

“Symphony in 2020, Op. 1”

The curtains open.

The conductor motions.

“Symphony in 2020, Op. 1.”

5, 6, 7, 8...

Movement I

Sonata-Allegro - A fast, flowing opening.

The New Year promises a new decade,
a new presidential election,
a new start.

No one notices the rise in volume,

the building “1-2-3, 1-2-3, 1-2-3—”

until a *sforzando*—a sudden, emphatic note—pierces the measure,
and the COVID *sonata* begins.

Staccatos—short, stabbing notes—prick every beat.

One case here,
one death there,
the tempo accelerates.

Middle school closes,
shops shut down,
the world spirals.

I’m alarmed as anyone,
except for one thing:
I’m selfishly relieved that piano lessons are canceled,
especially after my disastrous music theory test.

I fling a cloth over the keys,
gladly ignoring them.
No more judges,
no more fancy Italian theory terms:
molto, poco, tre corde...
All useless anywhere else!

My mom chides me for avoiding the challenge.

“Have some faith in yourself, Emma.”

“But I’m hopeless at piano theory!”

I turn to online indie songs for comfort,
but discordant melodies seep through the tunes,
an ominous reminder of the ongoing chaos.

Movement II

A slow, drawn-out section contrasting the Sonata.

Starting in April,
A huge *fermata*, a lengthening of notes, is placed on everything.
Days extend twofold.
Half notes stretch into whole notes
for weeks,
then May,
then June.

This movement is fatiguing, like my seventh-grade Zoom classes.
“Exponential growth” in math eerily parallels the present.

When summer arrives,
we desperately hope the heat will beat the virus,
but the second wave hits with an earsplitting *crescendo*.
We experiment with banana bread recipes after our favorite bakeries closed down.
Seeking normalcy, my family takes daily walks,
where I step into my parents’ world,
where I learn that they may lose their jobs.
As I stare at the stunning blue sky,
The idea of a raging pandemic is unfathomable.

But there’s a dragging beat beneath the music,
A reminder of disturbing injustice:
People being killed simply for their skin color.
Black Lives Matter activists brutalized by archaic policing measures
while a white supremacist escapes accountability
after murdering two people.
Anti-Asian hate crimes skyrocketing,
my family fearing going out,
for we have watched videos of Asian people,
people that could be my grandparents,
being beaten over and over

while we plead,
“*We are not a virus.*”

The news channel runs for hours
and my piano lays untouched.

Movement III

Minuet: a quick, dancelike movement

August begins *subito*—suddenly.

A chaotic dance begins.

Everyone steps over each other
in a scramble of melodies.

Contrast overarches everything:

Republicans,
Democrats.

Masked,
unmasked.

Shops re-open,
shops re-close.

Fire season erupts in a smoldering chromatic scale.

Blue skies are stained orange.
Hazy smoke cancels our strolls.

Yet we do venture outside occasionally:

to shop for the elderly couple next-door,
to share our baked goods with friends,
to support local restaurants,
to receive kindness from our neighbors,
and to deliver handwritten messages to seniors in Chinatown:

中秋節快樂!

“Happy Mid-Autumn Festival!”

Times are rough,
but solidarity can triumph despair.
This is a choice.

Dust collects on my piano,

but its daunting air subsides
day by day.

Movement IV and Coda

The heroic climax of the symphony followed by a reflective conclusion.

A *crescendo* attacks in November.

The tempo accelerates to *presto*, extremely fast.

“ELECTION” skyrockets in Google searches.

Everything culminates into *fortississimo*, the highest volume.

Everyone is on edge.

States turn red or blue,

causing outrage or celebration.

It’s a repeating *trill* of “who’s ahead?”:

“Trump!”

“Biden!”

“Trump!”

“Biden!”

Yet finally, the deadlock is broken,

and a sharp *sforzando* makes the final ruling.

While notes are still jumbled,

it seems the symphony is slowing down—a *rallentando*.

Piano class resumes.

A new theory test date is announced.

I sit down at my piano,

dust off the keys,

and tentatively press one note,

then the other.

Everything sounds clumsy,

but it also sounds like a *D.C. al fine*: a restart.

