



VOX

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— *free your voice* —



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DARK versus LIGHT

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Second Chance

Samantha Finch

I looked out the passenger window of my black jeep. The rain trickled down, leaving the road a blur behind the little streams that twisted and twirled along the glass. I had a deep pain in my stomach that had been tearing my insides apart for days. I sighed, pushing my bangs out of my eyes, as I turned towards the radio to change the station from a rap song that I had no interest in. A few moments passed and my father stared at me like I was a child looking for a specific candy bar and having no such luck. I settled for Britney Spears' latest song. With a huff, I sat back and continued looking out the window. I wanted to do anything, but go home that night. The headlights began to blend with one another as I continued staring. The song changed to one I knew well. I sang the lyrics in my head.

My eyes are open wide and, by the way, I made it through the day....

"Leila! Were you fucking listening to me?" my father barked as he pushed me.

"Uh, sorry, distracted, what did you say dad?"

"I asked if you would help me tonight." He said it low, but with confidence. He already knew my response.

I paused and looked at him. "Yeah, sure." A slight smile formed along my face. I turned back to my window. The rain had thickened, forming sheets along the glass.

*Tell my mother; tell my father, I've done the best I can
To make them realize this is my life, I hope they understand.*

I'm not angry, I'm just saying

*Sometimes goodbye is a second chance.... Sometimes goodbye is a second
chance.*

As the final verse in the song played, a small tear escaped from my eye. We pulled into the driveway and the rain splashed down all around me as I walked to the door. I was welcomed by darkness and cool thick air. I heard the metal bars close and the latch of the lock clicked behind me. I stared as my father shut the door, the rain still

pouring from the black sky.

I awoke to a freezing breeze. Cold air flooded the room from the window that I had broken when I tried to open it the night before. It was a murky winter day. Thick gray clouds covered the blue sky. I pulled my thin tan blanket tightly around me like a cocoon. I heard my parents screaming downstairs. I just laid there and prayed the screaming would disappear. I knew it wouldn't. I pulled the blanket over my head, like a child hiding. I heard footsteps head up the stairs and then a small pause. I waited. My mom leaned in the doorway in a straight line, obviously pissed off.

"Leila, do you mind actually cleaning up for once?" Her face was cold and emotionless. Her green eyes which softened for the slightest second gave her away.

I grunted as I rolled off the hard mattress. Tired, annoyed, and cold, I followed her down the stairs, nearly tripping over the textbook left at the foot of the staircase.

The house was a mess. It was a complete disaster. There were dirty dishes piled high in the sink. Clothes were thrown on the broken, wooden rocking chair, along the concrete floor, everywhere. A sea of empty pill bottles lined the floor around the couch. The floor itself was covered in pine needles from the dying Christmas tree in the corner. I grabbed some clothes from my cardboard box in the laundry room: grey sweat pants and a tie-dye tee. The doorbell chimed loudly as I was half way up the stairs. The slam of the metal door against the wooden frame made me jump.

As I began stripping off my light pink nightgown, tiny goosebumps began to form along the surface of my tan skin. I could hear the sounds of faint mumbling outside. I put on my clothes and slipped on my chestnut colored moccasins and went into the bathroom with a copy of the New Yorker in hand. I heard the creak of the front door opening, followed by a loud slam. The sound of forceful footsteps vibrated along the floor.

I walked out of the bathroom, dried my hands on my shirt, and headed to my closet where my phone was hidden under a pile of jackets and scarves. I knelt down on the rough floor as the front door

opened with a loud squeak. I felt a cold arctic breeze enter. I turned on my tiny black phone and the bright lights flashed.

I looked out the window and I could see my father, still standing there, tense and motionless, like the unmovable rock of a mountain base. His eyes shined pure and cold, like the crystal blue ice of a frozen pond. The murmurs were low, but I could tell they weren't good by the tone of his pitch. The anger built on my father's face layer upon layer. Within seconds my father looked like he was yelling at our landlord.

I stared, as he waved his arms around angrily. All I could think about was how much I hated to be there with him, my asshole father. I looked around the room, my bed messily covered in blankets, the carpet turned up along the wall, and the thick sound of the television in my room clouded my brain. I turned back to my small black phone and began deleting the calls and messages I had received. The door slammed shut. The earth seemed to stop moving at that point. My father walked in the house and started kicking the stuff that lined the floor; I shut off my phone and stashed it away.

“All I could think about was how much I hated to be there with him, my asshole father.”

"This house looks like a fucking pigsty," my father yelled at my mom. I began to go downstairs, my heart racing.

"I have been cleaning the kitchen," my mom said, her tone coated in annoyance.

"Bullshit. This place should have been clean before, I told you to fucking clean it." My father picked up a plate full of Chinese food and threw it across the room. A metal fork clinked along the tile floor of the kitchen, nearly missing my sister who was eating her breakfast as quickly as possible.

"Is that really fucking necessary?" my mom said as she got up and began making her way to the kitchen. I reach the bottom step in time to see him fling a full cup of Snapple at her, drenching her in the sticky brown liquid.

"You're an asshole," she said as she grabbed a towel off the floor and began wiping her face. A small tear fell down her left cheek.

I followed her into the kitchen ignoring him to the best of my ability. I walked over to my mom to see if she was okay. As I am about to grab her hand, the clash of glass on the floor stopped me where I stood. I rush back to the living room; the Christmas tree is thrown on the floor. Tiny shards of colored glass coated the floor from the collection of broken Christmas ornaments.

“Start fucking cleaning. We are not stopping until this house is cleaned to my standards. You can’t eat, you can’t shit, and you can’t do anything else until it’s done.” He sat down on the couch and turned on the T.V.

My mom starts cleaning up the tree. A steady stream of tears flowed down her soft face. She gently picked up each decoration that had broken along the cold cement floor. I began searching for paper towels to clean the Snapple that was dripping from the wall. My lip was numb from biting it.

I finally found them under the sink in the laundry room and walked over and began to wipe down the walls; my sister started the dishes in the kitchen.

He just sat there, watching each of us work, as if he was the king overlooking his slaves. He gets up and limps towards the stairs, and begins screaming as loud as he could.

“Gerry! Wake your ass up and come down here and start cleaning!” He waited a few minutes and called again, “Gerry, now!”

My brother walked to the top of the staircase, rubbing his eyes. He was obviously still half asleep. “What?” he said.

My father marched up the stairs and grabbed my brother by the ear, pulling him down the stairs along with him. My brother started yelping in pain and crying.

“What did you do that for?” my brother screamed between sobs.

“Clean. Now!” my father said as he poured himself a new glass of peach Snapple.

Gerry began picking up the clothes along the floor, wiping the tears off his cheek with my NYU t-shirt. I cringed from a sharp pain in my chest as I watched him go into the kitchen. My thoughts

were distracted by my father's stern voice.

"It's a shame, see if you all cleaned the house before, we wouldn't have this problem. We could have been relaxing. Instead I look like an asshole in front of the landlord," he said condescendingly. "They will most likely kick us out now, who would want a bunch of slobs in their home."

I spun around from my position on the floor and said icily, "If you are so concerned about what people think of you why don't you get off your ass and help clean..." My mom, sister, and brother all stared at me with their jaws almost reaching the floor. In what seemed like a second, my father sprung up from the couch and came charging at me.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry," I said as he pushed me hard against the kitchen table.

"You better fucking be!" He yelled, pushing me against the table once more before heading back to the green and red couch. He sat back down and started flicking the channels.

My mom walked into the kitchen, going to the storage closet to get the broom. "Do you really need to talk back to him like that?" she said coldly.

I was still shaking against the wooden kitchen table when I turned to look at her. I just stared in disbelief. Did she not see what I saw?

"Yes, I was right!" I said sternly. She sighed nodding in acknowledgment. In a whirl of a second he was back up in my face, his nostrils flaring in anger.

"What did you say?" he screamed in my face. The smell of breath made me cough.

I cleared my throat. "...I said that I am right." The strength in my words surprised even myself. I closed my eyes, half expecting him to slap me across my face and half expecting him to push me into the table again. Instead he got closer in my face, pushing me back with his hands. All eyes were on Gerry Leench Sr.

"You're not going back to NYU, you won't get an education and will just stay here," he said.

“Oh yes I am going back,” I said.

He pushed me back hard when he slapped me, causing the table to slide backwards and for me to fall onto the cold tile. He then flung the plate on the table across the room. It smashed loudly when it finally hit the ground. I stared up at my father.

“I will just tell financial aid that I make \$50,000 off the books every year and you will lose all your financial aid.” He said it as if he was ready to convince anyone that it was true.

“I don’t care, I wouldn’t stay. I would rather be anywhere, but here.” I smiled as I realized the truth in my own words.

