

## 2023 Teen Writing Competition Entries

Authors' names are not listed. Entries are displayed and numbered in the order they were received. Untitled writing is listed as the first word(s) of the writing.

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## My Pedestal

If nothing happens, I'm not thankful  
I crave action and progress  
I can't just sit there on a broken or boring pedestal  
My pedestal needs to be constantly changing, constantly improving

My pedestal doesn't need to be the tallest  
My pedestal doesn't need to be the prettiest  
My pedestal doesn't need to be the favorite  
My pedestal needs to be my own

If something happens, I'm thankful  
The action and progress that shapes my pedestal makes life thrilling  
I don't strive to keep it the same, because the same isn't good enough  
I want to be standing, moving, dancing on a forever changing pedestal

My writing goes here:

One windy night the wind blew hard and everything went dark except one lamp post. It shook 3 times slowly 1, 2 there was a big pause 3. Jack woke up breathing intensely. "That was a weird dream," Jack said.

Jack put on his clothes and came down stairs to eat breakfast "good morning jack" Jack's mom said.

Jack's mom baked him a bowl of cookies that filled the kitchen with a great smell of chocolate. Jack instantly ate a bowl of cookies with milk and then asked his mom "Mom, could I please go outside? I'll be back in an hour," Jack said.

Jack is going to go by the clock tower where he saw his weird dream but when he reached the tower in the distance a weird stench came out of nowhere and it smelled like an old abandoned closet full of old clothes.

When he went closer to the clock there it was the lamp post from his dream, he went closer to it and then suddenly a old man with a captain hat came and sat on the bench right next to the lamp post jack came up to the lamp post to see if it was the same one from his dream but then the old man said " have you heard the story of captain Tory"

Jack replied " no I haven't ".

"Well captain Tory always takes the lamp from this exact light pole and he shakes it 3 Times and his ghost pirate ship appears out of nowhere but this only

happens once a night at midnight when a child dreams of this light post shaking 3 times" said the old man.


Jack was frightened and he ran home without saying anything to the old man.

Later that night Jack fell asleep but he heard a weird noise that made him wake up. but when he did he wasn't in his bedroom anymore he was by the clock tower "it can't be it couldn't " Jack said.

It was Captain Tory, well that's what Jack thought but when he came closer Jack saw captain Tory was actually the old man that told him the story. In the captain's hand was a lamp. Then a cold wind blew and the captain shook the lamp once twice and Jack said "please don't do this," then he shook it the third time and the ghost ship appeared.


Jack looked at the ship then at the captain but he only saw a broken lamp in his place. But when Jack turned around there was a ghost pirate taking aim with his cannon on the clock tower then on Jack. Then the ghost pirate shooted and Jack closed his eyes and he heard a big boom and then he opened his eyes he saw his bed and then realized he was in his room and all of this was all a dream.





*The best thing about a temporary solution,  
Is that it's permanent;*

*A zip-tie,  
A roll of duct tape,  
A band-aid which is all too small for this  
wound.*



*We need more than a band-aid.  
Drive safely and with dried eyes, please.*

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## School; What they don't teach

The English lesson doesn't teach that *I am* is a complete sentence

The Math lesson doesn't teach  $1+1$  doesn't always equal 2

The Science lesson doesn't teach *I was put here* to do something great

The Speech lesson doesn't teach me to be loud and proud of who *I am*

The Art lesson doesn't teach there is no right or wrong way to make, create

The History lesson doesn't teach to remember your past, your present, your future

The lessons don't teach me

*Who I am*

*I taught myself*

I never knew my real parents, and when I asked my foster parents, they always looked at each other before one of them said, "you have us, you don't need whoever they are, anyways they just left you" tonight I had enough I was getting answers, with or without their help.

I stayed up all night contemplating what I was going to do. I finally had an idea in what I believe was the witching hour, and I knew what I had to do. I was going to pretend to be asleep, so I did just that. And on that que my foster parents came into my room, when they began to walk closer to me, I felt my heart going faster, but I managed to pull myself together in the nick of time. I could feel the chill of their bodies leaning over me, but I wasn't about to let that blow my cover. I waited and waited for them to move, in what felt like an eternity, but just when I thought it would never end it did. I heard their footsteps change from an old carpet into the fresh new wood floor, the only thing I didn't hear is the click clack click of the door shutting. One moment it was eerily quiet, the next it wasn't, the room filled with the "whisper" of my foster parents.