“I’m ready for this test,” I tell my mom.

She smiles knowingly.

This challenge feels almost welcoming,

and I’m grateful to learn these words anew:

Fermata, subito, presto...

Meanwhile, “election” is overtaken in searches by a new word:

“Vaccine.”

For once, I feel hopeful about music theory
and the prospect of normal life.
This hope is my choice.

As the notes flow from my piano,
a new composition is fading in,
upbeat and building:

1, 2, 3;

1, 2, 3—

That's it:

“Symphony in 2021, Op. 2:”

A piece on the theme of Hope.

FINE - “End.”

The Box

He couldn't remember his name. He couldn't remember anything. Not how long he had been trapped here, in this vast, empty white space. Five minutes or four years, he had no clue. It seemed more likely to be the latter, though it felt like he had been trapped forever.

The town of Inspiria had a secret. To any outsider, it seemed like an unsuspecting place that was the home of the arts, known for the unparalleled painters, musicians, sculptors, writers, and poets who lived there. But the people of Inspiria knew better. The reason for this talent that seemed to flourish in the small village was a box. A simple, black box that didn't seem like anything out of the ordinary. However, when the lid was opened, instead of corners and limited space, there was a boundless emptiness. This simple object was the key to the village's peculiar success. It was kept a secret at all costs.

When an Inspirian child reaches the age of ten, they go inside the box. They don't step into it, they simply place their hand within the box, almost as if they are reaching for something inside. They are then transported into the box's emptiness and shortly after they return wide-eyed with wonder. Something in the box makes them emerge with inspiration that they make tangible. No one knows what goes on inside the box. No one has ever remembered what gave them their ideas. Some inspirations lead to musical pieces that are so beautiful, birds stop in their paths to listen. For others, it's a story that comes to life when a pen touches paper. For all, it's different, but always has the same result. Everyone in the village has this inspiration after being introduced to the box. Everyone, except one boy who was still trying to find it.

He could remember reaching his hand inside the box, full of expectation. He imagined himself sitting at a piano playing masterpieces, reciting poems full of life, anything but where he was now.

When he arrived in the box, still expectant of inspiration to strike, he looked around in bewilderment. Where was the idea that he was supposed to have? At first, he thought it was a test, something had to be deciphered to unleash creativity. Maybe a pen or a paintbrush had to be summoned. He closed his eyes and imagined several items, each with potential for ideas. When he had opened them expecting to see inspiration, nothing appeared. He attempted this process many times, even trying to vocalize the objects. When saying or imagining an object didn't work, he tried to depict the objects in the blank space, all with the same results. He had somehow become the blank when he vanished into the box. It was like closing his eyes but instead of the black of his eyelids, it was white. Panic started to set in. Where was the creativity he was promised? It was like he was a blank paper, needing something to write on the page. In one last desperate attempt, he strained to see something, anything that could help him.

Suddenly, he glimpsed something. It wasn't there exactly; he saw the white, but it wasn't white anymore. Nothing was there, so why did he see something in the blank. It wasn't a color, a painting, or a poem. It could almost be described as a feeling, but one that he was unaware of until that moment. Instantaneously, the blank paper didn't look as empty anymore. The colorless turned into snow. It turned into clouds. There was white sea foam and seashells, flour spilled all over a marble floor. A swan spreading its wings and learning how to fly. He let himself become the white, he stopped resisting or wishing. He became the clouds and the cream, the daisies and

the marshmallows. He became the vast emptiness that didn't feel so empty anymore. And like a dandelion in a breeze, he flew away, towards some unknown beginning.

He emerged to a cheering crowd.

Blinking his eyes in the face of the sun, a man approached him.

"Congratulations! Only thirty seconds, that's almost a record!" The man told him, shaking his hand. "What happened in the box?"

He tried to think back to what had occurred but couldn't conjure up a single image after reaching his hand inside.

"I have no clue," he shrugged, and a smile appeared on his face, "but I have an idea."

