

Gateway Regional High School

# PERSPECTIVES

MAGAZINE

2021-2022





By Jaiden Ellinger



Gateway Regional High School

# Perspectives Magazine 2022

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We print **Perspectives Magazine** as a way for the Gateway community to express their voice through essays, stories, poetry, drawings, photography, graphic design, and painting. It is a forum that provides an audience for all people who want to share their thoughts, ideas, and dreams through literature and artwork. Thanks for all those who were willing to share their perspectives.





by Hailey Krassler





By Hailey Krassler

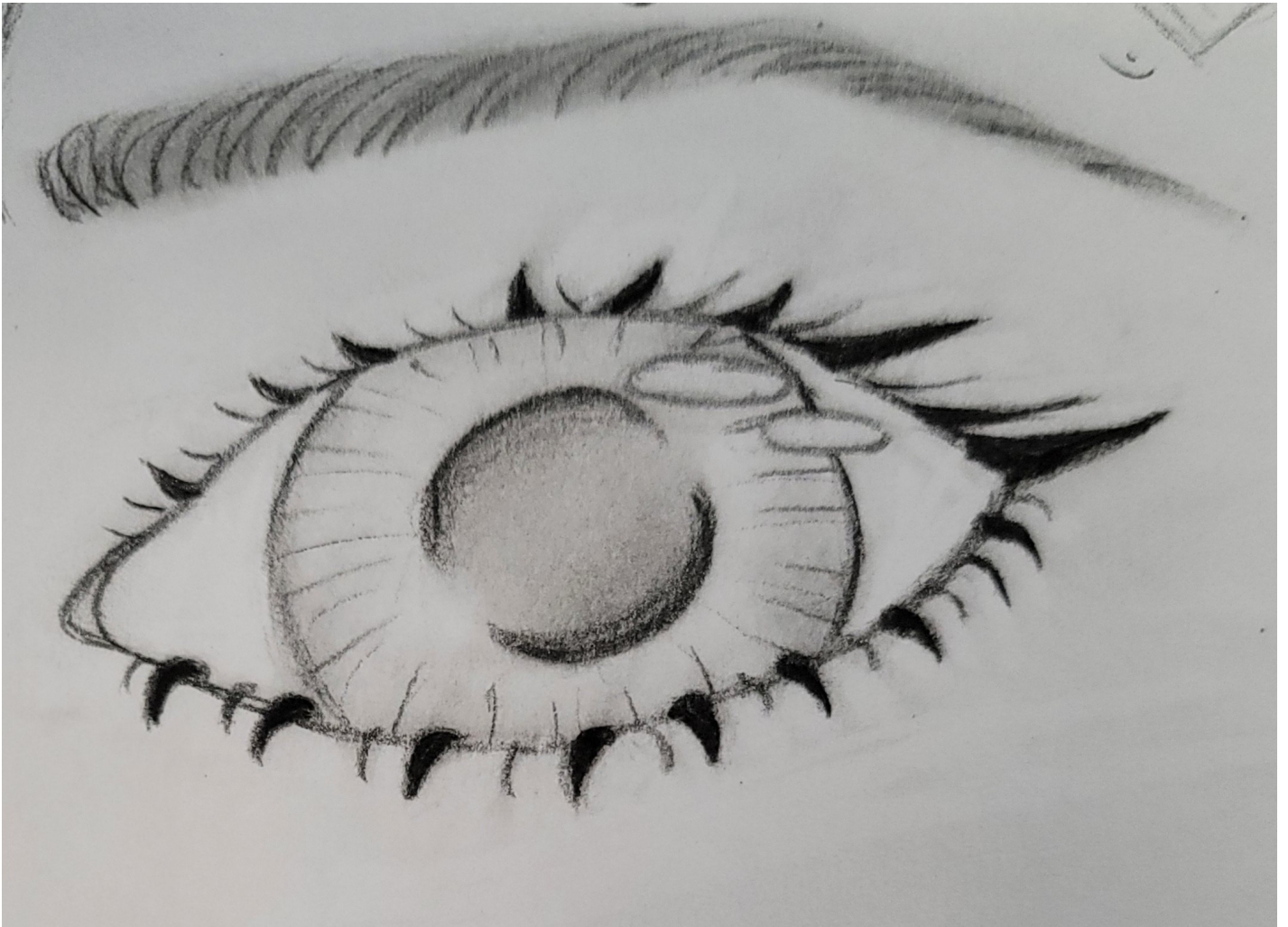




By Katrina Nakaya







By Jaiden Ellinger





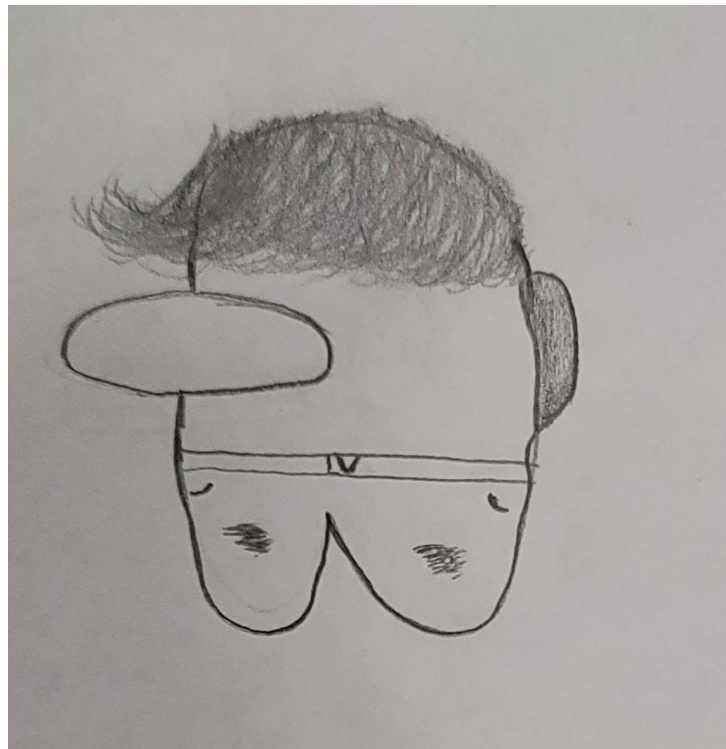
Richie

By Richie Doolittle



By Anastasia Glukova

By Anastasia Glukova



By Dominic Lucia



## Quarantine Poem Part 3 - The Final Stretch

By Allison Berge

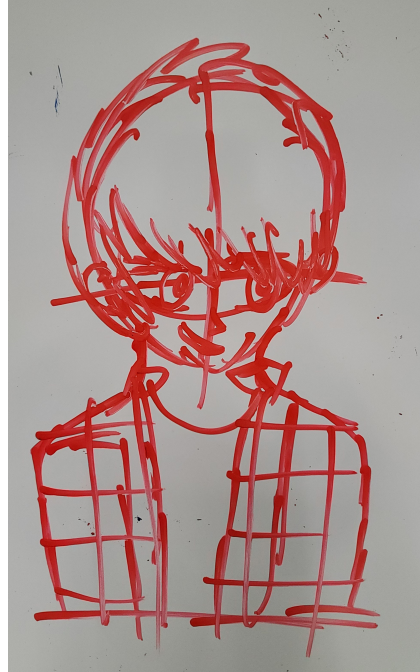
Masks off in school,  
Isn't that so cool?  
It was something we were all wishing,  
Look how many people were mask-fishing!

Covid 19's two year anniversary,  
Vaccines and boosters, controversially  
Studies of Covid numbers show  
Those cases do not grow.

No more hoarding the sanitizer,  
Restaurants can now earn money for their appetizers!  
We are all hoping things remain normal,  
Covid was just so mournful.

First Quilt  
by Allison Berge





By Hailey Krassler



## **RAGS**

by Nancy Mueller

When the warmth of the sun fades, the nights come quicker and quicker.

The leaves have begun to fall, crushed, crumpled, and crinkling under foot.

It is evening, long after the dinner bells have rung. You scramble to finish your errand by the light of the lantern and the dim moon. This is when the Rag Man comes. He pushes his creaking cart along the road, its rubber-plastic wheels squeaking in dirt ruts. You hear all this long before he makes an appearance.

His haggard voice is calling, "Rags anyone? Rags!" He continues the call even past unlit houses and remote roads. You know he will stop at yours. He always does. It is the way of life here. Every year he takes your used rags, those dirty scraps of cloth. Grandfather's worn winter jacket, long since eroded by the wool-hungry moths.