Time seemed to pass slowly before my mom began to walk over and extended her hand to help me up as my father just stared at me; his eyes coated with thick fiery flames.

“Don’t fucking help her!” He screamed in my mom’s face.

“She could be hurt, Gerry,” my mom said calmly and extended her hand again.

“I said don’t fucking help her!” He shouted and tackled her to the ground in a single movement. I got up to try to help her.

At that moment everything sparked up faster than I could imagine. As I ran over to my mom he viciously grabbed me by a clump of my thick brown hair and began dragging me to the door, my feet sliding across the concrete.

“Fine, you don’t want to fucking be here, let’s start now!” he said, his tone baked in fury, as he threw me out the front door, then slammed it shut and locked it.

I stood in the cold snow waiting for him to come unlock the door. Time passed slowly, and the cold air burned my lungs. Before I knew what I was doing I was running down the street. As I ran faster and faster the dingy white house soon left my view. I felt my chest burn as I ran up the steep hill, the intense ache in my thighs each time my feet hit hard against the charcoal pavement. I pushed my feet to keep going. The smell of crisp, cold, snow filled my lungs as they strained to keep my breathing under control. My cheeks were hot from the chill of the December wind. Yet, I kept going. I finally stopped in front of a large brick building that read ‘Police’ above the

door. Two cop cars were parked in the street. I slowly walked up the stairs to the glass door. I looked back to where I ran from one last time. With a deep breath, I pushed the door open and walked over to the receptionist.

“May I help you?” the receptionist said with a smile.

I nodded and smiled back. Sometimes goodbye is a second chance.



“Stream to your Soul” by Samantha Finch

Anna, Undone

Alisa Leavitt

Anna wakes at midnight to the distant sound of heavy glass falling to the floor. She squints her eyes and they adjust to the darkness in the bedroom. Pale light filters in through the tree branches outside her window.

Her body is sticky with sweat. It's the middle of summer, but she wears an oversized fleece sweatshirt and jeans. She recognizes the sound of boots shuffling, stumbling down the hallway. Anna knows what comes next.

She is tense, and her mouth feels dry. Her father grunts as he leans against the door and pushes it open without effort—he broke the lock when she was five.

“No,” she says. It comes out of her throat barely above a whisper. His silhouette is thick and fills the doorway. He undoes his pants, but loses balance and falls into her dresser.

“Stop,” she says. He ignores her demand and starts for the bed with a raised fist.

The shot explodes in the dark—a flash of white—and strikes her father's chest. He falls forward and his head hits the wood floor with a heavy thud. Anna drops the revolver on her lap; her hands throb from the recoil. She reminds herself to breathe.

He reaches for her, but she does nothing.

“Anna,” he says in a hoarse voice. “Anna.” She can barely hear him over the ringing in her ears. She looks into his eyes and sees the life behind them. Anna can't turn away.

He jerks for a minute, then rests. A crimson pool expands under his body, traveling toward her bed. His breathing weakens; hers becomes stronger.

They both know it will be anytime now.



“Carnival” by Samantha Finch

1st Place Winner
Dark Poetry Competition
“Shadows (The Dark Tide)”
by Daniel Hood

Enthralled is the one who seeks
out the dark. Lost in the shadows,
they lead him down a shady pathway.
Whispers menacing, they hide
truth and evils that surround the mind.
Pitch black, insanity welling as if
the sun had burnt out: everlasting
confinement of the soul. Some
have said that it is not fear of the dark,
but that which it conceals. But then
the dark is just as menacing, a quick assailant
with a knife up his sleeve. Darkness
toys with our imagination, for we can
only envision those creatures and obstacles
that cackle amongst their veil. We take
comfort in the moon and the stars at night,
as any cry for help may be tucked away,
impossible to track down by blind eyes.
Like a holster to a gun, it threatens
even before the gun can be drawn.
Once the trigger is pulled we cannot react
before rain showers of crimson permanently
stain our life. But furthermore it's a poison
that enters us deep. Crawling like
deadly snakes or demons we never wish to see.
It tangles our hearts and minds with doubt,
dishonesty and fear. It lurks like a bird
of prey, waiting for us to be further ensnared.
Tempted by its blanket we often wander in
too far, the enraged oceans of blackness
coming up in great swarms. Shrieking
like a gaggle of crows at your grave,
the darkness seeks out the fools,
and even the brave. It is a menacing tide
ready to sweep you in from ashore.
Be wary of the darkness,
shield yourself and prepare
for the skeletons and the spectres it stores.



"Windmill" by Samantha Finch

Human Experiment Marc Johnson Debate

Taylor Vogt

“Sally, you go on in one and a half. Focus, girl. You’ve got this,” a woman’s voice flooded into the ear piece of a young lady. She was the kind of attractive lady that would never have to pay for a drink at the club. She had a small pocket sized mirror in the palm of her hand, and was using it to examine her face and hair to make sure that everything was in its proper place. A young man walked up to her and fastidiously brushed her cheeks with some blush. She coughed a couple of times, which caused her perfectly made up hair to come undone. She brushed the stray locks of hair behind her ears to put them back in place. She looked as perfect as she was ever going to. Just then, through her ear piece, she heard the sound of her producer announcing that they were going live in thirty seconds. She drew in a couple of long, deep breaths to clear her lungs out. Her eyes were closed as she mouthed out the words she was going to say. She felt someone place their hand on her shoulder, and she opened her eyes to see her camera man Greg standing in front of her.

“You ready, dear?” He asked, his southern drawl hanging thick in the air. He removed his hand from her shoulder and saddled a large camera onto his.

“Yeah, Greg, I’m fine,” she responded through a forced smile. Even though she would never admit it; the truth was that she felt like she was going to throw up. Never before had she been asked to cover such a high profile event. This was a far cry from her years spent covering dog shows and local festivals.

She heard a bit of static over her headset before the words ‘ten seconds’ sent shivers down her spine. Her grip on the microphone tightened, and she could feel a bead of sweat hanging on the back of her neck. One final gulp was all she could afford herself to clear her throat before Greg put up his five fingers. The countdown began and she brought the microphone up to her lips.

“And now we go to our reporter on the scene, Sally Williams, who is covering the debate.” The voice of anchorman John Thomas sounded in her other ear.

3... 2... 1...

“Sally?”

‘You’re on.’ She heard her producer say in her ear piece.

“Yes, thank you, John. As you can see behind me, I’m at the American Airlines arena, here, in beautiful Miami, Florida to bring you the debate between Republican James McKinley and Democrat Marc Johnson. It’s expected that tens of millions of viewers will be tuning in tonight to watch the debate. Every major news outlet is here, John, and I’ve seen dozens of local affiliates trying to get into this event just for a glimpse. Without a doubt this is the most talked about and anticipated event of the political season. We’ll be bringing you live coverage of

the debate complete with post-coverage analysis in less than an hour. Back to you in the studio, John.” Sally smiled into the camera and waited for the signal from Greg that they had stopped broadcasting. When it finally came she heaved a long sigh of relief and wiped the sweat from the back of her neck.

Greg ran up to her with a big smile on his lips. He still had the camera saddled on his shoulder. “Ya’ did great! Good job, girl!” The young man exclaimed jubilantly. He motioned to put his arm around her shoulder, but she put up her hand to stop him before massaging her temples.

“We need to get inside. There’s no time to celebrate yet,” she said with a melancholy inflection. Sally gave Greg half a smile through the headache that was coming on. She turned and began walking slowly towards the entrance to the arena, waiting for Greg to catch up to her before quickening her pace.

The inside of the arena was an absolute mess. Some people had reserved their seats for this debate the day after it was formally announced over six months ago. There was a buzz in the air. Everyone was shuffling to their seats hours before the event was scheduled to begin. The waiting lines for regular ticket holders to get into the stadium were backed up all the way into the parking lot. The concession stand lines were completely packed with people trying to get something to eat before the main attraction began. The ticket booth had stopped selling tickets an hour after doors opened because demand was so great. It had the atmosphere of a rock concert.

“You’re going to do great. You remember all of your talking points right?”

The dressing room was aflutter with moving bodies running from one side to the other. This was the hectic dance that the aides played every time that Marc Johnson had gone into debate his opponents. This was the seventh debate that he had taken part in over the last year of campaigning.

“Yes, David, I can recite my fiscal policy in my sleep at this point. Thank you.”

This time was different though. He wasn’t going up against primary opponents or the representative for the Republican Party. This debate was against James McKinley, his most outspoken dissenter throughout the entire process of becoming nominated. McKinley had made the trek all the way to Miami from the sixth congressional district of Louisiana. There was no one in the Johnson campaign who doubted that McKinnley was coming at them with everything that he had.

“Yeah, but we both know that this isn’t about your fiscal policy. Are you ready to face him?”