My foster parents finally finished talking, but what they said made no sense. I reached to my neck just to be sure of what I was hearing, and that just confirmed everything. I was always sure that my foster parents were monsters, but now that seems like an understatement.

Since I was little I had always been a fan of history, but mine was never something I could learn about until now, I reached into my school bag where I had hidden my book of mythology, my foster parents never went into my school bag, so that was the perfect place to keep my belongings from unwanted viewers. I found it instantly but had trouble finding out where in the book related most to my story, but then I found it. I am a god. Well at least partly anyway. But that's the least of my worries now. They took me. They wanted to sell me off, get a reward for finding me. But I have something they don't, I have knowledge, and that was my key to survival.

In the morning when I was going to leave for school, I knew what I had to do. I was going beyond; I was going outside into the world beyond the place where I grew up. I went the same way to school I normally do, being careful not to rouse suspicion. When it was lunchtime I went to my school nurse, and I was preparing to tell her I wasn't feeling well, (in all actuality I lied). I knew she would send me home, that's what she does, or at least did. Finally, I was called into her office. When I went in there was a surprise waiting. My "foster parents" were there, and my heart sank, I don't know if it was just me, but something seemed off, my foster parents never paid any attention to me, and just out of the blue they seemed to care at least in front of the nurse. The strangest part of all of this is this itself. Nothing made me more confused than ever in my lifetime, which I guess is going to have to withstand some pretty tough times.

I now know that people, or gods can be deceiving. My foster parents were a living nightmare, but it turns out that they helped reunion me with my family, the scar on my neck was actually a birthmark passed down to track us down. There's a lot more than what meets the eye.



# And Then We're Gone

Won't you let me tell you a story? It will only take a moment.

There was a little porcelain ballerina, spinning and spinning and spinning and- I think she made herself sick, but she never said anything. She only spun, only when looked at, only with her eyes closed. But she always did that, spinning around, with her eyes closed, and people got bored of it after a while and they stopped coming to see her. Eventually she stopped spinning altogether and just stood there. Still.

Ivy grew up her legs and bound them together as she stood there and rusted, all because no one saw her.

And her eyes stayed closed.

There was another girl, who hated her mouth. You would too, if you saw it. It was bruised from all the unwanted kisses she got. She always wore a flowered mask to cover it. Her lover would always tell her to get rid of the mask, but she refused. One day, her lover lost his temper, and took the mask in his bloody, violent hands, and ripped it off.

The next day, he woke up to an empty bed, and walked into the kitchen. He saw her with the mask on again. He tried to rip it off, but realized then and there she had sewed it on her face and it would never come off.

And the ballerina never opened her eyes.

A little past the river there, you'll see the house of a man who had his insides ripped out as a child. He drinks all the time now, and holds in tears and words, all in an effort to be full when he sees his husband again.

Don't tell him his husband never wants to see him again, I don't know if he could stand it.

And the ballerina never opened her eyes.

And the girl never took off her mask.

I think, somewhere in the haze of everything, there was a child. We forget about them often, there's a lot of stories we forget about, but they were standing in front of a tree, just staring at it. They lost something in the branches. I like to think it was a part of their soul, but you can ignore me. Anyways, all they did was stare at the branches, and hope it would come back down.

Their feet turned into roots and they still stood there, waiting for it to come back down.

And the ballerina kept her eyes closed.

And the girl kept her mask on.

And the man kept drinking.

This all seems so pointless, doesn't it? These little stories of people with no names. But they are so important, I promise.

My plan was to die of frostbite. The sky was darker than crayons that night, and nothing really made any sense, not even that analogy. I had found a railroad track, and had begun following it. It was dusk when I found her.

In a valley, surrounded by trees. She was rusted and her eyes were closed, and ivy was winding all the way up her cracked legs. She was still.

"Hello?" I had said. "Are you alright?"

She began spinning, slowly, because she was being watched again.



"Why are your eyes closed?" I cautiously reached forward. Touched her shoulders. She stopped spinning.

I looked at the pedestal she was on. "Aren't you real?"

When I looked up, her eyes were open.