Like the worms to his corpse two years buried.

Your little sister's summer dresses with the threadbare elbows and ragged hems, much too short now. He takes it all.

You have no use for it. In a few months he will return an array of buttons, shoelaces, kitchen mitts, for you to exchange.

But that's not all he takes. You've heard the stories. We all have. The unwanted children and the pesky trouble makers. But also those who went missing, the ones who were never returned. Mothers' backs turned for just a minute, yet cries of the beautiful babes never heard. Old maid's tales they say, but still...

He doesn't do much to clear the cloud of mystery that wraps him. You can see him now; hunched over the buggy, dressed in his own patchwork of cloth. Leather mittens cover the fingers you know are caked with dirt. In this dull light you can't see his eyes, just the outline of where they should be. Tangled hair hides weather-beaten features, completed by a thick beard over his chin.

He turns your way, still calling his business. You nod, leading him towards the house. You try to hide your quickening steps and flittering breaths. You want to turn around and stare, but you can feel him on your back.

Up the stairs now, to the front door. You knock. It opens to Mother, standing there with baby on her hip. She doesn't meet his face, her glance always sliding right past.



Brian is in the corner shining his boots. He looks upward swiftly and then focuses intently on the task. Mother ushers you to help her, as she begs him to wait please. You follow her and baby to the kitchen, out of sight from the door.

Mother sets baby, wrapped in her blanket, on the overstuffed chair. The kitchen's light thaws you from the cold. You take the first wicker basket laden with a year's worth of hand-me-downs, mother takes the other.

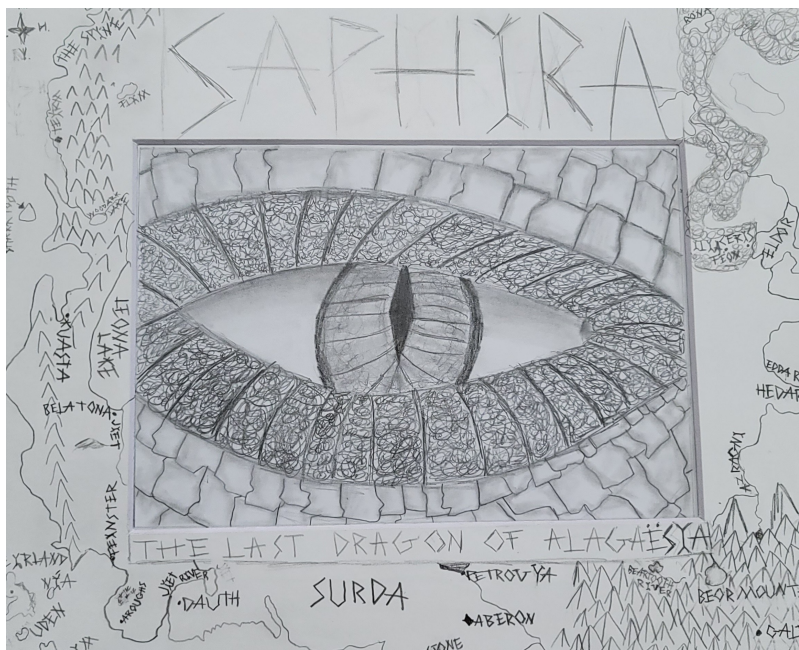
You both head to the front room, pausing at the threshold before you enter. Brian is still scrubbing away at his boots with a nervous energy. You draw closer to the front door finding him...he's not there.

No figure on the steps, no crunching leaves, no buggy squeaking down the road.

Mother turns to you equally confused. The next moments are slow, but oh-so quick. As if it were the striking of a match, understanding comes.

You drop the basket, its contents spilling across the floor. Spinning you race back to the kitchen. Brian is jumping up and Mother's right behind. Slipping, you grasp the door frame, stumbling into the light of the kitchen. All is silent, still, just as you left it.

But the back door is ajar. And baby, with those blonde curls, small limbs, and cheerful smile, is gone.



By Jaiden Ellinger



# Bystander

By Dylan Buckman

Bystander  
It's always too late  
Standing at the corner  
Cursed to wait.

Bystander  
Watching through a lover's eyes  
You're just a lonely outsider  
Counting all the lies.

Bystander  
A life with a heart on fire  
Trying to turn you bitter  
Sacrificed to its eternal pyre.

Bystander  
Standing at the corner  
Bystander  
You're just a lonely outsider  
Bystander  
Life's trying to turn you bitter  
Bystander  
Still looking for a helper.



By Vee Damon

# That's what she said.....

By Allison Berge





# A Poem

By Cynthea Papillon

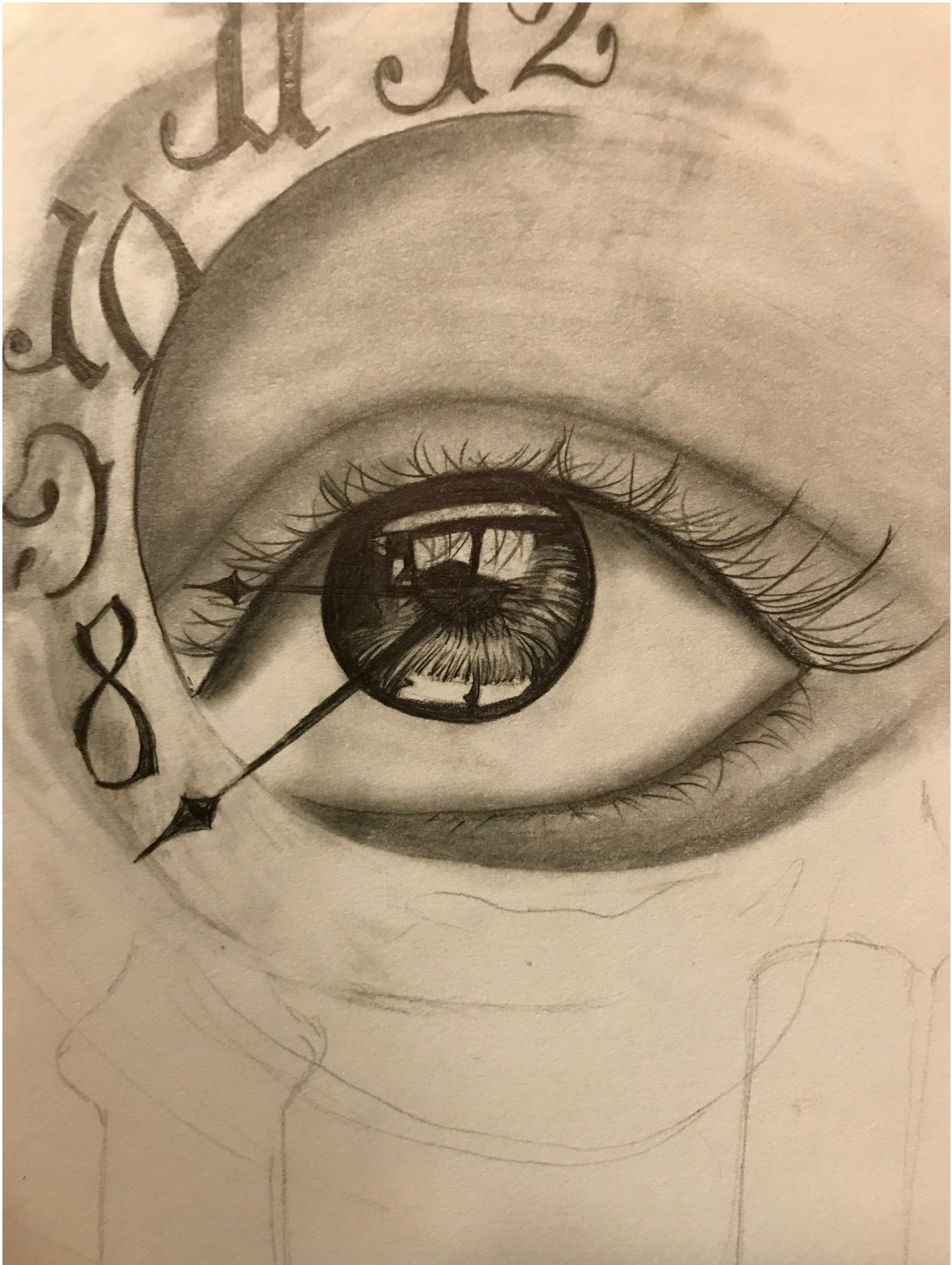
The instructor said,

*Go home and write  
a page tonight.  
And let that page come out of you--  
Then, it will be true.*