For the past year, James McKinnley had been on every news outlet he could find a willing audience to spread his message of hate and intolerance. He polled remarkably well among both Republicans and Democrats in his district

despite this message. The liberal states and media all tried to talk down what he was promoting, but he found a ready and willing audience that ate up everything he said like he was delivering an edict every time he went on the television. It seemed to everyone he was preaching against that as his audience grew their chances for representative equality diminished. All of their hopes were riding on Marc Johnson.

“I’ve been ready since the moment he opened his fat, bigot mouth. It’s the waiting that’s killing me.”

That’s why everyone was clambering to get a front row seat to the debate of the century, as it was being billed. Every major news outlet had been instigating this event even before it was officially announced. All of the station executives thought it was too juicy a story to not try to promote. Johnson and McKinley had clashed several times on live television and in opposing editorials countless times before but never had they been face to face. That night was shaping up to make political history.

“Then go get him, champ. Make all of us proud to call you our Congressman.”

A woman wearing a headset and carrying a clipboard opened the door to the dressing room and announced that there were only twenty minutes until the debate began. Marc got to his feet and brushed off his suit. He needed to look pristine. One of his aides saw that he was picking off strands of lint and ran up to him with a lint roller. His advisor, David, got to his feet as well. The taller, younger man outstretched his hand to Marc. Marc took it gladly and they shook each other’s hands for a good minute. Exchanging smiles, they were caught in a moment of mutual appreciation. For Marc it was one of gratitude to David for managing their campaign so beautifully from the very beginning up until this moment. In David’s mind he was looking at the best chance for equality for all people everywhere. The pride he had in Marc’s character showed through his wide smile.

They finally broke their silent handshake and walked out the door. A gaggle of aides were following them. Some were carrying extra ties in various colors and designs. Others had talking points on clipboards that they were pushing to Marc’s face. He simply ignored them. He had been preparing months ahead for this debate. Looking at any of these interpretations of his stances on the issues would only give him tunnel vision during the debate. He needed to be talking from his heart at this point. Last minute rehearsal would only make him second guess what he had already committed to his memory.

After walking for ten minutes from his room he finally got up to the side of the stage and stood behind the curtain. He looked to the other side and saw his opponent, McKinley, talking to his aides and looking over sheets. Marc smiled to himself without saying anything to the many needy voices airing their

concerns around him. He simply shut them out. The only thing worth doing was studying his opponent and getting a feel for how prepared McKinley was.

Marc never broke his gaze. He kept his eyes locked on McKinley, who seemed to ignore his presence. After a good five minutes of trying to get Marc's attention his aides eventually backed off and left him to his own devices. None of them dared to say a word, standing at attention with their hands either at their sides or folded across their stomachs. All of them looked on at the man, they were supporting and putting their faith in, with admiration.

An old man with black hair, streaked with gray lines, sat in front of two dozen video cameras just in front of the stage. "Hello and welcome to the Global News Network's sponsored debate between Mister Marc Johnson, Democrat from Florida's 21st Congressional district, and Representative James McKinley, from Louisiana's 6th Congressional district. My name is Timothy Stern, correspondent for GNN, and I will be your host for the evening. This debate is being broadcasted commercial free on our station by the generous support of the American Civil Liberties Union. The network would just like to thank them for their contribution to tonight's debate. Without any further ado, please give a warm welcome to the participants in tonight's debate: Mister Marc Johnson and Representative James McKinley," the old man said to the cameras.

The curtain on the stage rose and revealed Marc and James standing on either side of the stage, all alone. Their aides had taken to hiding in the wings of the stage. There was no use for them now.

Johnson smiled widely at the audience, waving to them even though all of the lighting shining from the rafters and on the floor in front of the stage blinded him from seeing anything beyond Mr. Stern. He glanced down at his suit for a quick second to make sure it was still pristine. His feet kept moving forward though, and in seconds he found himself standing behind his podium.

His heart was beating faster than it ever had before. "It's an honor to be hosting the two of you gentlemen in this debate. The format will be five minutes per response and rebuttal to every question. We will close rebuttals at my discretion and then move onto the next question. This debate will last for an hour. The first person to respond to the question will be Mister Johnson, followed by Congressman McKinley. We shall follow this order for rebuttal opportunities for every question. Do both participants understand the rules of this debate?" Timothy Stern asked.

Both of them responded immediately with a direct 'yes'. Marc kept his eyes glued forward. He didn't look over at McKinley even once.

Timothy Stern shuffled some papers around in front of him and then looked up at the stage. "Good, then let's begin. Mister Johnson, I want to start this debate with the question that everyone around the world who is watching is waiting for you to answer. What is your stance on the issue of superhuman

rights?”

There was a moment of silence throughout the entire arena. Marc didn't respond right away. Rather, he took that moment to formulate the proper response. “Whether or not you have special talents or abilities is actually irrelevant at the crux of this issue. What we're really talking about here is whether or not every human being should be afforded the same rights. Some people have the ability to move Earth, others to fly. Myself, I can manipulate my energy into electricity. That doesn't make me any fundamentally different than a person without those abilities. We're all people who deserve to be given the same proper rights and representation by the government as any other minority group. I would go as far to say this is an economic rights issue, as well as social. I met a man who lives in Georgia named Robert Thompson. He has the amazing ability to make fire from absolutely nothing. I think that's incredible, and so do the people at Georgia Electric Power Company. He's now a full time employee there, working at a power plant outside of Atlanta with over two dozen other people just like him to produce steam to turn turbines to make electricity. It's stories like that which give me hope that society won't be prejudice and discriminate against people with abilities.” He wrapped up his answer with a few extra seconds left on the clock. Those few seconds were taken up by nearly the entire audience hollering and clapping in support of Johnson. His smile had faded away into a look of absolute seriousness.

There was a stark contrast between Marc and his opponent. McKinley was a much older, shorter man, already into his late fifties, with a large belly and jowls that hung down past his chin. His staff had done their very best to mask his sunken eyes with makeup before the debate but they still shown through. His white hair had sprinkled dandruff on the shoulders of several black suits he had worn on television, so now he only wore grey. He had been reelected six times in a row, so it was obvious that his appearance connected with his constituency well. Marc Johnson, on the other hand, was completely new to the political scene. He had been a lawyer for the past two decades, representing financial firms in downtown Miami and New York. He had graduated from the top of his undergraduate class at New York University and attended Yale Law School, graduating Magna Cum Laude. He looked the part. His suit was Giorgio Armani, a navy blue piece that brought out his equally dark blue eyes. He kept his shortly cut black hair parted to the side. He got a hair-cut before every debate that he went into. Marc was nearly a foot taller than his opponent.

Nearly the entire time that Marc was making his points McKinley was openly chuckling. He wore a grin on his lips. When Marc had finished speaking McKinley audibly cleared his throat next to the microphone. “Representative McKinley, I pose the same question to you. What is your stance on the issue of superhuman rights? You may respond directly to the points raised by Mister

Johnson in his response,” Stern addressed McKinley.

McKinley cleared his throat once more, still grinning. “To begin I’d like to thank you by referring to ‘people with abilities’, as Mister Johnson calls them, properly. They are superhumans; that is exactly how they should be defined. They are beyond normal human beings. As Mister Johnson made perfectly clear they have the ability to do things like make fire, like make electricity. That makes them a danger to you and me, people who can’t defend ourselves. As much as we’d like to believe that someone like Mister Johnson will always be there to save the day, that’s not the case. That’s why we have a government and police force. We can’t depend upon vigilante justice to protect the public from lunatics who use their powers to break the law. I don’t argue that superhumans aren’t a great asset to society, like Mister Johnson said. I do think that if they want to use those powers they should be regulated just like any other weapon. We need ways to track, monitor and protect the public from the use of those weapons. The government needs to know who is using these weapons and where they are at all times to ensure public safety. They deserve rights, but to say they’re just like a normal person is ridiculous.” When McKinley finished talking there were significantly less people applauding, but they cheered as loudly as they could. He shot a coy smile over at Marc Johnson before staring back forward.

Stern took a moment to let the crowd die down before turning back to Marc Johnson. Johnson had an air of disgust lingering on his face when he was asked for his rebuttal. “Thank you, Mister Stern, I appreciate the opportunity to rebut the outrageous implications that Representative McKinley just made. You can’t really be saying that because we were given these incredible opportunities we should be discriminated against. That’s treating anyone with an ability as less than human. Everyone deserves equal opportunities to take advantage of their talents; whether that’s being exceptionally good at math or being like Mister Thompson. It’s all relative. You have to remember, we didn’t choose to be like this. It was forced upon us. You can’t penalize and segregate because of god given differences. That’s against the law. We’ve come too far as a society to take such a large step backwards into the dark ages of intolerance and discrimination. If elected I will fight to ensure the kind of laws Representative McKinley has proposed will never be passed.”