One day, when we were huddling to keep warm in some alley, she saw us shivering and wrote on the wall with her lipstick, "Can I join you?"

The ballerina wasn't used to being real, so she didn't say anything. I just shrugged.

She sat with us and I asked, "Why are you wearing a mask?"

She looked out at the moon.

It wasn't until spring, when our little trio had stumbled across the little house a little across the river, that we met the man who drank to keep himself full. He pitied us, and let us stay with him for a day or two.

The girl with the mask noticed how he drank and drank, and instead of a lecture, she offered him the apple she had in her bag.

So he ate, and listened to our stories, which filled him up more than the drinking ever did. Somewhere in that day, we got seam-rippers and the ballerina gently removed the mask.

The girl was a bloody, sobbing mess at the end of it, but we knew it was better to feel pain than nothing at all.

Now the child. The man had become full of love for us and let us stay permanently. I was walking again, I wanted to see if I could find the valley where I found the ballerina again.

I found them standing there instead.

"What are you doing?" I asked, before I noticed the roots.

They didn't even look at me as they said, "I'm waiting."

I kept looking at the roots. "For what?"

"For..." They looked at me. I looked them in the eyes. "For... I don't, I don't know." They kept shaking their head, crying, "I don't know. I don't know. What am I waiting for? How long has it been?"

They were a child at some point. They weren't anymore, and whatever they had lost had lost them so much time.

I went back to the house. "Come on! We're going to go help them. Bring a knife." No one asked why.

Their feet were gone by the end of it, but I made some fake ones with what was left of the roots. They came to live with us at the house.

I think, at some point, everyone left. They didn't want to, but everyone has to at some point.

I'm all that's left, but I'm glad they made me live for this long. I wouldn't have done it myself.

*Did you tell our stories?*

*Yes.*

*What about yours?*

*Yes.*

*Welcome home.*



# Parallel Echoes

## Prologue

On a dull and rainy Friday morning in the unusually quiet city of New York, Brynne Solace wakes up to knocking on her front door, and she groans. She wished it was Saturday already; even if she had a day off, being an actress wasn't very easy, was it? When she heard the knocks for the 4th time, she finally got out of her bed, and answered, "I'm coming, I'm coming, give me a minute!" She hurried to the door, just in time to find her best friend, Nadia Jules. Her hair was up in a bun, and she was in athletic pants, topped with a hoodie. "Missed me, bestie?" Brynne gasped. She and Nadia were best friends since childhood, but when Brynne moved away at 17 to pursue her career, they met very seldom. Brynne immediately pulled Nadia into her embrace, and after a few seconds, she suddenly pulls away and slapped Nadia's head repeatedly. "Ouch, ouch, ouch! Why are you hitting me? What did I do?" As Brynne continued to hit her head, she replied, "You idiot! Don't ever scare me like that ever again! You haven't visited since, like, years! And you didn't even answer your phone when I called! I thought you were in trouble!" She pulled back, and Nadia gasped for air. "Sweet relief, thank god!" Nadia grabbed the nearest water bottle that came in her grasp, which was on the kitchen counter, and gulped half of it down in one go. The two then took a seat in her living room, discussing her sudden arrival. "I'm really glad you visited, Nadia, really. But is there a reason you came on such a short notice? You could have informed me about your arrival a few days ago. I would have been prepared!" Nadia laughed slightly, then spoke, "While I would have did that on a normal visit, this one time I forgot-and also did it intentionally at the same time. I actually do have something to tell you- I'm moving right here! Right into a house beside yours!" Brynne squealed with excitement. "Are you for real?! You, moving right here, right beside me? We could do so many fun things, like shopping, and going on late night walks, and sleepovers, and mani pedis, and-" Nadia interrupted her excited rambling with a big beam and a grumbling stomach. "Yes, I'm for real! We could do all of those things, but first, can we have something to eat? I'm so hungry!"

## Chapter 1

Both girls sat down after a while, with ramen and a glass of boba. As they ate, Brynne and Nadia shared stories about their life, how their relatives and other friends were, career talks, boy gossips, and much more. By the time their food, drinks, and talks were finished, the girls were laughing so hard, they were laughing with tears. "Oh my goodness, stop, please! My side are hurting now!" Brynne exclaimed, wiping her tears off her face. After a long minute full of nonstop laughing, both of them calmed down, and then Nadia said, "We should probably do something more active now, don't you think?" Brynne and Nadia both looked out the window, and the sun was already starting to set. "You're right! Oh, how time flies. How about we go on a



shopping spree? I have a day off, and moreover, who doesn't like to spend time with their best friend?" Nadia smiled, then answered, "Shopping it is!"