I wonder if it's that simple?  
I am fourteen, white, born in Massachusetts  
A small town called Russell in the western part  
I go to school there, play sports there  
It is unpredictable weather here.  
Below freezing on Monday and 68 on  
Wednesday  
Sunny at 8:30 not a cloud in the sky  
8:35 a typhoon has come  
What can I say? It's New England.  
Penguins in winter  
Fire in summer  
So I sit down and write this page:

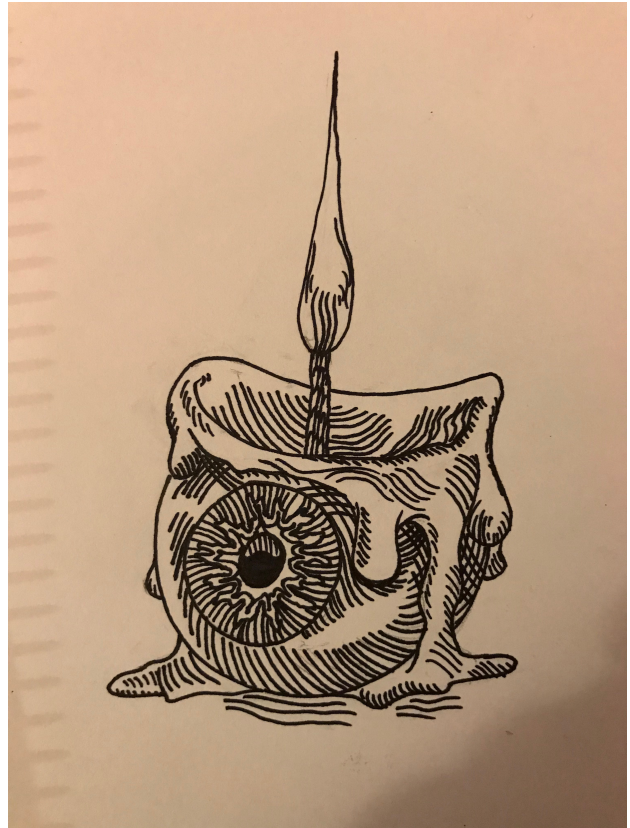
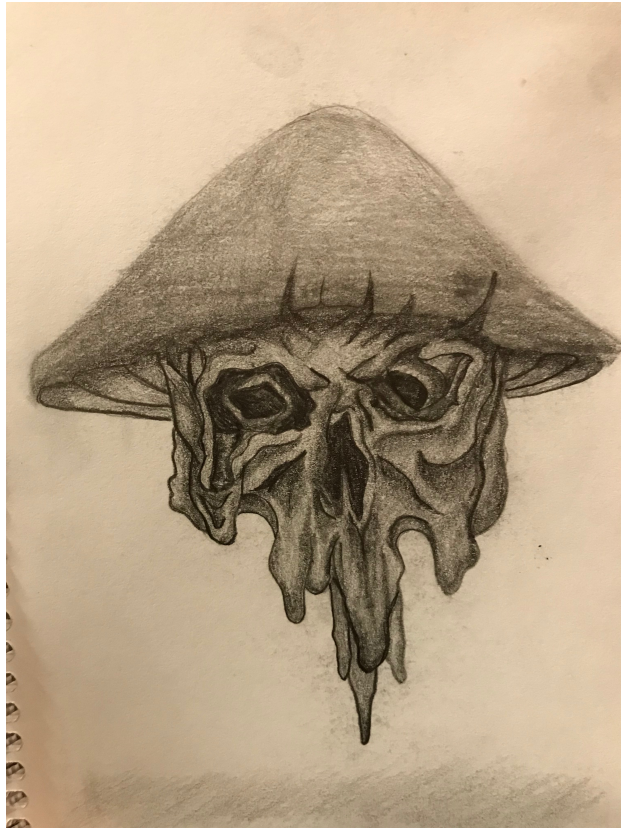
What is true to me?  
A softball player in a small town  
A cheerleader in a small school  
A president of just 34 people  
Well I like to read, draw, paint, color, craft, play ball  
Watch the Pats play in Foxboro  
I like to bake and hear songs  
Like a bee in the hive, No break in sight

I did not know what was true  
I put my finger to the keys and let it flow  
I am strong brave and independent  
Young and innocent  
A country girl with ambitions.



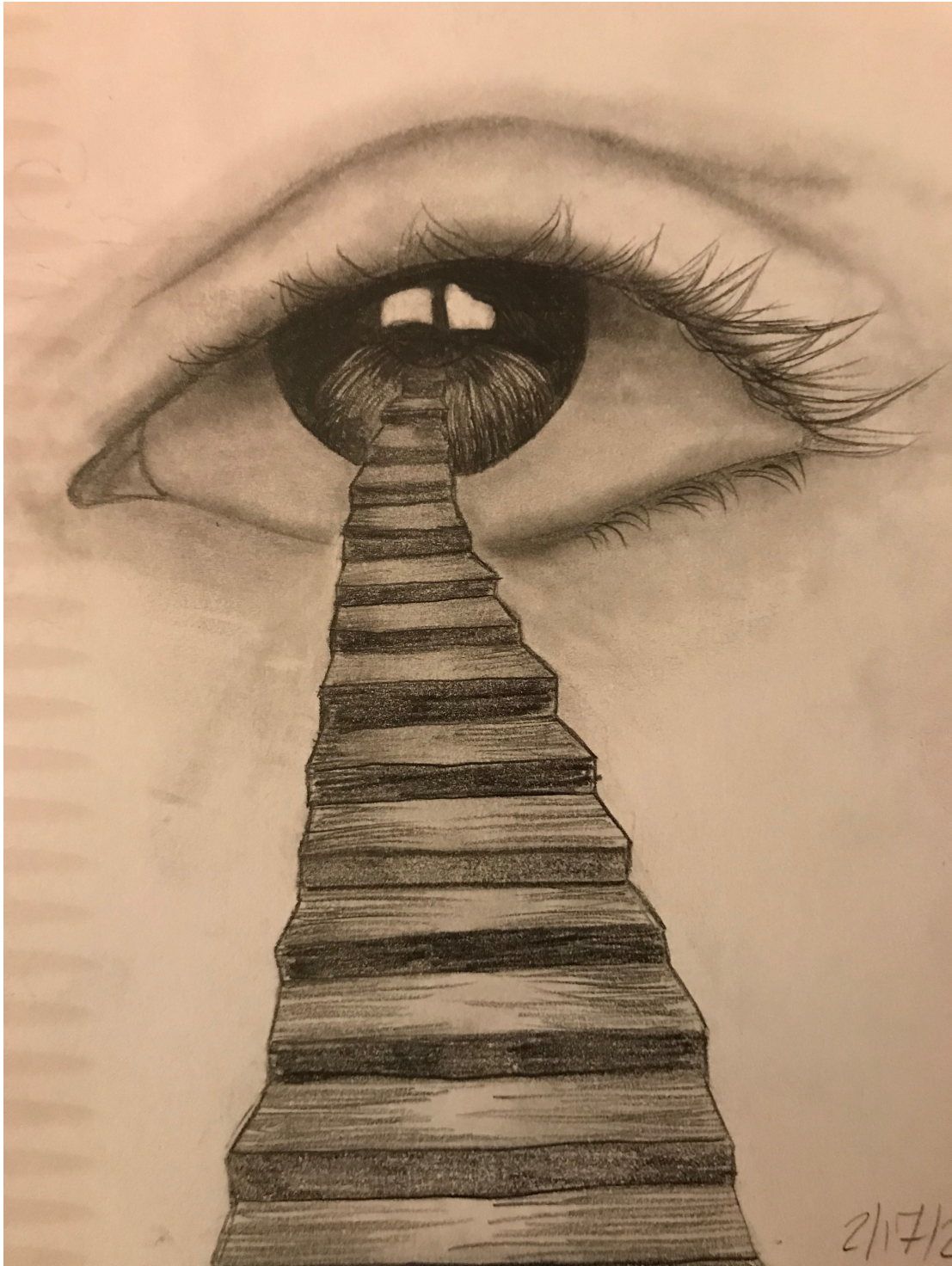
By Vee Damon





By Vee Damon





By Vee Damon



# Unmolded

By Tristan Mesick

I was but a blob of clay,  
willing and ready for a mold.

I had to look for it anew,  
as the first slipped from my grasp,  
before I knew how to make a fist.