The crowd erupted into a roar even louder than when he had first spoken. People in the audience had gotten to their feet and were clapping. A few were even crying. Marc Johnson had never publicly made such a powerful statement of opposition against James McKinley’s policies before. The ACLU had pushed for him to be more open and direct before. Johnson had protested to being so blunt about his stance opposing the proposed Superhuman Monitoring Act. McKinley had sponsored the legislation every year that he had been in office. Every time it had failed miserably. Even his party had taken a stance against

it.

McKinley was laughing and smiling throughout Johnson's rebuttal. "Representative McKinley, would you like to make a rebuttal?" Stern asked. The audience was still applauding when McKinley began to speak. It had died down enough for his voice to be picked up by the television, though. "Mister Johnson, I envy your vindication in your stance. Being a superhuman I wouldn't expect you to take any other stance. I find it selfish though, that you would put your own interests ahead of the American people. Just because you like to play superhero, and 'fight crime' in your spare time, doesn't mean that the public should suffer the tyranny of wild superhumans. You can't punch every superhuman in the face. People have died because of your inability to protect them. No one's ever been killed by someone's math skills. I trust the government of the United States much more than I do on your unreliable electricity powers, Mister Johnson." The audience was silent. All eyes turned to Marc Johnson.

Johnson did not look visibly shaken by McKinley's comments. He drilled into the older man with a furious glare. "I take offense to that statement, Representative McKinley. There are thousands of brave, courageous men and women just like myself who work with the police all over this country, putting their lives on the line, to protect and serve the public. I am proud of them." Marc didn't blink the entire time he was speaking at McKinley. The audience rose to their feet and applauded once more.

"Okay. Thank you both for your passionate responses. Let's move onto the next topic," Stern said nervously. He had been caught off guard by their exchange. The producers of the event were screaming into his earpiece that he needed to get them back in line before things got out of hand.

"It's that pride that will get people killed, Marc Johnson! Are you proud of what you did to poor Martha Genevieve?" They turned off McKinley's microphone after that. He continued to yell over at Marc despite that. "As long as I live I will make sure you don't ever set foot in Congress!" He yelled over the sound of booing from the audience. Marc could barely make out what he was saying. McKinley reached into the breast pocket of his jacket and grabbed onto something.

Marc Johnson wasn't always the darling of Miami. He was just a young man looking for his place in the world. After his powers manifested, he ran into some trouble at his job working at a large law firm. He had worked his entire life to rise up the ranks to become a junior partner and all of his work had finally paid off. The realization that he was a superhuman shook his foundation. One day, while he was reading over some papers, his new powers came to life and they went up in flames. He almost burned down his entire office. After that his bosses sat him down to tell him that he needed to take some time off.

After that, he sunk into a deep depression. He had never been much of

a drinker, but that lawyer's paycheck turned him into an alcoholic pretty quick. Instead of going out and enjoying the night life of the town or spending time with friends, he stayed home every night drinking, and experimenting with his new found ability. Despite the fact he was almost always intoxicated he became very adept at controlling his powers. It got to the point that he could direct tendrils of electricity around his apartment without setting anything ablaze or shocking himself. While he held a hatred of his powers for interfering with his work and personal life, he did find them to be interesting at the least.

One day Marc was going to a local bodega to buy more booze, when he saw a robbery taking place. People were running out of the small shop and taking cover when they noticed what was happening walking past. A gunman wearing a ski mask was holding a pistol to a little girl's head. He kept shouting demands to empty the register and safe to the cashier behind the counter. Something within Marc compelled him to do something to help that little girl, whatever he could. He ran over to the door of the bodega and hid next to the entrance. He was out of sight from the robber but could hear the girl crying. The man with the gun sounded like he was disturbed. Even though the cashier continued to plead forgiveness for not knowing how to open the safe the gunman demanded he did. Then Marc heard the distinct sound of a gun's hammer being cocked back. The girl screamed out as a gunshot rang through the air. Johnson moved out of hiding, threw the bodega door open and saw the cashier bleeding out on the floor behind the counter. The robber had the pistol pointed at the girl's head. He turned to Marc and screamed something inaudible. Marc felt the adrenaline pumping in his veins like never before in his entire life. Time slowed down in that instant. He saw the robber cock the hammer of his six-shooter again with the muzzle of the pistol still pointed at the girl. Marc raised his hand as the robber's trigger finger tensed. He pulled the trigger but no bullet exited the gun. The girl screamed out in pain. A streak of white hot lightning shot from Johnson's fingertips and tore straight through the robber. Both he and the girl collapsed to the ground, only the robber had a smoldering hole through his chest.

Marc ran over to the cashier, who was clutching the hole in his chest. Blood was pooling on the ground around him. "Let me see," he said, panicked. He had never seen so much blood before. Had he just killed a man? He pushed that thought out of his mind and looked at the wound. It was a clean hole through and through. "Looks like the bullet passed through. Ambulances should be here soon, but we need to stop this bleeding," he said as calmly as possible. Marc looked around the room for something to stop the blood. He noticed that there was barely any blood around the robber. He turned back to the cashier. "You need to stay still. I'm going to cauterize the wound, okay?" The cashier nodded his head. Marc put his pointer finger above the hole and concentrated. A

streak of light shot from his finger tip and tore through the hole in the cashier's chest. He let out a terrible howl in pain and the smell of burning flesh made Marc fall back. The bleeding stopped though. Paramedics arrived in a matter of minutes to take both the little girl and the cashier to the hospital.

Marc had, indeed, killed the robber. Witnesses were interviewed and corroborated his story. He had created a net of energy at the end of the gun barrel. It had been dense enough to absorb the kinetic energy of the bullet and stop it before it killed the girl.

Sadly the robber had smacked the gun into the girl's head, shocking her. The next day Marc found out that she had some permanent brain damage. He didn't know how to deal with killing a man or causing an eight year old girl brain damage any other way than to turn to the bottle. He was drunk when he got a call from the police commissioner. At first he was convinced that they were going to come arrest him for killing that man. When he was told that they were going to award him with a medal commending his bravery he was shocked. He didn't say anything for a good thirty seconds before gladly accepting the award. The family of the little girl, whose name was Martha Genevieve, had gone on national television to formally thank him for saving their daughter's life. That week he was awarded a medal of valor by the police commissioner, the key to the city from the mayor and offered a full time position as a consultant for the police force. He accepted the offer the next day, left the firm and put down the bottle. He spent his days on the shooting range, practicing with his ability. He adopted the name 'Living Lightning' as his superhero alias and was offered a contract with the Miami Heat to affiliate with them.

He was the prodigal son of Miami, and soon of the entire superhuman community.

Now he was on global television, representing the hopes and dreams of his fellow superhumans to finally have someone who is open about their abilities serve in Congress. Johnson froze up as McKinley took a few steps towards him with his hand inside the breast of his jacket. Time slowed down as the adrenaline began to pump through his veins. He saw security begin to rush to the stage as McKinley got closer. He saw McKinley begin to pull something black out of his jacket. In the chaos of the moment, with security swarming them both, Marc did the only thing he could to protect himself. A streak of white light shot across the stage and in a split second McKinley was on the floor. Security swarmed around Marc and pulled him off the stage. Paramedics rushed to the stage. The last thing Marc saw were the paramedics trying to resuscitate McKinley. The last thing he heard was the collective shrieking of the audience.

“Johnson froze up as McKinley took a few steps towards him with his hand inside the breast of his jacket. Time slowed down as the adrenaline began to pump through his veins.”

“I’m sorry to have to relay this horrific news, but to everyone around the world who was watching tonight’s debate, we have all been witness to the murder of Representative William McKinley. The news we’re getting now is that Marc Johnson believed Representative McKinley was going to pull a gun from his jacket. It certainly did look that way from where we were sitting. These are just initial reports, but it appears that it was not a gun, but a picture of young Martha Genevieve; a young girl who was involved in a robbery where Marc Johnson caused her serious brain damage while protecting her from being murdered. It’s been confirmed that Mr. Johnson has been taken into custody and will be charged with the murder of Representative McKinley. We would like to extend our deepest sympathies to the McKinley family,” Sally Williams looked shaken as she stammered through the quickly written synopsis of what had just taken place less than twenty minutes before. People in the background were running from the seats, trying to get out of the arena. Greg turned off the camera and sat down in the seat he was standing in front of. Sally walked over and sat down next to him.

The two didn’t speak for nearly five minutes. They just sat there, staring at the stage where McKinley had been shocked. The paramedics had taken him away. “What do ya’ think is going to happen next?” Greg asked her.

Sally shook her head. “I don’t know. Whatever is going to happen, it can’t be good.”