*An hour later*

Both girls were returning home in their car from a nice time at the mall, buying new clothes and getting some dinner on the way. As they were talking about all the things they did, Nadia said, "What a fun day it was!" Brynne exclaimed, turning her head to Nadia. "Oh, and those black heels! Did you see them?" Nadia sighed dramatically, and Brynne giggled at her friend. "I know, they were so majestic! Too bad the store was already closed. I would have bought them for you!" Nadia giggled, then looked ahead and her eyes widened. "Brynne, look out!"

*Crash!*

## Chapter 2

Brynne moved and slurred in her sleep. The pain she was feeling in her head was unexplainable, and her feet were throbbing from pain. She suddenly opened her eyes, and observed the place she was in. 'Weird,' she thought. The room looked so similar as hers- yet so different. It was the same, tan colored walls, but something about them felt off. She felt movement on her side. That's when she got scared, and screamed. "Aaaahhh! Get out of my bed, you creep! She got up from her pillow, but her head pained her, so she had to hold it with her hand. The person beside her got up from the noise, and looked around. When he got a look of Brynne, his eyes widened with fear. "Aaaahhh! Who are you? And why do you look so much like me?" Brynne turned to see who it was. The guy looked like the male version of her! "No, why do YOU look like me? What are you doing in my room?"

"Your room? This is my room, lady!"

"Well, then why does it look like mine?"

The man's eyes narrowed with a hint of realization. "Probably because you made it appear so! Now I know who you are!" Brynne just got more confused. "Who doesn't know who I am? I'm a world famous actress, of course! I'm the one and only Brynne Solace!" Brynne wore a victorious smirk on her face, and she raised her hands in the air, as if she was waiting for applauding from a distance. The guy said, "Did you just say Solace? Now you're trying to copy my last name and career? Who do you think you are? And where did you come from?"

"Like I told you, this is my room! And I'm not copying you! This is my real name and career! What do you mean by 'copying' anyway?" Brynne scoffed.

"My name is Braxton Solace, and I'm the world famous actor here, thank you very much! I haven't ever heard of a Brynne Solace!" Brynne was about to argue back, but she stopped to think: what if *she* was really the intruder? This made the girl very confused. How was this possible? How could they both have the same last name and careers? "What day is it?" asked Brynne. "It's Sunday, why?" 'Sunday...' Brynne remembered Nadia coming to her house on Friday, and all she could remember after going to the mall is a sound; 'crash'. Does this mean...? "No, no. How could I be? I feel so real...I look so real. It can't be, right?"

### Chapter 3

Braxton softened a little by looking at the fear on Brynne's face. "Hey-Uh, I don't know who you are, or here you're from, but I can help you out, if you'd like that?" He swallowed and tried to smile kindly. Brynne was taken aback by the trusting offer. "Weren't you just yelling at me? I thought you didn't care who I was." To this, Braxton smiled awkwardly and shrugged. "Eh, I had a change of heart. Anyways, let's start with a proper introduction. Hi! My name is Braxton Solace, I'm an actor, and I love bicycling and shopping! And you are?" He asked with a warm smile on his face. Brynne took a deep breath, then answered back with a friendly smile, "My name is Brynne Solace, I am an actress, and I also love bicycling and shopping!" Braxton and Brynne went into deep thoughts for a while, and Brynne finally asked, "Uh, Braxton, can I use your phone to call someone? Maybe she can explain what is happening." Braxton nodded, then handed her his phone. Brynne tried to call Nadia, but she was shocked when the only response she got was, 'this number does not exist.' She gave back Braxton phone to him, still in shock. "How could this happen? I'm sure I dialed the right number!" Brynne looked at Braxton, and she finally realized the amount of similarities in his face and hers; the same hazel colored eyes, the slightly tinted red cheeks, the mole above their eyebrows, even the same shade of light brown hair! "Are you done staring at my face? Oh, good, you're back to Earth." Brynne snapped back to reality, and immediately denied his accusation. "Hey-what-no! I was looking at our similar features and-and-" She sighed, then continued, "Alright, maybe I was staring at your face. But it's for a good cause! I've been thinking; we both have very similar faces, possibly habits, hobbies, even careers, and close to same names. But you don't know me, I don't know who you are."