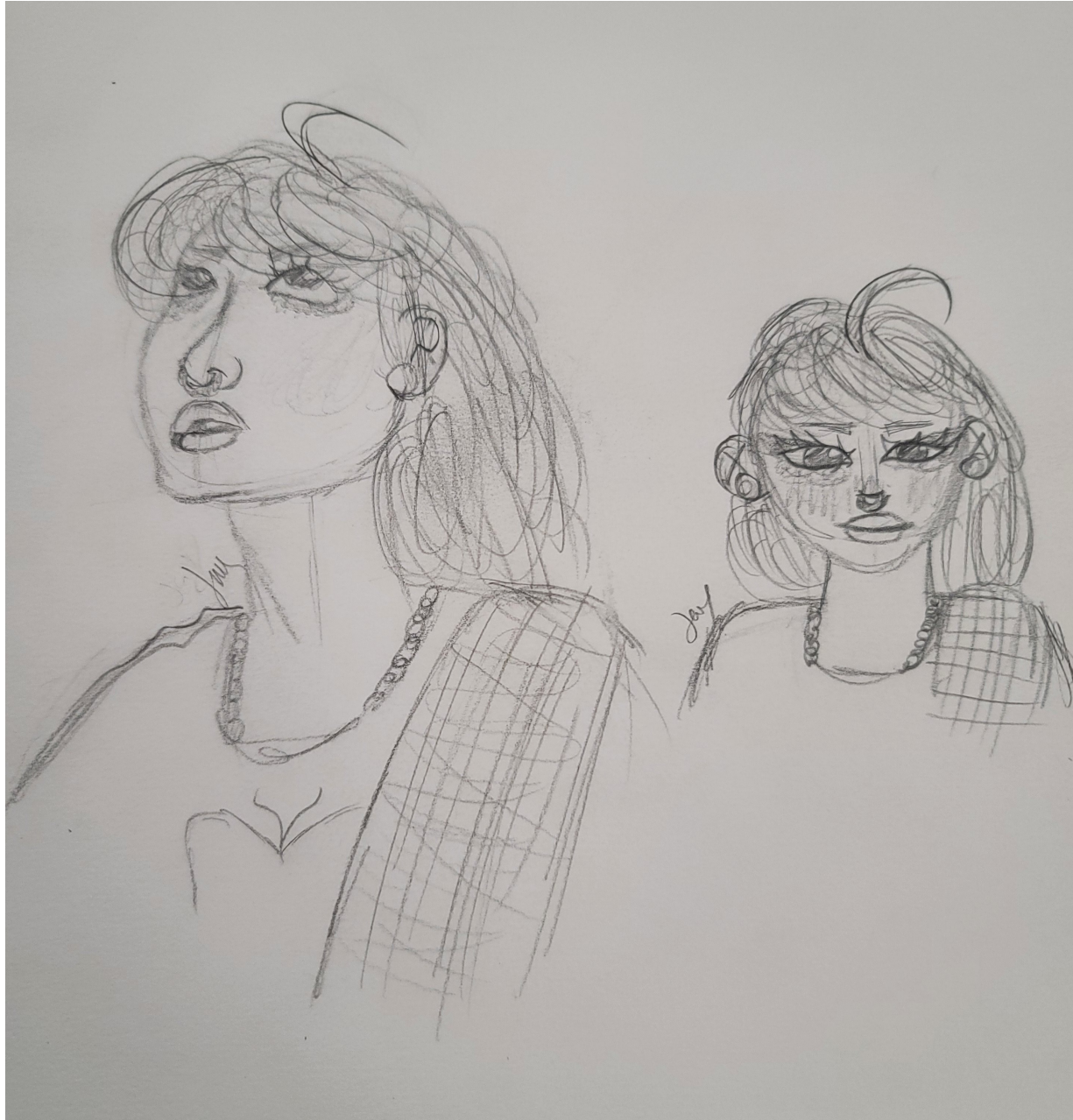
Then a new mold arose,  
with jagged edges and texture.  
Soon my willingness faded.

But trapped I became in a grip unbreakable.  
I tried to escape.  
Even the sun though, it almost dried me out.

The mold became anger.  
I would not become him.

He would lash out  
attack what I held close,  
even my creator.

Bloodied and beaten my creator arose  
to new heights.  
and rid us of the mold for good.



By Jaiden Ellinger



# My Responses to Thought Provoking Questions

By Meghan Gilman

I've always been fascinated by thought-provoking questions like "If our universe is constantly expanding, where is it expanding to?" and "Is there an afterlife, and if so, are there multiple?" Questions like these have no real answer and we can only guess what their answers are. Now, I did a little bit of googling and searched up questions like these that I haven't heard before. Here are my responses to those questions (since they really can't be called answers).

Without further ado, here are my thoughts on some philosophical questions.

## *What is the meaning of life?*

To give life meaning.

## *Does a person's motivation matter regarding whether an action is morally good, or does the action itself matter?*

I spent a long time debating with myself about this one, and I think that if someone does a good action that benefits people then the motivation behind that action doesn't matter unless the person is getting something physical in return. If a billionaire donates to charity to be able to brag about doing a good thing, then I think that the billionaire's selfish motives should be slightly overlooked because they donated money and didn't get anything in return. However, if a billionaire donated money to charity to be able to write that money off on their taxes then I think that should be seen as a selfish action because they will just get that money back. The money they gave to charity will help people, but the billionaire didn't truly give something away. In my opinion there's no one answer and it should be determined by what, if anything, a person gained from their good deed. Basically, I'm sometimes willing to overlook a person's motive if it has a positive impact.

## *Do parallel universes exist?*

Maybe. It's not like we will ever know the answer unless something from another universe tore into the fabric of our universe. However, let's consider this question as though we have scientific evidence to prove it. If there were other universes, assuming they were spherical shaped, would there be space between them? If there was space between them, would it just be nothingness or would it be from some other universe that surrounded a bunch of other universes like a Russian nesting doll? If universes physically touched in some places is there a possibility that they could crash into each other? What effect would that have on the matter in those universes? There are just so many questions that arise from the multiverse theory and I could honestly spend hours just thinking about it.

## *Is it worse to fail at something or never attempt it in the first place?*

In my opinion, the answer is yes. Not only would you be missing out on so many amazing experiences if you never try something out of fear of failure, you also will never learn anything. Mistakes and failures are how we learn and improve ourselves. Failing something may make you feel bad, but at least you learned something.

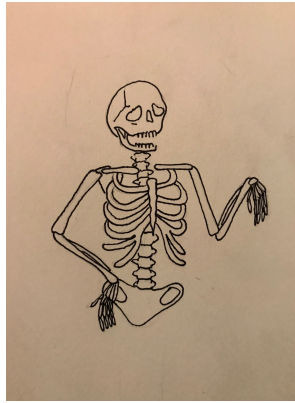
## *Is torture ever justified?*

No. Torture is never justified. Purposely inflicting an enormous amount of pain on another human being is never okay or able to be overlooked. Ever. There are arguments out there that sometimes torture can be justified if it's for the greater good, like getting information from a terrorist. Not only is that wrong morally, it's also wrong factually. It's been proven that torture is an ineffective way to get information out of anyone and that it's better to be nice to someone.

## **In conclusion,**

I hope you were entertained by my rambling words written onto paper.





By Vee  
Damon

# Forastiere

By Evan Forgue

Forastiere, the house of misery and pain  
Where beloved ones gather filled with disdain  
A recollection of previous times  
That might seem so far away  
A place that had you feeling confined  
With somebody who had nothing to say

And for a time that feels all too brief  
We all live in an atmosphere of grief  
Of fear, of sorrow  
For one who won't know  
The lengths we all would go  
For him

While this is all going on  
Workers'll remind us of the ticking time bomb  
Of time we have left to stay  
However, just please remember  
In this time of somber  
Show some empathy for us on this day.