"Piano" by *Leslie Donelan*

Alpha-Bio Poem

Zenaida Gonzalez

Alto range I sing this song,
Burning with desire. Hold me tight, oh entity,
Clouding in inquires.
Deafening silence surrounds my home; no one dare speaks to me.
Evading shadows besiege my view, empty out the memories.
Fighting silent, don't arouse them; here come the puppet masters.
Gelid are their souls, as well as their hearts; oh, how they are exacters.
Hellish rains inundate the streets, forming acidic puddles.
Invisible piercings through feelings unknown counteract rebuttals.
Joining in mind, philosophies as one; they're manipulating my freedom.
Keeping me here with whispering pipes while darkness
Lures the bugs.
Masquerading their snickers and their little white lies,
Never have I heard fidelity.
Openness is fictional in here, the world they've created to suit them
and their needs.
Peripheral I am in this snowing globe: I am shaken, not stirred.
Quivering in the outskirts of their insolvent orb, I ferret for truths.
Renovating the little space allowed for my mind, I attempt to
Secrete myself from them.
Thinking the thoughts one is not permitted, I adopt the audacious
chances.
Uttering words one dare not speak in the position that's bestowed.
Venturing into the crevices of their lobes where the lies were first told.
Weakening their forces with the bolster of my heart - who is in charge
now?
X-ray vision is in my possession: The puppet masters empty their
bowels.
Yellow Disease spreads to their hearts causing their dysfunction.
Zero is now their consciousness and they no longer take voluntary
actions.



"242" by Krista Masullo

The Grip on My Heart

Amanda Morey

Something foreign from what I knew.
Conflicting feelings run so close,
they merge into each other.

A hand around my heart
that squeezes it tight. Holds
its firm grip. But I can't
say no. Still I know

I should go. Turn
and leave this behind. The
hand squeezes my heart
again and I know I'll

stay. Stay right here
with these feelings
I know I should shed.
But I can't flip
the switch on.



“Lighting up the Dark” by Samantha Finch

1st Place Winner
Dark Prose Competition
“When You Wish Upon a Star”
by Shawn Murrell

It was late at night. Sam worked in the morning, but didn't care. He wouldn't miss this night for the world. He'd been waiting for this one special night for weeks, months even. Now that it was finally here, nothing would stop him from seeing the most amazing, beautiful, and breathtaking thing he would ever see in his entire life.

The news had talked about it for weeks in advance. Astronomers and meteorologists predicted that tonight would be the clearest night to see the shooting stars pass over the earth's atmosphere. He studied along with them, since astronomy was his favorite hobby. This astonishing sight would last for half an hour, forty-five minutes at the most and Sam was going to make sure not to miss a minute of it.

The whole town came out for the event, and the large park in its center quickly filled with citizens. Sam arrived early to have a spot on the small hill near the right edge of the park. Lounged in a fold-out chair, he witnessed it all from his place.

The Jones' trooped along with their eldest son and the twins in tow. Newly married Adam and Cyndi Veras walked along holding hands looking for a good spot between the trees. The Thompsons, the elderly couple living on the edge of town, strolled along soaking in the excitement of the night. Chairs unfolded. Blankets spread out on the ground. People with picnic baskets laid out their goods. Chatter, laughter, and music filled the air.

Even the animals seemed expectant of an interesting night. Insects buzzed happily around the sky surveyors. The dimly lit park was made brighter by fireflies and the stars shined magnificently overhead. The wind blew mildly; the trees swayed gracefully. Seated there, Sam breathed in the warmth that surrounded him; his lungs filled with the scent of wildflowers. The night was alive and Sam simply needed to stretch out his hand to feel the electricity. Then it began.

As the first shooting stars streaked across the sky, a hush fell over the park. It was magical! Greens, reds, purples, and blues tailed the stars as they raced each other to the far reaches of the galaxy.

Sam kept his eyes towards the heavens as chills ran through his body. He couldn't believe his eyes.

The stars seemed so close that Sam imagined he could reach out his hand and pluck one from the sky. He was so focused that he didn't hear the distant booms or notice that the ground slightly shaking beneath him. He didn't notice until one of the stars he had been admiring from afar fell into the park.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! Sam and the chair toppled to the ground. Coiled into a ball where he'd fallen, he covered his ears and waited for it to be over. Sam flinched and cried as several more crashes occurred nearby. Then...silence. A dreadful quiet overwhelmed the park, creeping along endlessly.

Finally, Sam dared to move. Slowly, he removed his hands from his ears and lifted his head. Everyone was on the ground like him. What he saw next shook him to the core.

In the craters the shooting stars made, there was movement. Not from any person originally in the park that night. Miraculously, they all seemed to be alive. The movement was coming from the stars themselves. Sam looked on as the balls of light shifted and changed. The outline of a human took form, bright shadows of what a person looked like.

These static outlines were small, no more than five feet high, but their brilliance illuminated the park and the space beyond it for miles around.

Sam couldn't help but gasp when the figures—there were only seven or eight of them—started moving. The stars walked gracefully out of the craters. As the brightness moved, reality seemed to bend and Sam was unsure whether or not what he saw was real.

This doubt vanished, however, when each star came to stand in front of a stargazer. Sam immediately recognized a woman one of the stars chose to stand before, Cyndi. They were coworkers, and Sam considered her a friend. He was sure he could hear sobs and labored

breathing even though she was far away.

All at once, the stars raised their right hands from where they had been resting at their sides. And all at once, they stopped at a particular angle and stood motionless. Cyndi, after a moment, began to shift. Despite her husband's protests, she worked her way to a kneeling position. The others whom the stars were in front of soon followed suit.

Visibly shaken, Cyndi raised her arm, mimicking what the stars had just done. She inched her hand closer and closer to the star's hand. It was within grasp when another universal movement took place among the stars. Before Sam could think about blinking, they were dead. The razor sharp tips of the stars' fingers slicing cleanly through the necks of each victim. The dark red blood squirting from the necks of the innocents evaporated on impact with their shining bodies.

A massacre ensued. Waves of panic washed over the park. Deafening screams hung in the air as ground was soaked with blood. Too afraid to move, Sam could only lie there as he watched the countless deaths take place. Even if he could move, where would he run? In his heart he knew he would never escape the park alive.

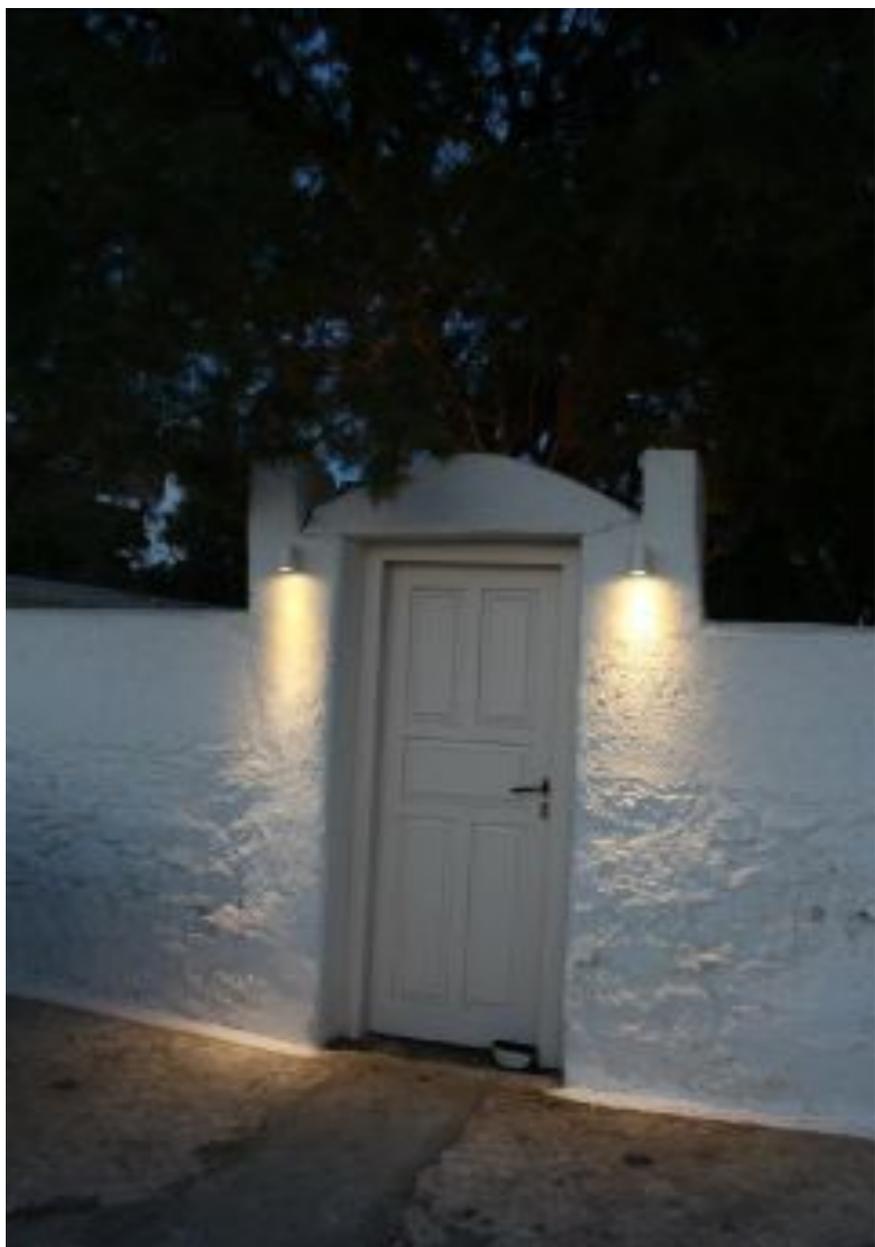
As if it was summoned to him, a shining star appeared in front of him. "What do you want from us!?" He shouted at it.