Stargazer: A Tribute To My Far Away Family

The sky is tinted
With rosy light
Stripes of red
And gold
A nighttime breeze
Stirs
Like a sleeping fawn
In a bed of leaves

In Michigan
The lake stretches
Waves slap the shore
A lullaby
To the sleeping dunes
A faraway horizon
Shows stars

There are stars here
Too
Lit up like lanterns
In the coming dusk

Far among
The mountains of Montana
A town twinkles
It's message
Of light
Dark cliffs never
Divide
That golden light of peace

Sitting in the night
Staring at
Familiarity
The view that has been there
All the time

Somewhere in Wyoming
Geysers spout
Even though the
Walkways are clear
The only one who sees them

Is the moon
And all the dreamers

Forever a dreamer
Among the twilight sounds
Owls are heard
Everywhere
Trilling their notes
Up into the darkening clouds

On the coast of
Massachusetts
Large waves grow
I wish I could be there
To see

Nearby that eastern shore
A pond
Safely nestled within its ring
Of trees

Back in my own town
Up where the trees sway
In a gentle ocean breeze
All these places are
Connected
Like me and family
By the night sky we all see
Whenever we rest
Whenever we dream of
New times
The one strong thread
Of night and day
Whenever we feel hopeful
Whenever we feel grief
Just know
Wherever you are
You are looking
At that
Same
Sky

Days, Upon Days, Upon Days

From bright green leaves,
To holiday eves,
To the cold winter days,
And early morning haze,
We are stuck inside,
With nothing to keep us occupied.

Days, upon days, upon days...
Seem to drag on forever
With no end in sight.
Whatsoever.

Activities dwindle down
And tranquility shadows every town.
Parks barren of play
As children are kept away.

Days, upon days, upon days...
Weeks that feel the same
With nothing new,
We just have to get through.

It shouldn't be too much longer now,
As restrictions start to break.
A week, A month?
How much more can we take?

Days, upon days, upon days...
Weekends hold no excitement,
For there are now more hours we need to fill
With endless tasks
From our parents' asks.

School hours drag on...
As lectures are given online,
But we are missing out
No doubt.

Days, upon days, upon days...

Cooped up together
And constant arguing;
With patients for loved ones
Running low.

Kids begin returning to school,
But there is a rule,
As unfair as it seems,
That prevents seventh and up
From going.

So, days, upon days, upon days...

I am still at home,
Wishing this would all end,
Not giving up hope.

The Mystery Machine

A cloud of steam bursts out. I take a step back, afraid of what this means. Will I have to do it? I could walk away now, leave the task to someone else. An innocent soul. No one would ever know. But I know what this means and what I'm supposed to do.

NO! Why me? I ask, begging for this to all be an illusion. I open it again, double-checking. It was real. The steam has cooled to an eerie fog, and the cold moisture lands on my exposed skin. It slowly evaporates, replaced with chills. The misty memory sends an icy shock of terror through me. Flooding my body, racing through my arms, dripping down my legs, and filling my soul with terror.

It seems to stare at me, silently harassing me, telling me what to do. I begin to feel fearful of what I will miss out on now that the burden has fallen on me. I try to comfort myself, telling myself I was lucky. After all, the task has fallen at night, right after dinner. The best time for the worst task. Cruel thoughts slip through my head, taking advantage of my resentful feelings. I will myself to believe that it isn't a big deal, that it isn't going to change my life. My melodramatic heart disobeys, refusing to listen to the precious words of positivity, practicality. You can't force a heart not to feel.

I stare at the daunting task ahead of me once more. Now that the steam has evaporated, the machine has become unmistakable. The hole at the bottom, the one the powder goes in. The type of powder that clings to skin, never coming off. I then stare at the colorful discs, the ones that go in the machine. They return my look, their glare unwavering. Usually, they look beautiful. Today I avert my eyes at the sight of their hideous tattoos that never come off.

My chills begin to resurface as I reach down to begin the task. My heart lets out a last, pathetic plea. *Please, no. Don't do it! Think of your future, of the things you could do.* Their cry for help goes unanswered. I begin to unload the dishes and brace myself as the living nightmare of plates, bowls, and glasses in the sink looms in my near future. They're desperately in need of scouring.