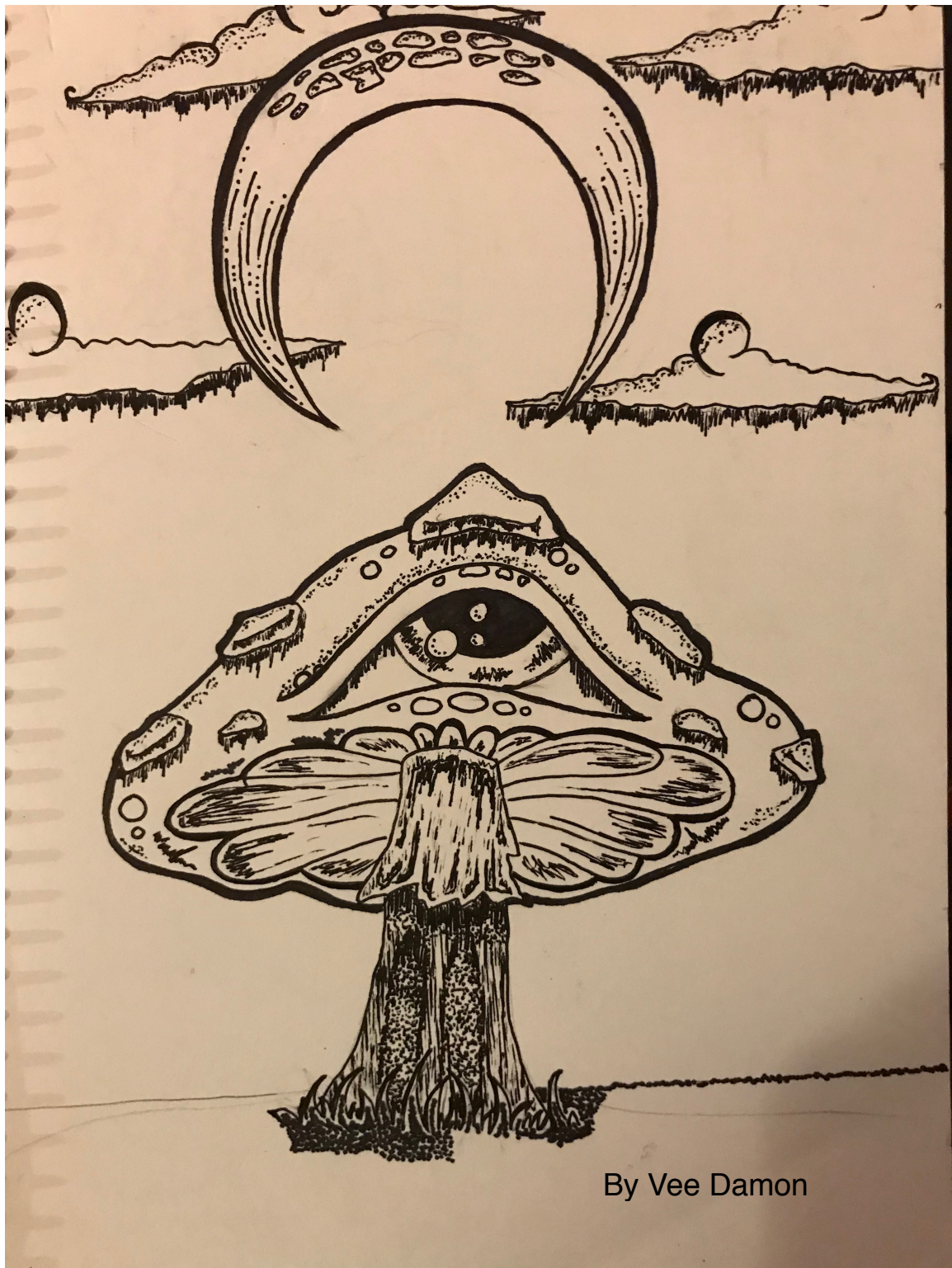
By Vee Damon





By Vee Damon





By Vee Damon



# Memories of Then

By Katrina Nakaya

Never cared about what other people thought

Rarely cared about anything really

Except you

Laying in the wildflower fields

Climbing up the old, sturdy and mysterious tree

The moonlight that led our way home

We might've been polar opposites

Although

Understanding, acceptance and respect

Was the only thing

That mattered to me

# **Student Commentary**

## **Because of COVID-19 I:**

GOT TO SPEND TIME WITH MY DOG  
HAD TO TAKE PRECAUTIONS  
MISSED A HUGE CONCERT  
LOST ALL SOCIAL SKILLS  
DEVELOPED ANXIETY  
BECAME MORE RELIANT ON TECHNOLOGY  
GREATLY INCREASED MY ART SKILLS  
LEARNED TO VALUE IN-PERSON EDUCATION  
LOST SOME FRIENDS  
HAD COVID-19 FOR NINE DAYS  
READ SOME BOOKS  
DYED AND CUT MY HAIR SIX TIMES  
HAD TIME TO SELF-REFLECT  
FOUND OUT THE BEST WAY TO LEARN FOR ME WAS NOT ONLINE  
HAD A LOT OF FREE TIME  
LEARNED TO LIVE WITH MASKS EVERYDAY  
WAS AFRAID OF GETTING COVID-19  
MADE ONLINE FRIENDS  
WAS ABLE TO SLEEP IN MORE  
LISTENED TO SO MUCH MUSIC I'M SURPRISED MY EARS DIDN'T SHRIVEL  
UP AND FALL OFF  
STARTED TO ENJOY BEING ALONE, NOW I DON'T LIKE LEAVING THE HOUSE  
DIDN'T GET TO SEE MY FRIENDS FOR AWHILE  
WAS NOT AFFECTED MUCH, EXCEPT FOR WEARING A MASK FOR TWO YEARS  
LOST AN UNCLE AND GREAT GRANDMOTHER TO COVID-19  
WASHED MY HANDS AS MANY TIMES A DAY AS POSSIBLE  
HAD TO MAKE SURE MY MASK WAS ABOVE MY NOSE  
MADE SURE MY MASK DID NOT MESS WITH MY HAIR OR MAKE-UP  
DIDN'T GET TO SEE MY FRIENDS OR FAMILY MUCH  
LEARNED ABOUT MYSELF  
MISSED PLAYING MY FAVORITE SPORTS  
WAS PART OF A HISTORICAL EVENT  
COULD NOT PLAY HOCKEY

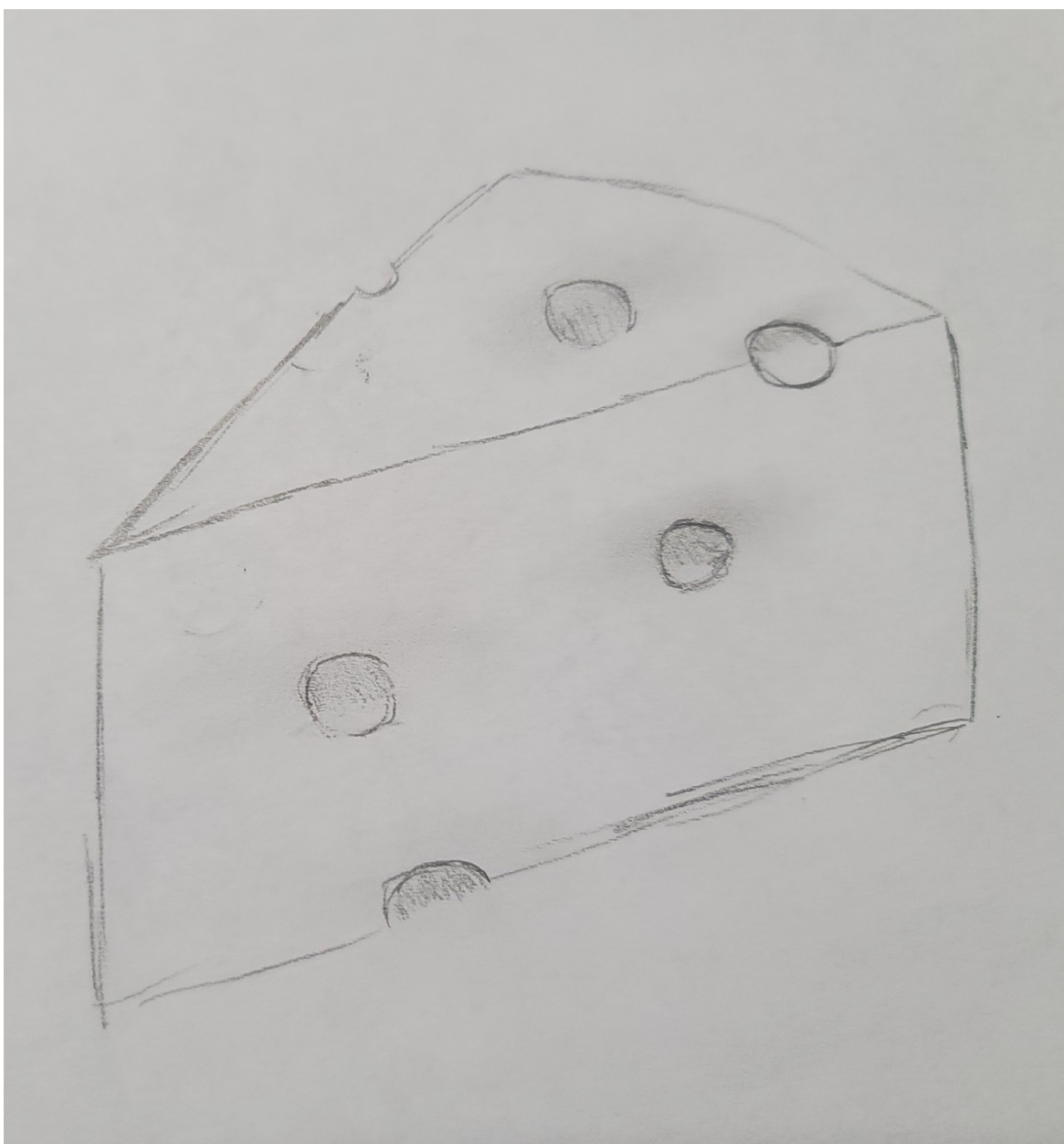


By Vee Damon



Queso.  
Me gusta Queso.  
Queso.