We want your planet, a voice in his mind answered.

Sam faltered, shaking his head. "Why?"

"Sam managed to scramble backward, though he knew his fate was unavoidable. The star advanced on him with surprising speed. Before he could utter another word, it struck and Sam fell into darkness."

It does not matter, for you will be deceased, came the star's answer. With that the star advanced. Sam managed to scramble backward, though he knew his fate was unavoidable. The star advanced on him with surprising speed. Before he could utter another word, it struck and Sam fell into darkness.



“Light My Way Home” by Samantha Finch

Xanadu
Kaitlyn Szilagyi

Every day
I am judged
by me.
If I continue to do
so,
I fear
I may
miss out
on
vast opportunities...
and,
if I do that,
I fear
I will
have
lived nothing more
than a
half-lived life.

Guidance
from others
shows me
something
I must accept.

Kindness
is
bestowed.
There is
compassion of ac-
tion
amongst all,
yet
forgiveness
must soon

follow.
It is
time
to clear
the energy.

Develop the
ability
to
fully love.
See
the
inner beauty
in others
to
find it
in
yourself.

I fear
I may
miss out
on
vast opportunities...
and,
if I do so,
I fear
I will
have
lived nothing more
than a
half-lived life...
and that...
is unacceptable.

2nd Place Winner
Cover Art Competition
“The Aftermath of the Pillow Fight”
by Andrea Garcia



Music Storyboarding

Zenaida Gonzalez

Maggie walked the empty halls, so empty that a pen cap dropping would sound as if a war were going on right in her backyard. She closed her eyes and bobbed her head to the serenity that encased her subconscious.

She was free falling in an endless supply of psychedelic rays. She saw nothing but the vibrant colours and her long ebony hair floating behind her. She wasn't in any danger, and she realized that. Yes, she was free falling, but she was going moderately slow. She felt no breeze against her cheeks, and her breathing was normal. There was nothing below that frightened her; no surface to be compressed in, nothing that caused an increase in heart beat. She watched as the colours blended and twisted downward.

She fell with a crash. She was now lost in a tangle of the earth's hair. There was nothing above her but dark-green shaders at which this time held no use to the creatures they towered over. She made her way through the knots and kinks of the seemingly endless jungle and in her travel came across a violent festivity complete with the typical roaring fire and the cliché of wild, animalistic beings parading around it. She remained hidden, but unfortunately made the crucial mistake of stepping on a branch. The sound was a thunderous wail under the current circumstances. They charged towards her, spears at hand ready to pierce through every part of her tender flesh. She shut her eyes securely and from the darkness a bright flash dispersed.

Everything, all the tribal people transformed, emerging from white, transparent cocoons in a matter of seconds. They became civilized, wearing lovely ballroom attire coloured with the purity of the women that floated and twirled like butterflies in a sluggish moving tornado. The hard wood floor was scuff free even with all of them prancing on it. The men wore powdered wigs that ended in pony tails while the woman wore ones that made attempts to touch the ceiling with every twirl. The room was lit to perfection showing off the impeccably polished wood furniture stocked with only the finest money could acquire. And then everything began to melt away.

“She fell from her place, smacking her face against the glass. Everything was moving so quickly.”

Maggie found herself aboard a large vessel instrumented with lighting buttons and small computer monitors. She staggered to a window, her hands pounding the glass from her leap. She saw nothing but blackness, a flash of light here and there, but darkness enclosed the outside. Oh Lord, she was in space.

She fell from her place, smacking her face against the glass. Everything was moving so quickly. She heard a commotion erupting from the other side of the hall and began to stagger towards it, hugging the wall to keep her balance. She opened the door and fell once again.

Darkness encased her. Bits of light fluttered around her. She knew there should have been no oxygen where she was, but somehow she continued to breathe without effort. She just lingered there, with no forces to bring her down or take her up. She had to work with all her strength if she wished to move because of the lack of gravity the endless area possessed.

Spaceships zoomed quickly past her. She was frightened of becoming a bug on a windshield. Once again, she shut her eyes.

The ships passed; she was gliding now, unconscious as a result of the shock from the ongoing bulletry of the ships. She spun and turned in slow motions on her back, her arms lowered from her body and her knees bent downward. Her hair folded onto her neck and the dark space became a moon lit room with the curtains open as well as the window which invited in a small breeze, allowing the white, transparent curtains to flicker inward like a butterfly's wings. Maggie laid in her bed, eyes closed and mouth engraved with a smile. The music ceased.



“Florida Sunrise” by Samantha Finch

This I Believe
Zenaida Gonzalez

Music. Everyone can understand it. Everyone can feel it. Whether you are deaf or not, the pulsation of the music – of the booming of the drums, of the electronically made beat boxes, of the electrifying rattling of the guitar – can be felt by each and every one.

Music changes people. It makes them comfortable; it makes them excited. It erupts in their bodies causing them to feel immaculate joy. The words capture their soul from a twelve story drop and cradles it ever so gently in its arms. The words, the emotion, the raging mess of the heavy metal or the soft and silence of the classical with its occasional bombings of indescribable instruments – whatever your flavour, there's a style for it.

Music captures emotion; it captures the humans very difference in what makes us human! A depressed person doesn't cry in silence! No! He cries in the

“A depressed person doesn't cry in silence! No! He cries in the drowning sound of forgotten love ballads and feels the connection...”

drowning sound of forgotten love ballads and feels the connection, the threading that can only be made by radio and listener, by producer and consumer, by depressed person to depressed person. If one is angry they will tune in to Eminem and crank it up and roar the lyrics and act out their emotion in a series of head bangs and hand jabs, feeling their anger go as they move down the scale of his angry songs and get to the softer sounds of “Haile's Song” and begin to drift into relaxation and comfort and then move on to softer and more happier sounds. One who feels like expressing themselves through rapid, solo dancing often clicks with Ke\$ha or Lady Gaga. They don't want to feel anything other than party world. They want to sing rather meaningless lyrics and twist their hips in insensible tattering and have a fun, energized time. They become one with the music.

Music connects people, it heals people, it brings out people. No matter what language you speak, you can understand it. Understand it by the way it's sung; by the way the artists regurgitate their words over beats. We understand it all.

Music has a way of connecting us all; all of Earth's children celebrating as one, crying as one, laughing as one. Music is universal.

Music brings you up, it can keep you the same, but it can never bring you down. It's there as a metaphoric shoulder to cry on when no one else understands. The artists capture the exact emotion of their listener with their lyrics giving their listener a sense of togetherness; the feeling that they're never alone; the knowledge that at least someone out there in the world has felt the same way as them and that they are not alone.

Music. Everyone listens to it, and there's reason to that. If music didn't heal – didn't bring us to places where we can never go in reality – what would be the point in listening to it? To merely dance in a loop of irresponsibility? To just prance around an apartment, swinging your hands up from side to side and remain with a sense of ignorance? No. Music withholds a power – an electrifying power that can make the listener bare their soul. It gives people a chance to let loose and it's a way to heal anger management issues, depression issues, and it's a way to heal loneliness and a way to keep you happy. It makes connections; strong connections with society, with the world, with yourself. It keeps you strong. It helps you up. It heals you by allowing you to drown out the negativity of the world and submerge into your own sanctuary. Music is powerful, but it uses its power for the sheer goodness of the world. Music loves to heal.



“227” by Krista Masullo

Dust

Samantha Finch

I'm not concerned with my future
because I've grown from the ashes of my past.
And all the bad moments?
They are invisible scars that line my soul,
tiny pieces of faded skin along my heart,
that remind me of my strength.

I am like a phoenix, shining in the sun
of death. I rise from the smoke-filled ashes:
Stronger.
Better.
Wiser.
Watered by the tears of tragedies once known,
I became a better person, fighting
through childhood, alone.