"Could this possibly mean I've entered a different world?"



## The Fool

If only fools are satisfied,  
then let me be a fool.  
I will reach for the stars  
grasp them in my bloody fists  
and take them home  
to sit on my mantelpiece  
They have done their piece  
Shone and glistened and sparkled.  
Now, they can rest,  
and so can I.

To be satisfied is to be stagnant  
Never moving, never growing, never changing  
and in a world where there's so much to want  
restlessness is quick to sink its teeth into our joy.  
"Only fools are satisfied"  
The self-proclaimed wise men brandish this strength, this unwillingness  
to be reduced to what they are  
As if the mountain is not stronger than the breeze  
As if the great sequoias are foolish for not stretching to the stratosphere  
where there is no air, no hope for prosperity,  
only struggle  
and the hope that, for all their efforts,  
They will be successful in the ever-watchful eyes of the world.

I am not a sequoia, nor a mountain, and surely not the breeze  
I am no ocean or rainstorm or mist  
I am simply a girl  
Who dreams of success, yes,  
But also of rest  
Happiness, contentment  
Reaching the highest rung on the ladder and taking a seat  
Laying down not because I've lived my whole life running,  
but because I set a finish line and crossed it.  
And if they must laugh at me,  
with my bells and painted smile,  
I will laugh along  
Like the fool that I am.

**Fallen**

He fell  
Into my arms  
Burning my palms  
Like a dying star  
My Angel  
My everything  
My only light in this hell  
His fangs make a fool of me  
His dark, heavy brow and  
Beautiful stained-glass-windows-to-his-soul  
Adorning a chiseled ivory face  
Like a statue stood in place  
He amazes me  
I wonder how He lost his wings  
At what point did God say:  
"Flying doesn't suit you,  
Walk amongst the sinners now"  
And did it hurt?  
When He was told that He could not be saved?  
The bass in His voice can be felt from this short distance  
This beast is a soldier  
A boulder of a man  
He stretches his arms and yawns  
Putting all force in His fists  
He could squeeze a heart of its blood with this  
I wonder how gentle a monster can be when He knows His own strength  
I wonder how He lost His wings  
I wonder if it hurt  
My only light in this hell  
My everything  
My Angel  
Like a dying star  
Burning my palms  
Into my arms  
He fell

# Fishing Trip

When I was a kid, I got to go on a fishing trip. I had never fished before, so we headed to the lake in Albert Lea early in the morning. The lake was huge, bigger than an eye could see. I had to choose which rod I wanted, so I tied on a worm. I cast my bait deep into the blue-blooming water. I could feel all the what from the sun beaming onto my head and the shine on the water. I got bored and was waiting for the moment I got bit. I was feeling excited and impatient for it to go down. All of a sudden, my line was being tugged and my bobber started dancing. I reeled in the big fighting fish; it kept tugging and tugging. After it felt like hours of reeling, I caught my first fish, a crappie. It had all sorts of cool patterns and colors. I kept fishing and even caught a bluegill; it was a cool fish with even better patterns and colors. Despite all the fun I also ran into trouble like the hook set problems. I kept trying to get it to stay on but the fish would not stay on.

We continued fishing, having a great time enjoying the lake with my family. The sun started to go down, and it was time we headed home to cook the fish and have a great dinner. I learned all the importance of how to fish, what gear is being used, and how much fun fishing really is. During the ride home, I couldn't stop thinking about the fish I caught and the next time I will get to do this again. Fishing takes semi-skill, but mainly patience. As I think about that day, I will always cherish this moment. I will never forget the moment I first caught a fish as I continue that hobby today. If I find time to myself and need time to relax, I head out to a pond to fish.