By Andre Tsosie



# Decaying Gradually

by Katrina Nakaya

The bright moonlight led the dark night

As she stood under the tall willow tree

The brisk wind blew gently

Yet it burned from the chill

Hoping the raven would arrive

At any moment

A shadow covered the tree

On a similar night

It looked like a big shadow

Although

It was the suspicious clouds

Hovering over the sky

Every now and then

She appears

Waiting endlessly

Under the willow tree

For the raven to come

Freezing away



# Our Tree

By Katrina Nakaya

Wait for me by the tree

Where we cherished countless memories

A safe place for us to be

Wildflowers engulfed the fields

The solo tree

Stood tall and lively

Standing across the lonely tree

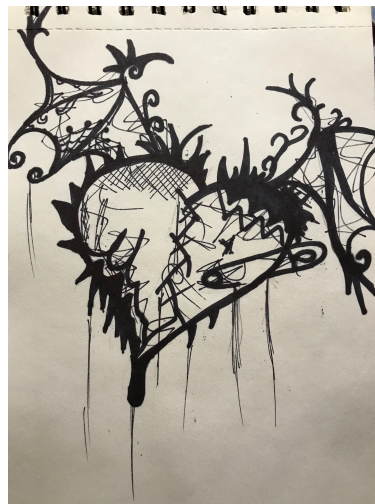
With a fist full of colorful wildflowers

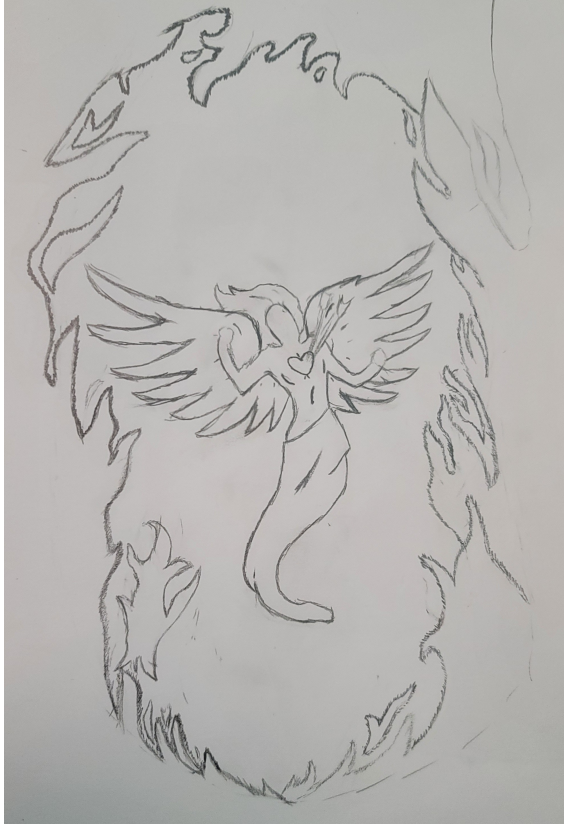
Greeting my grave

Where I lay six feet under

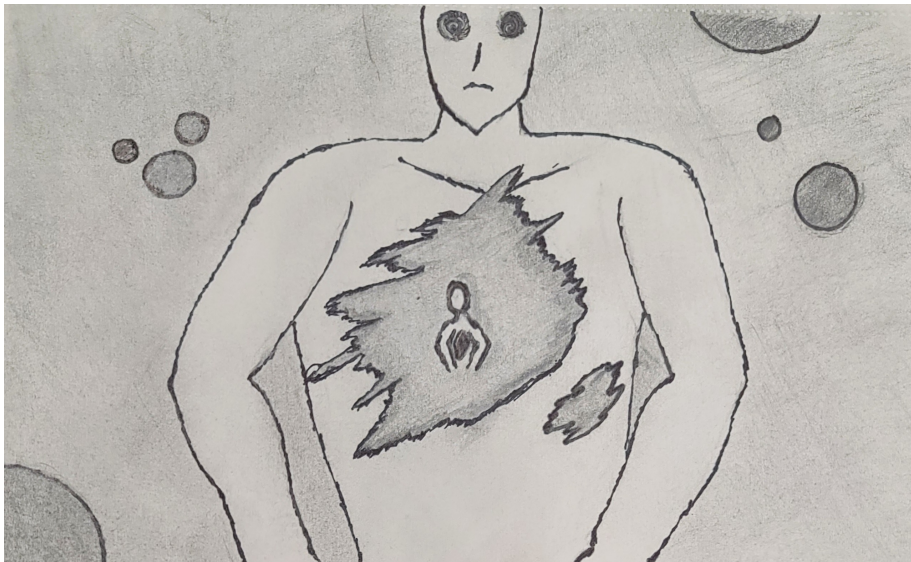
Missing you

By Vee Damon





By Tyler Hebert







By Jaiden Ellinger



By Mason LaBranche



# The Fame

By Tyler Hebert

## Chapter One:

I live in the slums of Vanquese with those deemed unworthy and cast out from The Fame. But, once every five years, teens are chosen to be given a chance to change their life and live in The Fame among the victors. Those that are chosen are taught how to fight in the gauntlet by a mentor who has been banished from The Fame for acts of heresy. Mentors were also the electorate for the slums because of their previous status. Many of those from The Fame had been considered royalty and trained by the elite victors. Today was the "Choosing." And, I would be chosen today, I just didn't know it yet.

I made my way through the markets, dashing between buyers and vendors bargaining for a price. I had to make it to the plaza before the ceremony began at noon. The slums outside the wall of the Fame were always busy with hustlers trying to sell items to naive Fames coming back from their vacations in other unknown lands. Other than entering and leaving the city, the Fames never condescend to spend time in the slums. The wall which they passed through was impenetrable. Its notoriety was known to other invading lands that had been removed from the face of the earth. The wall was guarded by elite teenagers who were learning their deadly skills. The wall also yielded cannons that looked like giant ant holes in the side of a mountain that blasted its fiery ammo. The slums avoided the blast radius of the cannons because houses and people would be crushed. Roads marked where the cannons erased any sign of existing armies. I ran through the road toward the plaza. I took a shortcut through the alley but as I walked through, dark figures appeared at the end, throwing rocks at the mayor's windows. I tried to make my way through without causing trouble, but it was Dan and his gang goons.

"Hey you got to pay us in order to pass this alley." Dan ordered.

"Why should I do that?"

"Because if you don't, the next stone is for your head. And you'll be late to the choosing," he threatened. Being late to the choosing had many punishments. The most common was being chosen for the gauntlet.

"I think I'll take my chances with the rooftops. You can't seem to hit where you aim". The look of his face of anger was priceless. Before he could react, I was scaling the uneven surface of the building. Most of these buildings had been there since the beginning of Vanquese and their antiquity showed with missing walls covered by cloth and blankets and gauges in the buildings that showed the bloody history of the kingdom. When I reached the top I only had five minutes

before the ceremony. I ran to the other side and began my descent. Four feet from the bottom my grip was ripped from the wall. I fell like a brick and bruised my tailbone on the gravel. Before I could get up, a fist thrust into my stomach knocking the air from my lungs.