I became a better individual
by not hating you.

Because I am like a phoenix, I come back
surpassing the expectations from before.



“Cherry Blossoms” by Andrea Garcia

1st Place Winner
Light Prose Competition
“The Speech”
by Taylor Vogt

Adam punched the bag another time. There were beads of sweat pouring down his face. He had been hitting that damn bag all night and into the morning. He needed to be at his best when Evan and the forces of Eden came knocking on his proverbial door. They were less than a month away from being on his doorstep and he was so out of shape. This kind of a drill would never have taken so much out of him back at the LAB. He hit the bag again and threw a knee into it just to vent his frustration. It did not leave his body. He had so many more people to take care of now than just himself. Back then he was head of the Alpha house, where he barely made any attempt at getting to know the students. He was a ghost to them, someone to be feared if he ever came around. Evan had been their main administrator. Now he had an entire police force, a contingency of stationed marines and every soul that lived in the Assisi Academy. They had all had a meeting earlier that night to see what the feelings on the situation were of the students of the Academy. Adam kicked the bag and then violently punched it.

Adam stood in front of everyone at Assisi: teachers, students and staff alike. He had even invited the Mayor and Police Chief to join them, which they gladly did. They sat in the back, wearing regular clothes as opposed to their suits and ties. They wanted to go unnoticed for this spectacle.

Everything Adam had been working for was climaxing in this moment. His students could either turn on him or stand by him. Either way he didn't care. If they wanted to leave this fight they could. There was no promise that any of them would survive. Adam couldn't rightly say they would, but it was worth giving them the choice. That's all anyone could really ever do for someone else; give them choice.

Adam was standing in front of nearly two hundred faces staring up at him from their seats that filled the room. He surveyed them all and dropped the script that he was holding. He couldn't use prepared language and speech; he owed them more than that. "Everyone, hello, my name is Adam Everest. I am your director here at the Assisi Academy." With that students began clapping. Several students stood right away, but after a couple seconds almost every young person in the room was awarding him a standing ovation. Even the Mayor and Police Chief joined in with the others and stood up. He had earned it.

After a minute or so the claps began dying off and people took their seats again. "Thank you all. Your kindness is well received." Adam cleared his throat and pursed his lips before taking a quick swig of water. His throat had been cleared. He had no more reason not to say something. He stared out at the room and all of the eyes that were now fixated on him. He just couldn't speak. Adam punched the bag two more times and kneed it again.

**“Adam kicked
the bag
and then
violently
punched it.”**

“Adam! Don’t worry about censoring yourself, bro! We know what you’re going to say and we stand by you until the end!” A boy in the middle of the row stood up and said. A roar resounded throughout the audience. Some students stood up again, but everyone clapped and hollered. They were a raucous bunch, and Adam adored that in them. He had spent his entire adult life being controlled by outside forces. These kids, young adults, were taking their lives into their own hands and standing up to authority by placing some faith in him. He needed to place some faith in them too.

“Again, thank you all. I have to say that I don’t want you to stand by me. Even though you may think highly of me, I don’t deserve it. That’s the truth. I don’t want any of you putting your lives on the line in two days just because you think I need it. I do need you though. I need every single one of you to do what you think is right. Whether that is to turn and run as far away from here as possible or stand and fight until the very last drop of your blood is spilt. You have to know how serious the implications of your actions are.” You could hear a pin drop in that hall. Not a soul was moving or going to say anything to interrupt the person next to them from hearing.

“I don’t want you to do anything tomorrow than what you want. This Academy is here for you all. If all you want to do for the next two days is sleep and never come out of your room until whatever has passed has happened, so be it. If you want to cross the Golden Gate Bridge tonight and disappear into the crowds of people vacating this city go forth with my blessing. But if you want to stay I will not stand in your way. In fact I will stand beside you. I will march into oblivion with you. I will slay beasts and demons with you. The darkness is but a veil behind which evil festers before it can venture into the light,” Adam said, pausing before he finished. He looked out across the room. The eyes that looked back at him were intent on hearing every word he had to say. Their minds were so porous and he was giving them something for them to absorb. This was his battle speech. “It is the duty of the light to venture into the dark! That is why tomorrow we will be working with the police force and military to cut holes in that veil of darkness.

We will make ourselves so bright that we will blind that evil. We will not go quietly into the night! No, we will rage against the dying of the light!” Adam raised his fist. The audience raised their fists as well and got to their feet once more, clapping.

Adam pulled back his fist and smashed his fist into the punching bag. It went right through the metal fibers that he had constructed it from and the metal beads poured out from the inside. The sound of the beads could be heard echoing their pings off the walls of the large gymnasium that he was in. He was ready to give that speech now.



"Path to Athens" by Samantha Finch

Little Blue Clown

Isa Lopez

Guadalupe.

You used to sit on her altar,
the altar by the round window, facing east
The bright *siesta* sun shining through its baked, white corners.
Its rays illuminated *Guadalupe* and the mountains of
flaming candle wax surrounding her.
Sarita would pray
every day
to lift her from out of this misery,
healthpeaceandmoneywellbeinghappinessandsuccess,

in all but

a swift whisper.

Guadalupe stared back silently while Sarita ended her prayer with a
kiss to

theFathertheSonandtheHolySpirit.

Until

the sun's beams began to dim,
dim, dim, dim, dim...

A venom crept up in every crevice of Sarita's body.

The flaming glow dwindled into a darker shadow

each and every day.

Until,

with a swift gust

they froze.

Only white rocks of silence remained.

The moon replaced the sun,
and alone in darkness *Guadalupe* stood.

SILENT.

Sarita turned blue.

She, a blue clown on the day of the dead,
submerged in a world of orange and gold rays,
a bright beacon ahead.

And Guadalupe...

Guiding her,

guarding her from evil spirits, like a shield on her back.

Guiding her with every step,



“Meeting the Horizon” by Dara Thompson

1st Place Winner
Light Poetry Competition
“Light”
by Darrelle George

Soothing and warm;
comforting, yet strong.
What a sweet embrace, to be
wrapped up in enlightened
rays.
Now I can see once where
shadows
were my guiding light,
a tease of what things could be.
Now it shines through so liber-
ally,
refusing to be miscalculated or
flouted.
Not like it could ever be, once
all
of its glory was fully unleashed.
Its true impact is never known
until we are without.
It's never fully appreciated
until it has
stripped us of its discoveries,
leaving us submerged in doubt.
One gets accustomed to such a
luxury,
so much it's never expected to
not be there
until we can feel the perpetuat-
ing
cold, harsh grip of the creeping
haunting shadows of ignorance
tickling our tiniest hairs, which
have now been awoken in fear.
Ignorance begins to bloom,
being watered and feeding off
the proposition of oncoming
doom.
But what is this light?

And how can it easily become
so scarce?
Affluent amongst you one mo-
ment,
the next leaving you bare.
How can it be so easily con-
cealed,
like a mahogany moth so easily
unseen
on a bark in enchanted fields?
Then at times, so prevalent,
refusing
to be mocked or displaced?
When knowledge grows and
envelops all that greet it,
that's when the light shows and
indulges
in the minds of those who of-
fer it a hearty greeting.

But when it is cast away,
when it is refused or denied
by patrons under the sky,
that's when the darkness creeps
and slithers through, harden-
ing hearts
and making them unscrewed.
Catastrophe and strife, none
of which are new, instead it
fills
the minds of those who refuse
to let the light shine through.



“An Open Field” by Samantha Finch

Blind Visions

Fatuma Hydara

The sun streamed through the partially covered bedroom window and onto the face of Alaina Howell. She wrinkled her somewhat wide, flat nose in annoyance at the sudden warmth on her nearly round face and turned her back against the window. She snuggled deeper into the thick covers with violent mental resistance to facing another long day after just 4 hours of blissful unconsciousness. A few minutes later, she sighed as she could tenderly feel her conscious mind floating away like tendrils of smoke from the end of a cigarette. BEEEEEP! BEEEEEP! BEEP! She groaned spitefully, cursing Apollo for not delaying his descent across the sky for a few minutes more. She thrashed half-heartedly in her small twin size bed, needing to relieve her frustrations, but afraid to risk falling out of bed. She whined, "I don't want to get up. I don't want to!" She cajoled, "Please, please, please. Mother Earth. Give good ole San Fran another earthquake." She cursed, "Shit, damn, fuck" as she eventually fell out of her bed, hitting the wooden panel floor with a thump. She hissed annoyingly, scrambling up quickly to keep any part of her coffee colored skin from touching the ice-cold floor. "Fuck, OW/W!" she exploded as her head hit the footboard for all her trouble. Meanwhile, the alarm which had paused a minute ago, resumed his blaring BEEEEEP! BEEEEEP! BEEP! She slumped, utterly defeated, against the bed and closed her eyes to regroup.