## Is Med School Really Worth It?

Everyone wants to get into med school but how hard actually is it? Med school is all about medicine and learning about the human body. You have to actually learn about the muscles, organs, body parts, blood circulation, blood pressure, and attend clinicals to learn about these things and practice them. Students are stressing over the fact that it's hard to become a nurse, because they need to balance school, entertainment, work, or sports is hard when you have your own personal life too. But these kinds of careers are professional and knowing what you're doing so you don't actually hurt the patient. The specific classes that students are taking are actually that helpful, some are actually not that helpful depending on which area of hospitals and clinics you want to work in. Med school is expensive, tuition is high, student loans are increasing each time they have to pay back the intended school and government. The uniform, textbooks, materials needed for class but how are they supposed to pay for all of these? High school seniors focus on writing many scholarships needed for college in the fall. There are different types of labs that have specific types of medicines for patients to stay healthy and heal faster, but they cost money and are expensive. But why are medicines so expensive and why are they increasing at a faster rate? Due to this, not a lot of patients want to go for a checkup at hospitals or clinics due to the high rate of costs of healthcare that are increasing each year. More and more diseases are coming and healthcare staff shortage is real, coming in a hospital where only 1 provided doctor is available, many people are quitting healthcare because they are prepared to retire, transfer to a new facility or quit their job. Some people quit their healthcare job to do something else like teaching children or babysitting and so forth. If you're working 12 hours a day, coming home exhausted from surgeries draining their brains that in another 6 hours they have to do this again. Same goes for the emergency room employees getting up at 2 or 3 am calling for duty and don't get home till 11 pm or 12 am. Sometimes getting into med school can be the worst thing to experience because it is draining your brain into learning so much, while you're putting newer vocabulary and new things into your brain. Being in healthcare means that you're always learning new things, constantly and constantly while you're achieving your dreams as best as you can. Healthcare isn't for everyone but I hope that people can get where they need to be in life. Med school isn't supposed to be easy, it's supposed to challenge everyone depending on where they are currently at. I hope that everyone can achieve their dreams and do what they want.



# Talking birds

Once in a faraway land there was one human and a million birds. He had to find his way around but he couldn't he need so help. He wanted to ask the birds but he knew none of them would help. He thought that they couldn't talk. A nice-looking bird came to him, he looked confused. The boy wanted to say "hi, there I need help" but he knew the bird wouldn't help. The bird never seen a bird so he flew away. The boy yelled "NO, come back I need your help please!" The bird heard this he knew how to speak human but he didn't want to embarrass himself. He decide to come back the next day.

The next, day the boy went to the spot he knew the bird would come back for him. The bird came, he knew now that he speaks human. The he knew this information, the bird said "how manny I hep you?" the boy didn't understand. The bird tried again "you meet hop?" the boy was trying to decode what he was saying. "help?" says the boy, the bird nodded. "I don't know where I'm at, can you help me?" the boy said with sacredness in his voice. The bird said annoyingly "poly don't knowww", the boy rolled his eyes. "Just help meee." the bird flew away. "are you actually going to fly away?" the boy yelled at the bird.

The next day, two birds came to the spot. They waited for the boy, waited, waited, and waiting. The boy never came back. The next and the next still never came back but the same bird brought friends even though he never came back. About a month later, the boy came back to about 1,000 birds waiting for him. Once they saw the boy they knew he was the next leader for them. A bird stepped up "come with us my dear" the walked him to their queen. The queen tapped her staff on the ground twice. He walked in slowly.

"Don't be shy look at me in the face" the queen said. He look up he knew that voice, but how he can't think of anyone. Right now all he could think of is was I am I going to die? He looked up slowly, he didn't look all the way and the queen comes running at him. The queen hugged him. He was so confused. Once she notice his, she stooped. "You're a human right?" he nodded. She jumped around forgetting she's the queen. "I cant believe there's another human on my land!" she laughs. Then she had a straight face. "Are you ok? Do you need to eat? I'm here to help" she asked very quickly. "n-n-no I-I-m ok"

They talked and talked, until it was dark. The queen gave him a room. He slept like no other.