"Told you he would be here," one of my assailants said. Greedy hands searched my pockets for anything of worth but they turned up empty. I knew it was Dan and his crew but I was outnumbered and needed to get to the ceremony before it started. I lay there until they lost interest and got up and headed to the plaza. I wasn't late, said the old watch I had safely secured under my shirt when they mugged me. It was the only tie I had to my paternal father. He had disappeared after leading a rebellion against the Fames by expressing a popular idea among we paupers in the slums. Many were contemptuous toward the Fame because of their lavish lifestyles. I walked into the plaza to see the ceremony beginning. Ashley, who had been my friend since we were four, waved me over. I went and sat down next to her.

"What happened to you, you look like you got attacked by an Aeger," she asked.

"I was mugged by something very similar, Dan." She laughed. Aegers were dogs like lizards that were obstacles in the gauntlet. They had the body of a dog with hard scales covering their bodies with clumps of hair sprouting in between each scale and had long canines that massacred human flesh.

The mayor grunted into the microphone to gather everyone's attention. "We are gathered here to take part in the hundredth Gauntlet since our civilization was erected. We all know what happens when I call your name, do not try to run or the mentors will not hesitate to kill you." The mentors stood behind him. There were twenty mentors, each would teach two of the Chosen that had the best chances of surviving the Gauntlet. The mayor called twenty before I paid attention to the names. "Gabriel Johnson, Helen Hearth, Alexander Galore, Ashley Hope." He announced the names which asserted his authority. My heart stopped when I heard my name and Ashley's. I was in a daze until he gave the podium to the mentors to choose their apprentices. And man, I got the worst one, Mr. Gilderoy. He quoted an excerpt from the Gauntlets Rules before he chose Ashley and me. I had heard from family members of those that were Chosen that he taught his apprentices how to make ethical decisions between weapons and taught them language skills so they weren't inarticulate at their victory speech in front of the whole Fame. He had a thin but muscular build and a handlebar mustache that matched the curves of his thick black hair. He had a strong jawline that increased his glare underneath his thick eyebrows.

"Well we are probably going to die," said Ashley. As if she had prophetic powers, she read my mind. I then thought about the posthumous award my



mother and brother would get when I died in the gauntlet. They would get a plaque with my name and my ranking along with food tickets for a year. Mr. Gilderoy made his way over to us.

"You will be staying with me until the Gauntlet begins in two months. In that period I will teach you how to survive the Gauntlet..." He then went on to make an analogy between us and baby apes learning how to use different tools from older apes.

"One of the most important things I will teach you is fortitude. This will help you mask your feelings and weaknesses from your competition. Soon you will evolve into killing machines but still be recognizable by your mothers."

## Chapter Two:

Mr. Gilderoy asked us to follow him to his home where we would be trained. Ashley and I followed behind him as we walked on the pale uneven dirt past the bayou to the markets.

"I wish we could switch our mentor instead of being taught by Gilderoy," I said. "I know but the rules state we can't switch our mentor or we forfeit and succumb to the environment outside the village after being banished" Ashley quoted verbatim from the rulebook. My head was full of indigence against the rules. Victory, much less survival of the Gauntlet seemed impossible under advice from Mr. Gilderoy. "I want you both to stop and pick two weapons. One that you know roughly how to use and one you don't. I will teach you to use these like an attachment of your arm and hands," said Gilderoy. "I will pay for them and then we will go to pick your other equipment," he continued. Mr. Gilderoy brought us to the section of the market that made their gear from highest quality materials. I ran over to a sword dealer. I examined them trying to find one that caught my eye. "You know that these swords are malleable right? They are forged with soft iron given a shine to impress a fool's eyes into purchasing a sword that would get the user killed in combat" Gilderoy warned.

"I have never owned a weapon in my life. The only one I practiced with was my father's," I said. My father and I had practiced against the wooden support of the old bridge overhanging the outer edges of town hacking chunks out of the beam. The old sword had dents and nicks in the edge of the blade and its weight was heavy in my hands. It had waves in it that had the visage of a gray, sad clown.

"Follow me. I'll show you where you should look for a real sword," Gilderoy said. He weaved through the market in a judicious manner, showing his knowledge of the vendors and their products. We reached a building with a blacksmith's hammer and anvil on the sign. He led me in and a blast of

unbearable heat swallowed me as we entered. Mr. Gilderoy acted unaffected by the oppressive heat. He looked at me as I wiped sweat from my brow.

"Oh stop being so melodramatic, you'll face much worse in the Gauntlet," he laughed amiably. I heard the rhythmic slamming of hammers forging bars of damascus into weapons. There was a sign showing the development of weapons like the anthropology of humans. We made our way to a stall with a monster of a man beating a piece of red hot metal into submission with a hulking hammer. He turned away from his work with a grimace, but it turned into a smile as soon as he laid eyes on Mr. Gilderoy. The giant's eyes had a whimsical twinkle in them like the stars but his hands were calloused from years of hard work and his body glistened from sweat. "Now what do I owe the pleasure of a visit from Mr. Giddy" the giant's voice boomed heartfully.

"We need a sword for my new apprentice. He needs a commendable sword from one of my most trusted friends, Angus," said Mr. Gilderoy. Angus turned and opened a cabinet. He then dumped an armful of swords on the workbench. "These are my best blades, ones that I keep for myself. Take your pick," Angus said. I looked over the pile of swords but I kept coming back to one double edged arming sword with a dark wooden handle with an engraving of the moon and sun on each side of the hilt, with an inscription in an ancient language on the body of the blade that read Αυτός που κρατάει αυτό το σπαθί το κρατά με τιμή. "He who wields this sword wields it with honor," I read. A rare power some people in Vanquesed had was the mystic ability to translate the ancient texts of the Ancestors. Both of them looked at me surprised. I was apprehensive because in fact, my power was illegal. But, I trusted my teacher and his friend to keep my secret. "Well that ability may come in handy during the Gauntlet. Keep it a secret. I don't need you getting killed before the games even begin," said Mr. Gilderoy. I picked up the sword and felt its uncanny balance and slid my finger down the blade and winced as my finger got a cut from the minimal pressure.

They called people with the mystic deciphering ability Ciphers. Most of those who were Ciphers were tried for heresy and hung or burned because only those of royal blood were taught the ancient language as a right of their bloodline. Those who were not of royal blood were considered demons or another ancient force that remembered the language. I always lamented that my father's death may have had something to do with my powers, because those in proximity of Ciphers were executed to extinguish the bloodlines that had carried the gene. The Fames always said that those outside the walls didn't need to learn the old language because they were not in the position to make educated decisions that require knowledge from the past to prevent recurring mistakes. If all the people tried to learn the language, it would encumber our growing empire, they reasoned. But, most of us were too busy trying to survive the slums that we



barely had any time to read or learn. Many loathed the Fames but didn't have the ability to organize a rebellion against the Wall or the Guard.

We walked down the market after leaving the Blacksmiths shop looking for Ashley. People moved from the street as a carriage was making its way to the gates of the wall. Inside sat a Fame ignoring the world outside the carriage. The man had a chubby face and a portly body. He probably never experienced a night in hunger. He was talking to a young girl in the carriage with him. She had an irritated look on her face. He shook his arms about making a point and was quite pompous. We could hear him speaking in a thick accent correcting his daughter.

We found Ashley looking around at an archery vendor. She was picking out a recurve bow that would have taken painstaking hours to carve into its delicate design. It curved back and forth like a snake on the desert sand. The arrows she chose had different metal tips, the shafts were straight wood arrows with pheasant feathers at the notch. She was already suited with her holsters with metal and leather armor. In her holsters were a small sword and throwing knives. She smiled as she spotted us in the crowd. We made our way over as she was paying for the bow and arrows. She slung the quiver over her shoulder. It was packed full with arrows but didn't make a shaking noise when she slid it on.

"I see you familiarized yourself with the market and its people." said Mr. Gilderoy.

She smiled again, "My father is a trader, so I am familiar with some of the vendors here," she said. Her father sold a variety of things. He sent people into the desert to scavenge for anything of value and brought it back to the sectors to sell. Her father's men would search the desert that surrounded the east and south of Vanquosed, but to the west was lush forests and swamps filled with many atrocious monsters and the north was a frozen wasteland. Most of what was out in the desert has deteriorated, but they sometimes found old ruins of homes and cities hidden under the sand that held artifacts and goods inside protected from the sandstorms and people.

"Alex, what did you choose for your weapons?" she asked.

"I chose an arming sword, a dagger, a multi shot crossbow and a new invention from Mr. Gilderoy's friend Angus."