She jolted slightly, startled, as she felt the wet moisture of a large tongue against her forehead. She scrunched up her nose at the waft of hot air intermingled intimately with Pedigree dog food. She pulled her head forward and to the side to avoid another loving kiss and instead brought her hand up to lay lightly between two small, pointed ears of the red brown and white pit bull laying comfortably on the bed above her. "Hey, Penny. Who's a good girl?" Alaina cooed and moved her hand back and forth, letting her nails dig into the fur gently, massaging. Penny, rolling her intelligent whiskey colored eyes, sighed and laid her head delicately atop her white paws.

After a few minutes of content silence, the duo moved to begin their morning duties. Alaina shuffled her way to the connecting bathroom, grabbing the ratty purple robe she received as a Christmas present a few years ago, on the way. She undressed and began to shower quickly, knowing that she only had about 15 minutes before Penny demanded entrance for her turn. Mean-

while, Penny trotted out of the room and downstairs to begin breakfast, as she preferred to eat before getting washed. Walking up to the purple dog bowl, she filled her mouth up with some water and gurgled before swallowing. She did it once more. Satisfied that her teeth were clean enough, she moved to the cupboard to the left of the fridge and nudged it open with her stout pink nose. Grabbing the 10 pound bag of Pedigree with her teeth, she dragged it to the matching empty bowl beside her water bowl. Pulling the two sides apart with her teeth and paws, she opened the bag. Using her head, she pushed against the bag, tipping it over and pouring just the right amount for her breakfast. Finished, she pulled the bag upright with her paws and pushed it against the fridge. 'I'll put it back later', she thought as her stomach grumbled at the potential delay. Dropping her head into the bowl, Penny munched steadily and neatly until the bowl was empty. She turned her head towards the water bowl without moving her body and drank deeply, washing the crumbs from her face simultaneously. "Peeennnnny", Alaina yelled from what sounded like the bathroom. "I'm done". Penny burped in response and trotted back up the stairs to bathe. Entering the bathroom, she sighed resignedly. The bathroom was in a state: hair in the sink and in the bathtub, a toothbrush abandoned on the floor having fallen unnoticed, a dingy white towel laid on the floor before the toilet. Growling softly under her breath, Penny set about bringing the Class 10 natural
Finished and a little more satisfied, Penny moved to the bathroom where the faucet was still running lightly. Making use of the stool prepared for her particularly, she hopped into the bath. She moved under the waterfall and nearly purred in pleasure as the warm water cascaded through her silky red brown fur. "Penny, we're going to be late," Alaina warned sticking her untamed mop of kinky red-brown curls, similar to Penny's own coloring and Alaina's basis for her theory that Penny must truly be the soul of her deceased sister Penelope.

Penny mentally scoffed, 'Who forced me to take time to clean?' Nonetheless, she hurried. With one last rinse, she hopped out of the tub onto the plush, purple towel spread out on the floor. Laying on her side, Penny moved back and forth elegantly to dry her fur. "Penny...." Cuffing in annoyance, Penny finished and grabbed her towel. On her way out of the bathroom, she hung it on the rod installed three feet from the floor.

Penny looked into the bedroom for Alaina. She didn't see her, so she made her way downstairs. Alaina stood at the door, tapping her scuffed military boot covered foot on the carpet and glared at her watch before shifting her glaring gaze to the stairway, where she saw Penny. "Finally",

disaster down to a more manageable Class 2.

she huffed. "Let's go," and hastily pulled open the door, holding it. Penny strode towards the door with her head up and back stiff, offense slightly deepening the whiskey color of her eyes to a deeper brown. As she walked by Alaina, Penny paused and looked up at her. Narrowing her eyes, she suddenly nipped at Alaina's skin where the boot ended, before her black leather skirt began. Not enough to draw blood, but enough to show Alaina who was actually in charge, since she seemed to have forgotten this morning.

"Alright, I'm sorry. Jesus," she pouted, still glaring slightly. "You know that Thursdays are our busiest days". Penny arched one eyebrow, or what would be one had she been human, and continued to stare. Feeling that she sufficiently made her point, she walked out the door, expecting Alaina to follow.

Penny and Alaina walked companionably in silence down Bedford Road as they did every morning. Penny lifted her head and inhaled and shivered; the sharp, metallic scent of menace and the sour, sweet scent of decay overwhelmed Penny's sensitive nose. She resisted her gag reflex. It looked like today would be different. Unaware, Alaina stopped in front of the glass door of a small, single story shop nestled in between "Epic Life Designs" and "Good Vibrations". In elegant, old English font, "Penny's Fortunes" in white lettering graced the purple awning. As Alaina unlocked the door with the old skeleton key that she always got a kick out of using, Penny surreptitiously took in her surroundings. She peered to her right in the direction that they had just come. She saw the usual sightings of Mrs. Lee opening up her fruit and vegetable store; Jessica Miller walking her poodle; Billy Ray walking drunkenly home. She turned her head to the left and swept her gaze along equally familiar sightings of Mrs. Breitman walking little Jaime to school and Anita Brown opening up her bookstore, "Guilty Pleasures," which was often mistaken for Laura and Jim's sex shop next door. Nothing was amiss. For now.

By now, Alaina had unlocked the door and left it open welcomingly for customers. Penny entered the brightly lit room filled with books and charms and herbs and statues and candles. In the center near the back

stood a low sturdy oak table stained the same shade of purple as the awning. Sitting atop the table were 6 candles: purple, yellow and green on one side, black, white and silver on the other, framing the table. Each side also held a silver bowl filled with bay leaves, blessed thistle, bramble, juniper berries and mandrake root which Alaina had already lit. The slightly intoxicating scent floated around Penny's head as she took her seat on the large purple pillow behind the table. She pulled the brass name plate sitting on the table closer to her. Sniffing annoyingly, she leaned forward to lick it clean, paying careful attention to each letter in "Penny: Fortune Teller". She nudged the plate back into place with her nose. *Alaina, hurry with my brooch.* "Alright, I'm coming with it," Alaina responded to the mental command. Penny leaned forward, licking her lips as Alaina clasped the purple brooch around her neck. Penny looked down at her priceless brooch, the tendrils of green smoke swirling slowly and mystically within mesmerized her. Someone cleared their throat. Penny startled slightly and raised her head to look at the newcomer.

She took in the slender feminine body, covered in a tan trench coat. She took in the red pumps adorning delicate, small feet. She took in the fiery red hair and the moss green eyes, maintaining eye contact. How can I help you, the words were pushed into the young woman's mind. She startled violently at the sound of the soft, lilting voice in her mind. No need to be afraid, Penny soothed. Have a seat, please. Penny nodded towards the matching cushion on the floor across from her. What do you need? she asked as the woman took a seat. "I – I," the young woman's breathy voice trembled as she visibly tried to pull herself together. "I need to know what will happen at 10pm tonight."



“Trees and Clouds” by Samantha Finch

Playground

Jessica Vanderwerff

The playground was my favorite place to go on Saturdays. You would take me by the hand, and we would go there together. I tried to match my stride with yours, but I was too small. Even my shadow looked so short compared to yours.

I remember running to the swings (they were my favorite) and you would push me until it felt like I was flying. I loved to lie on my side and roll down the big hill where you would wait for me at the bottom.

I jumped off the rock ledge more times than I could count. You would catch me with open arms and give me your biggest smile. Do you remember when I got my new roller skates and I fell? You scooped me up and got me ice cream. You were the one who always gave me a reason

to laugh when I started to cry. Even when it was freezing, and the scent of crisp snow stung my nostrils, you and I would still walk to the playground, making snow angels when we arrived. I refused to leave until I was soaked and freezing. Then, when Spring returned, there was that sudden thunderstorm and I was so afraid. But when you picked me up, I felt safe and we went back home where everything was always quiet and calm. You hardly ever spoke, and one day I'll forget your voice, but I'll remember you always smiled with me on the playground.



"Dirt Road" by Samantha Finch

Vox Arts & Literary Magazine exists for the purpose of publishing the original fiction, poetry, prose, artwork and photography of the students at Pace University's Westchester campus. In Latin, "vox" means voice. Vox Arts & Literary Magazine serves as an outlet for Pace students and faculty in which their voices can not only be heard, but shared and appreciated on the Westchester Pace campus.

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2. Click Submissions in the top menu.
3. Scroll down and click, "Submit to Vox".
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5. In the "Quickpress" box, copy and paste written entries into the textbox. For art entries, click "upload/insert" icon to attach the image file.
6. Mark your genre in the tags (as either poetry, prose, or art) and click submit.
7. Repeat for all additional entries.

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