If We Don't Act Soon

Penelope Claire Gall

I hate extinction
That's a well known fact
If we don't act soon
Some animals will never come back
To watch a cheetah race at top speed
Is an experience that will only exist on TV
If we don't act soon
We will never again see a glossy black California condor
With a wingspan that seems to swallow up the sky
Gone will be the congresses of orangutans
As they search for food in the early morning
And gone will be the majestic elephants
Their only remnants ivory jewelry
That people will look at and say "now why did I buy that"
With their presence only a ghost, a whisper
All the animals we love
Will be gone forever
If we don't act soon

Seed of Hope

Hope is a seed
Buried in the mud
Buried in the mind
Pushed further down by wind and rain
Flooded by hurricanes
Its potential hidden
Smothered by the dark
It remains
Alive still
It endures

For it knows
The sidewalk cracks of the street
Walked by the ones with empty stomachs and souls
The ones filled with dust and despair
Also hold grainy and glittery wishes, sprinkled and sifted
between fingers like sugar

The seed survives
It sighs as one tendril of green meets the sunlight
A sigh that slows the fast beating hearts of worry
A sigh that pushes through the dark

And then

A breath that lets the light in

For minutes and for hours

For months and for years

The seed not only survives, it thrives

It expands its roots into the unknown

It widens its arms to the sky

Over time learning

Light and dark pass between both hands

Riding the currents of time

Guiding change

Forever ebbing and flowing

Finding their places in each living thing

No longer little, the seed

For it has now blossomed into a tree

Bravely reaching for what it seeks, open hands, wide eyed

for everything that is yet to come.

Dr. Andrew Blunk and the Yeti Discovery

By EJ Ho

Dr. Andrew Blunk grabbed a bag of Doritos and headed into his small and cluttered office. He slumped in his chair that made a loud creaking sound. He then reached for the keyboard and sighed. Dr. Blunk was a professor for Yetiology and had just gotten back from a depressing day. The thing is nobody believes him especially his brother Carl. He talked about him to other people so it makes people think he's crazy. But that is not stopping Blunk. His main goal is to find the Yeti and collect data from it. But there is something stopping him from doing it. Dr. Blunk has a strange phobia called iciclephobia. You see, Dr. Blunk is afraid of icicles falling on him, which means he has to get past his fears knowing he is going up into very cold areas. For many years Blunk has tried to find the Yeti and prove it was real.

Crunch! Dr. Blunk stepped onto the fresh snow. He was on his way to find the Yeti. With his huge backpack, it was pretty hard for him to keep a steady pace. After a little bit of time, Blunk's phone rang. Blunk picked up the phone, it was Carl.

"You're never going to find the snow creature!" Although you might think that brought Blunk's hopes down, he never gave up on something like this.

Whoosh! A cold wind hit Blunk's face a shiver went down his spine a massive blizzard coming his way! He quickly looked for shelter, he was in the middle of nowhere but as he thought he'd lost hope. He spotted a huge cave next to a river. He didn't have much time before he would get submerged under the snow. Blunk then made it into the cave, which was tall and very long. Blunk looked up and shrieked in horror. There above the poor man were icicles as sharp as they could be. He tried to look away but as he did the weight of his backpack made him fall into a ditch. Before he could get up a loud "Roar!" echoed throughout the whole cave. It rattled the ceiling and a couple of icicles dropped. He saw a shadowy creature coming towards him. He fainted.

Crackle! Crackle! Blunk's eyes opened and he tried to move but he was stuck. He then smelled a smoky smell. It was a fire! There Blunk was hanging from the top of the ceiling just right above the fire. His feet were tied up but he thought he could break free. He then noticed a giant figure approaching him, could that be the Yeti? The Yeti sniffed Blunk around. The Yeti then sneezed on Blunk's shirt. Sticky, gooey green slobber was all over him. The Yeti didn't seem interested in eating him right now, so it rummaged through Blunk's bag. He unstrapped his pocket and the lighter fell into his hand. When the Yeti wasn't looking he chuckled the lighter across the cave. The Yeti went charging after it. Blunk swiftly untied the ropes and fell hard. He slightly missed the fire. Blunk anxiously grabbed his phone out of his other pocket and snapped three photos. He then made a run for it. He didn't make it far out because something stopped him dead in his tracks. There right before his feet was a huge gap in between him and the way out. If he fell he would fall into a dark abyss. Blunk took a deep breath, but he realized he had no time to think because the Yeti was running at him. Without hesitation, Blunk jumped over the cavern. His chest slammed against the side of the edge. Blunk held on for dear life, but the Yeti followed him. Blunk and the Yeti fell down and probably never to be seen again.