Angus's invention was a wrist guard that held a sliding dagger, one small arrow shot and small hidden compartments for kindling, throwing knives and anything else I needed. It was hard for Angus to keep his composure when showing me his invention. He was ecstatic because it was his first working model. He told me that his invention was unprecedented in the forging world, one of a kind. He was going to patent it before I went into the games in order to

advertise it. He hoped it would rejuvenate sales and publicity for his workshop. He called it SCAD (Survival Combat Attachment Dagger). As I showed it to Ashley her eyes went wide as the footlong dagger slide out from its compartment with a “Shhhiinkk”. She asked Mr. Gilderoy if Angus had more but he said he only had one made so far. Other prototypes were dangerous for the user. I could tell she was repressing her jealousy with her easygoing smile but it showed in her eyes.

“I’ll make sure that Angus makes another for you before The Gauntlet, Ashley. It’s an invaluable tool to have in the game. It can be used invariably in every task.” comforted Mr Gilderoy.

We walked to Mr.Gilderoy’s home after picking up a couple more pieces of equipment. Mr Gilderoy’s house was large for the houses in the slums. It had ten foot walls that guarded the training yard. The walls were a collage of wood and stone and it encased the entirety of his land which was probably a square mile. We passed through the rough cut wood gates that opened as he approached. His home was a circular pillar with two floors. It had a balcony on the second floor that overlooked the insipid desert land. When we ate dinner we asked him questions about what to expect in The Gauntlet. But everytime he said “I don’t want to give you wrong information about what to expect, they change the rules and challenges every time. The only plausible advice I can give you is what I train and teach you about my survival, and my experience as a teacher.” After dinner Ashley and I went straight to our new beds in our new home and passed out. But I couldn’t shake the feeling of faith I began to have in Mr. Gilderoy. Maybe we could make it out of the Gauntlet in one piece under his guidance.

### Chapter Three:

*The sun was rising behind me above the Aztecan temple. Standing behind the altar was a boy with blonde hair in a buzz cut holding a hunting knife to Ashley’s throat as he held her in his iron grip. He was always talking but I could never hear him. He looked wan, as if he had seen a ghost, His mien had a determined yet trapped look. He would start backing away but as he did the figure swung his arm back and threw a white object towards him. He pulled Ashley in front of him with his muscular arms to make her the recipient of the object.*

Blackness. I woke up with a start: no boy, no temple, no knife. I looked around the dark room. My eyes adjusted to the dark room, a slit of light shown through the door crack. It opened slowly as Mr. Gilderoy came through the door frame. His shadow blocked the rising sun. My eyes stung from the sudden light.

“Have another one of those dreams ?” He asked. With a concerned look on his face.

“Yah I did, I bet it will go away in a couple of days though” I said.

“You said that two weeks ago, yet it has continued to plague your dreams,” He said. I thought about it now that it had occurred again. It seemed the more I progressed in my training the more it occurred. Mr. Gilderoy said it could just be my anxiety about the gauntlet. But it always felt real.

“I’m not worried about it, it will fade just like any other dream” I said. He looked at me skeptically then motioned me to the training grounds. I always began with running the perimeter of the wall. It was tiring at first but my stamina had increased dramatically since I had started exercises with Mr Gilderoy. He tells me I’m still mediocre in my other skill other than sword fighting. That felt like an extension of my arms. My worst skill though, was knife throwing. I never could fabricate the rhythm needed to throw them into the target with proficiency. Mr. Gilderoy had martially drilled me during that training but with other forms he let me progress at my own pace. Maybe it was because he had found Ashley’s and my competitiveness an opportune way to train us to our highest potential before the Gauntlet. Ashley and I always had qualms about who was the better at our new skills. We would tease each other whenever the other won or conceived bets and dares for the loser of the match. Often Mr. Gilderoy would make paradoxes that we never understood but he always congratulated himself when we made a breakthrough in our training.

I turned toward the dueling circle. Ashley was sparring with the dummy, its arms swiveling with the force from each hit she landed. Its head was worn down and the spring it rested on was rusted but Mr. Gilderoy didn’t care about the aesthetic of the training equipment. He only cared if it worked. He told us most of the other Mentors thought it needed to look pretty to work and increase their charisma towards the Sponsors. Many Sponsors used the cliché that stunning equipment made star killers. Even though they spend the money on fancy equipment, some are not taught the flora and fauna of the gauntlet. One of the plants that kills many contestants is the “*de morte ad vescendum carnes*,” meaning flesh of death. Its fruit is similar to a peach but contains a cocktail of sedatives and neurotoxins that make the victim’s brain dead. Then the roots lift the trunk and drag the lifeless body to the mouth where it slides down to the stomach where the acids slowly dissolve the body. Mr. Gilderoy warned us of its seductive scent which draws many hungry contestants to their doom. This could be an impediment to the Aegers if they were hunting us, because it would mess with their smell and maybe attract them to the tree instead of hunting us.

Ashley always was making visits to her family, but they were less than zealous about her mentor and training. She had told me that her father had



offered to hide her in a dig site so she wouldn't have to participate in the Gauntlet. Her father was always against the reactionary government like my father. He often said they produced more Elites prolifically like they were factory items. A zephyr blew and she turned to me.

"Want to spar?" she said. Mr. Gilderoy emphatically nodded to the ring.

"Sure what do I get when I win?" I teased.

"Loser does perimeter laps till they puke" She said

"Sounds good hope you didn't eat much this morning" I said.

I entered the ring and we started moving around inside the white line of the circle. It was a flag I will never wave. Our fight commenced when Ashley lunged to grab me but I tackled her legs out from under her knocking her on her stomach. As I turned she kicked my legs out from under me bringing my body closer to the line. I have to be more vigilant if I am to win. I have to find a mess up that will make her vulnerable. I grappled with her besieging the area left behind her. She slid back an inch or two but then switched position and used an archaic move Mr. Gilderoy taught us, pulling me forward and flipping me to her corner closer to the edge. I stood up to face her again. She looked frazzled, her hair all messed up and staticky and an invincible look in her eye. There was only one way to appease this. Her last move was precarious. I grappled with her again and she went to pull the archaic move on me again as I predicted, but I flowed with it instead of fighting it pulling her on another rotation throwing her out of the white line.

"Well done Alex, you successfully predicted her next move," congratulated Mr. Gilderoy.

"Thank you Mr. Gilderoy, I guess you better get to running Ashley," I said as I grinned.

"Oh yah, it slipped my mind both of you lost that round so you'll both be running till you puke," he laughed. The suddenly balmy weather became inclement. We would be running in the cold rain.

"But I pushed her out of the ring?" I questioned.

"Yes but she successfully outwitted you just as you outwitted her so technically both of you lost" he informed me in a beguiling manner. His pretext was true sadly.

"I guess I have a running partner, don't I Alex," Ashley teased. We both started our run, but with enthusiasm. As we continued, we both began to wane. Neither of us wanted to admit we were going to puke. We kept the bile in our mouths and persevered. The weather began to damage our path making it muddy and uneven. With every step I sank down two inches and my shoes were suctioned into the mud. My muscles felt devastated, but I pressed on refusing to give in before her.

“Ladies first, I know you feel about as worn out as I am right now,” I spoke though gasping for air.

Just then she nodded to the wall where there were two people watching us through binoculars. Espionage by the other teams. Mr. Gilderoy had warned us they would try to do this. Ashley and I knew exactly what the other was thinking. When we reached the point from which they were spying, we would vault the wall after ringing the bell three times to inform Mr. Gilderoy of them. Then we would chase them off. It was fair game to eliminate competition if they were spying on you. As he had told us, it was each team's latitude to sabotage, spy or make alliances with the other teams. They ducked down, and Ashley and I ran for our weapons. She grabbed her bow and arrows along with her knife and I grabbed my arming sword and the S.C.A.G.. Then we rang the bell. We reached the wall and I vaulted her up before me as a boy looked over the wall with his eyes wide with fear. He yelled for his partner. Ashley reached down and pulled me up. We both hopped down and started the chase. Ashley knocked an arrow and pulled back. She lined up the shot as I started closing the distance between me and the opposing team. One fell forward as he was struck by an arrow in his knee cap. He yelled out in pain. Incapacitated. I continued after the other. I flipped the S.C.A.G. 's arrow out and fired it, hitting him in the back. He stumbled and fell. He pulled the arrow from his back with great pain on his face. That was when I realized the other team members were identical twins. Exactly similar to each other like facsimile books. He stood and pulled out two daggers and spat blood on the sand motioning me to advance. I flicked the S.C.A.G. 's blade out and unsheathed my sword as I walked towards him. We circled each other waiting for the other to make the first move. At that moment we did not yield to the Fames' laws. We were autonomous.