## JENNIFER (PRESENT DAY)

It's 11:30 pm. The sky is as dark as a raven in flight. It's the same color as my ponytail. I remember when I first came to the restaurant. Actually, I visited Laverna's lounge only once. Good riddance. You're probably wondering why I'm so cynical about it. After all, it's not like it did me any harm, right? Wrong! Well, maybe. You see, 20 years ago my older brother, Bradley, and his friends disappeared here. And other people have as well. Susano, one of my brother's friends, always told me I was a paranoid child, but I was observant too. Oh well. I yearn that they could come back, but that's unlikely. "Susano, Gabrielle, Fritzie, Casey, Charlie, and Bradley. Wherever you are, I hope you're having the time of your life." I almost cry, remembering that Susano was miserable before his disappearance because someone killed his beloved cat. "Oh well, I should turn back. It's getting late." I'm about to head home when I see a silhouette near the restaurant. "That's weird. Isn't it closed now?" They look around to see if anyone's there. Knowing that if I'm seen I could get in trouble, I hide in a nearby bush. The person (if they are one) doesn't see me and heads inside. "Okay, that's kinda creepy." I know I shouldn't, but I decided I'm going inside as well to see who it is. Maybe they're connected to the disappearances. Or they could be the kidnapper! I grab a piece of debris near me for protection, get out of the bush, and head inside. Let's do this.

## LAVERNA (20 YEARS AGO)

Why, Hello there! I'm Laverna. You must be hungry. Sit and eat something. Am I the founder of Laverna's Lounge? Why, yes! Ooh, hold that thought. I've got work. Oh, you want to come? Oh, you can't... actually it's fine. Just eat something so you'll look like a customer. I then proceed to put on my signature costume and go on stage. "Hello, folks! It's me, Laverna Lynx! Today's a very special day! It's Bradley's Birthday! Happy birthday, Bradley! I've got food to make and people to greet folks, but I'll be in the audience if you need me!" Cheers of all ages erupt from the audience. I smirk, knowing how naive they are. I mean, they're cheering for someone who isn't even real? I leave the stage and look around. Then I remember. "Bradley! Of course!" I look around and see him. He's a redhead with green eyes and a white and red shirt with his friends. One is a blond boy with cerulean eyes, a yellow hoodie, and a bib. Considering he's 10, that's rough. I almost feel bad for him. Almost. There's a blonde kid in a yellow dress, a girl with scruffy red hair, one yellow eye and one arm, a black haired boy in a black sweater, and a brunette with blue eyes and a brown skirt and shirt (Yeesh, kids. Have variety.) The final one's younger than them with shiny black hair and a pretty purple dress. She says nothing but draws. I approach them and say "Hello there, Children! What are your names?" I give Bradley a knowing smile while his friends tell me their names. The blonde boy is Susano, the black haired boy is Charlie, the redhead is Fritzie, the brunette is Gabrielle, and the blonde kid is Charlie. The purple dress girl says nothing and avoids eye contact. Aw, she's shy. "That my sister, Jennifer," Bradley tells me.



Aw, she's cute. "I've got goody bags for your birthday, Bradley. I'll go get them. Do you all wanna come with me?" They all nod excitedly, except for Jennifer. Oh well. You'll be next, Jennifer.

"Then come on!" We all except Jennifer head backstage.

"Wait a minute! If the door says employees only, how are we allowed?" Charlie questioned.

"Well, you're with me, kids!" Charlie still seemed unsure. After a while, we entered a dark room filled with torture devices. Gabrielle asked with skepticism "W-w-why does this place l-l-l-look like a serial killer's r-r-r-r-room?" Uh oh.

"Why, you silly girl! They're just props!"

"Y-y-y-yeah right," she muttered. I'd better make this quick. Who should I start with? Then the idea seemed perfect: Bradley.

"Here are your gift bags! I hope you enjoy them!" I gave each kid their gift bag. Charlie reluctantly took his. Bradley was gazing at the torture devices. I smiled while quietly locking the door. Let's do this. "Y'know, I bet this'll be a birthday to remember, Bradley." He nodded, clearly more interested in the torture devices. "Do you wanna know something funny?" He nodded again. I grabbed a sharp knife from my pocket and got ready to stab him.

"Bradley, look out!" Charlie cried. But it was too late.

"I literally backstabbed you!" I told him cheerfully. He looked at me, horrified before falling to the floor. Blood started gushing out of his corpse.

"Let us out!" cried Susano. Fritzie tried kicking the door open, but I locked it.

"Well, it was nice meeting you all, children! Tell Bradley happy Birthday!" They all shrieked, but no one heard them. In 10 minutes, they were dead. I washed myself, changed, and got ready to trick Jennifer. When I came out, Jennifer asked "Where are they?"