Carl called the police and told them his brother had been up in the mountains for more than a week and he hasn't come back. Then the police led an expedition around the mountains in search of the man.

After investigating for many hours explorers went to a cave and found a backpack of personal items. They went down the cavern and found a creature that had been all eaten up by bats. They then found a phone, picked it up, and looked through it. They were surprised about what they saw. They were pictures of a Yeti! But where was Blunk?

Mia's Christmas Hope

By: Alexa Jardine

"Hi, grandpa!"

"Hello, my girl! I haven't seen you in such a long time!" He stretched his arms out, about to give her a hug-

Mia sat bolt upright in her bed. Why was she always thinking about Grandpa? Her grandpa had passed away a couple of months ago, from cancer, and she'd always kept a part of him in her heart. She'd always hoped that she would be able to see him again or anything, just to even see his face. He was the best artist that she'd ever seen; he could make a scribble into a great masterpiece. He also had told the greatest stories and oh, he loved Christmas. Wait... Christmas? Mia realized that today was Christmas! She shook her head, dismissing all her thoughts, and sprang out of bed. Then, she sprinted across the hallway and into the living room.

"Hi, sweetie!" Mom chirped, "You haven't slept this late for forever, let alone on Christmas!"

"Yeah, I know... I can't wait to open up all of the presents!" Mia exclaimed.

"But first! Who wants some cookies and hot chocolate!! Eating cookies and dipping them in hot chocolate was a tradition, and Grandpa had started it.

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Grandpa had always had a massive sweet tooth, he just couldn't wait to get his hand on Grandma's cookies, and so he started nibbling on one. Soon, everyone else saw that he was snacking on cookies, and they all joined in. Mia who was only 6 at the time had some hot chocolate and started dipping her share of cookies into her hot chocolate. The others caught on, and before you knew it everyone was eating all of Grandma's cookies and dipping

them in hot chocolate. Grandma came into the kitchen a little later and just laughed. It had been a tradition ever since.

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"Mia come here and stop daydreaming! Don't you want some cookies?" Mom asked.

"Coming," Mia responded still deep in thought.

"Seriously Mia! What are you thinking about?" Mom demanded.

"Oh, just grandpa," Mia admitted, "I just miss him so much." She walked to the kitchen and grabbed a warm cookie.

"Wow! These cookies are so good! How come you don't make these more often mom?" Mia's brother Noah asked. Grandma wasn't able to come this year to make cookies because she was visiting Mia's aunt. It has been hard for her, without any company in the house.

"Yeah, honey these cookies are delish!" Dad said.

After awhile of eating and dipping the cookies,

Mia asked, "What in the world are we waiting for? Mom! Dad! Can we open up some presents?"

"Sure" Mom replied, "Take it away!" Mia raced into the living room with half a cookie and her mouth and gazed at her presents. On the top of the stack, Mia saw a letter, with her name on it. She hadn't noticed it before, and the handwriting on the letter looked kind of familiar. She knew that it wasn't Mom or Dad's handwriting, and Noah hadn't written her a card in ages. Who could it be from? Mia picked the letter up and slowly broke the seal. She took the letter out and it read:

*Dearest Mia,*

*Merry Christmas! I'm pretty sure that I'm not going to be alive when you're going to read this, but I want you to know that I love you, and all of the memories that we have shared together, I will cherish in my heart forever. I hope that you will tell your story to many many people, as I did with you, and remember, you will always be my girl.*

*Sincerely,*

*Grandpa*

*P.S. How were the cookies this year? I sure wish I could taste them!*

*At the end of the letter, Grandpa had drawn a portrait of himself; He must have known that what she hoped for and really wanted was to see his face again.*

*A tear slid down Mia's cheek as she looked up towards the sky and whispered, "Merry Christmas Grandpa, Merry Christmas."*

