anne gave one last beautiful smile and closed her eyes with a certain finality. It was like watching the sun go down on an amazing day.

"I love you." Constance whispered because it was true. There was little she did love but it was certain there was one person. And it wasn't her husband.

Anne lay cold on the bed, her hand still tangled in her friend's. She wasn't there anymore and Constance never quite knew if she had ever heard her final, most important declaration.

Anne's baby was now Constance's responsibility. She cuddled the baby close to her chest and took her son's hand as they walked out the door.

Constance coughed. Her throat was sore. Burning.

"I may not like it but this is Anne's child." Constance said to herself as she made her way through the deep, blanket snow. "And I will protect her as long as I can."

She coughed again and touched the bald spot on her head. "Although that may not be for long."

The baby awoke and began to whine.

Constance prayed that the war would be over soon so Thomas could collect his child.

"Don't worry, Anne." Constance said, looking up at the sky and then at her hands that would soon become yellow. "I will become a bird with you soon."

A small canary flew through the grey sky.

HONOURABLE MENTION (GRADE 11-12)

Elizabeth Rodenburg

The Colour of Lilacs

I never understood her. She was too evasive, too mysterious. I used to think she was shy, but now I know she didn't want to be understood. She liked being evasive, being mysterious. If no one can get in, no one can hurt you.

We rode our bikes together, when we were younger, mine was blue and hers was lilac and we'd go so fast the colours became a blur. When we rode side by side Lilac mixed with blue. When we slowed down the colours became brighter, more defined. Lilac. Blue. She'd tell me about her dad and how he was going to come back any day now. I thought maybe he'd gone away on a trip, maybe for work, my parents did that a lot. I thought he'd probably bring back some sort of cheesy souvenir, to make it up to her after being gone for so long. I thought, because he was her dad, he had to come back because parents aren't supposed to leave. He didn't come back.

We swam in the river sometimes. It was cold and we'd lay down in the shallower parts and let the water wash over us until our entire bodies turned numb and our lips turned a light shade of purple and we could barely speak with our lips chattering so much. We looked up at the big, blue sky. We pointed out clouds and their funny shapes and the way they'd float along without a care. Somehow she always ended up seeing the same thing, no matter how lumpy the cloud, how fluffy, how deformed. She always managed to find her grandfather's glasses. She said he used to wear them all the time. Said he'd prop them up on the very tip of his nose and look over them at her, his expression stern, his eyes twinkling. He'd grab her and tickle her until she screamed with laughter, but then he always had to stop. He was getting too old, his heart started to hurt. I didn't understand that, back then. How can a person have a sore heart?

I understand now. Sore hearts are a lot more common than I once believed.

We'd chase each other through the forest in the middle of autumn, always autumn. With the red and orange and yellow leaves crunching beneath our feet and the skeletal shapes of bare branches outlined against the fading sunset. We'd flop down exhausted and laugh and laugh and laugh. I liked it when she laughed, she didn't do it a lot and it was nice to see her happy. Then she'd grow quiet and we'd lay there and I'd think that maybe this time it would be different, but it never was. Every time, after a minute or two, she'd roll over onto her stomach and sigh a little and tell me about how she and her sister used to make great, big piles of leaves in the yard and how they'd stack them up so high they almost couldn't touch the top and they'd jump into them and make leaf forts. Her sister grew up though. She didn't want to make leaf forts anymore. She didn't want to play.

I never knew what to say so I never said anything. I think that's why she liked me, she could talk all she wanted and no one would ever tell her to be quiet, or to keep it down. She didn't have to be scared. I think I made her feel safe.

Not anymore though. I thought I understood her, but I don't.

She visited me yesterday. Climbed the tree outside my bedroom and knocked on my window just like she used to when we were younger and the world wasn't so messed up. I opened it and she told me to grab my jacket. She told me we were going for a drive. I hadn't spoken to her for years, but I climbed out the window and into the car waiting down in the street. We drove for a long time, I don't remember how long. The sun started to set and the

stars came out and we drove and drove and I didn't bother to ask her where we were going. I knew she wouldn't tell me.

We were well past the city limits by the time she stopped the car and turned off the engine and we just sat there, in silence for a while. Then she got out of the car and climbed onto the roof and I climbed up after her and we sat there in silence for a while. I was beginning to realize that silence was a defining part of our strange relationship.

"Everything's changed." I looked at her, she wasn't looking at me. "No one's who they said they were." I let out a breath and lay down on my back gazing up at the stars and trying to trace the patterns with my fingers. "People change," I paused, she didn't look at me. "But memories don't." She looked at the sky thoughtfully. "My entire life is made up of memories," She replied softly. I looked at her and through the darkness I could see the freckles on her face and so I started to trace those patterns in the air with my fingers and still she didn't look at me.

We lay there for a long time, me looking at her and her not looking at me and the stars looking at both of us and then the sun began to rise and the sky turned grey and then the fog rolled in and we got down off the top of the car and climbed back in and drove away.

She dropped me off in front of my house and I climbed out. I didn't look at her, I knew she wouldn't be looking back. I trudged up the pathway to my house and climbed the stairs onto the old wooden porch that she'd gotten a splinter from so many years ago. I heard her car start up and I turned around to watch her pull out of the driveway and head off down the street. The sky had just turned a brilliant shade of lilac and gold and sapphire and who knows what else and I watched as the outline of her car sped down the road going much faster than it should have been. After a minute or two it disappeared and still I stood on the porch and I stayed there until the sun had risen and the mist had rolled away and the postman had dropped off our mail. I never saw her again.