"They're inside enjoying their goodie bags. Wanna see them?" Instead of going inside, she ran out of the restaurant. I'm still enraged that I let her escape. Oh, did you expect me to be a murderer? Did you expect the friendly blonde girl to be the villain? While I do run the restaurant for money, it's mainly to kill people through manipulation, weapons,... and food like the hamburger you're eating. Oh, you feel faint? You don't say! Well, since you're dying I'll tell you three murder tips: make it quick as you can, never get haughty, and think of everything. Otherwise, you'll be caught right in your own trap.

I could hear the clock ticking "Tick-tock tick-tock." It kept going, I kept waiting, and waiting, and waiting. I thought my ipad was broken, it still wasn't there. "Tick-tock tick-tock." I grew ever more impatient. "Tick-tock tick tock." The clock struck midnight, I reloaded the page, nothing. I closed my Ipad and went to bed.

I woke up and checked my Ipad, nothing. It still was not there. I ate, put my backpack on, and walked to school. It was a cool morning with some frost on the sidewalk. Most people, like myself, wore heavy jackets and sweatpants, hands in pockets all walking to school. My friend took the bus to school so we would catch up when we went to the cafeteria for breakfast. My friend and I are both Thespians, or theater kids, so maybe she could tell me.

I got to school a little bit early so I waited outside the school until they opened the doors. When they opened the doors I went inside and felt the warm puff of air as kids piled into the school acting as if they wanted to be there. I saw my friend coming in the back doors (where the bus riders come in) so I waited off to the side.

"Chloé!" I called out and shot up my hand as soon as I saw her. Her eyes lifted and met with my eyes and she ran to me with excitement.

"What did I get?" She put her hands on my shoulders, her eyes filled with sadness.

"I got Ursula, and you," I knew I didn't get the part, but I had tried my best and would be happy with any role I got. "you got Ariel!" My eyes widened, too stunned to speak, I did it. Now, how am I supposed to memorize all my lines and the songs? The thought of me freezing on stage crept into my mind, what if I made a fool of myself on stage, in front of everyone?

First rehearsal was here. I was really Ariel, I was doing this. "Ok first rehearsal, to make sure everyone knows their roles, I'll call the part you play. Ariel?" My voice stuttered "h-here." Everyone else was so confident, ready to perform, I however, was not.

Rehearsal went on just as you would expect. We played some get to know you games so we would all feel comfortable with each other. I still mostly stuck with Chloé though, but as time went on I got to know more of the cast I would be performing with.

One day of rehearsal Chloé was sick, I hadn't made any friends, I thought some of them were my friends but turns out, I had made acquaintances, they all stuck with their friends. I tried talking to them during lunch and before class started, but they didn't really acknowledge me. I tried not to focus on that too much, but it was hard not too. I just went on as usual, said my lines, went through the movements, and sung the songs. It was a busy day of rehearsal but I got through it. I rushed out of there eager to get home and practice, practice, practice, until the whole script was embedded into my brain. I was not going to make a fool of myself on stage.

"Welcome everybody! Thank you so much for coming to see The Little Mermaid," backstage I was in costume, a bright red wig over top of my dark brown hair, purple seashells on a shirt that was tan to blend in with my skin, a greenish skirt to look like fins, it was a little hard to walk in but nothing I couldn't handle. "Our cast and crew have been working very hard to produce this play, please enjoy." Our director walked off stage the lights dimmed, it was time to start.

It was all going well, I sang on beat, I didn't freeze at all, it was smooth sailing from here. That was until.... The shining yellow light was right there in front of my face. I squinted, hard, I tried to stay focused, but no, it was no use, I had forgotten. I went through all my lines in



my head over and over and over, even other lines that were not mine, nothing. Nothing! My boat had crashed and sunken, and I was sinking to the bottom of the ocean, never to be found again.

"Beep Beep." The phone rang deep in the audience.

"Cough." The old man weezed.

That's all the sounds I heard in my head. I knew I looked ridiculous, it didn't help that the other cast was mouthing my line, but I couldn't make out what they were saying. I did the only other thing I knew what to do. **Improvisation!** The other cast looked confused but played along, eventually we got back on track.

"WHOOO!" The roaring crowd yelled

"Phwwwwwhht." The whistle of my proud father overtook the cheer of the crowd.

We did awesome... no matter how many times we improvised.