# The Key

By: Nura Mohiuddin

There it is. Right before my eyes. It looks like my little sister, Emily's, paintings if you gave her red, orange, and yellow. It seems to possess the heat of the sun, but the beauty of the sunset. I am not focused on the beauty right now, though. My heart leaps into my throat as my stomach somersaults. I duck to the ground, because that is what you are supposed to do if you are somewhere that is on fire. I call for my family, but no one answers. I start to choke as I crawl across the hard, wood floor. My eyes sting. My throat scratches. I manage to make my way slowly to the door, and I run outside to my mailbox. I am relieved to see my family there. Dad takes out his phone to call 911. It seemed like something that only happens in stories. This isn't real! I squeezed my sister's hand. She cries. It might have been because of me, but I have a feeling that this time it isn't because she's hurt. My mom picks her up, and uses her "comforting" voice to say,

"Don't worry, honey. It'll be okay. We are all going to be just fine."

Maybe I'm a skeptic; maybe I'm imagining it; but that voice that was always reassuring when I was little didn't sound true. I'm 12 now. It seems that mom is really worried, too. Maybe it's not going to be okay. Maybe, everything we know will be gone. I hear a loud noise and I cover my ears. I soon realize it's a siren. I couldn't really tell exactly what was happening, but I knew they were putting the fire out. Black.

"Honey? Are you okay," says a voice.

I groan and sit up. My mom's face comes into focus. I'm in a room. But where?

*What happened to our house? Why does my head hurt?* I have a million questions flooding my mind, but I simply ask,

"What happened?"

"You passed out from lack of oxygen. You were in there a lot longer than us. Is your head okay?" Dad says

"It's fine...where are we?" I ask.

"The hospital. We got worried when you passed out, but they said you were fine." Mom says.

"Our house. Is it..." I can't ask.

My parents exchange glances. That's bad. Mom takes a breath.

"Anna, our house is gone," she says sadly.

"Gone?"

"Gone."

"Completely?"

"Yes."

"But-"

"Anna! Our house burned down. It's gone. There's no changing it," Dad cuts in.

Something in me sinks. Actually, everything sinks. My eyes sting, so I squeeze them shut. How could our house be gone?

"Anna," squeals Emily, as she enters. She crawls onto the bed and squeezes my arm.

A bit later we have left and my parents are having a serious conversation about how we don't have enough money to afford a new house or even an apartment long-term. I know I should be paying attention but I just can't. They can't expect me to. I know that they said something about us going to find shelter, since our car is gone, due to the house falling on it.

It's been a while. I didn't keep track of time. We are at a fire shelter. My parents told us that we needed to talk about something important.

"I don't like fire." Emily says

"Hey, girls," Mom whispers, "Do you know what's gonna get us through this?"

We shake our heads.

"Guess. But I'll make a riddle out of it." She begins, "It's like the spark that starts the fire in a cold, dark cave; or like the flashlight that shines its beam of guidance, whether it's in a dark room or a forest in the dead of night."

Dad adds in, "Without it, all is lost, but with it there may be a way."

I am in utter bewilderment. Poetry class; really? What could this be?

"You can lose it, and that is when you are truly in the darkest situation, or you can possess a lot of it, which helps your character shine in the eyes of others," Mom continues.

"It helps you be optimistic, and see the good in all situations. If you lose it you become cold, which is why you should always have it, and always cherish it." Dad says

"With it, anything is possible," Mom finishes profoundly.

"*Hope*. It's the key," I say.

*A poem in the style of Amanda Gorman*

## **OUR RESILIENT NATION**

By Amanda Roach

I've dreamed of our nation:  
Where we aren't separated by what we are  
But joined for what we stand for  
I've seen this place - and it's not far

But we're scared of changing our ways  
So we choose to wait for some sort of spark  
We have to make the first, bold move  
If we don't, we stay hidden in the dark

There's always a way out  
So even if we make the wrong choice  
We can fix it, and we will succeed  
If our nation can find its voice

For every challenge we will face  
And every choice that we will make  
We come back smarter, stronger  
Better from our mistakes

We've seen things like none other  
Our nation was turned utterly sideways  
And even our democracy, which is so strong, was put in jeopardy  
But we can choose to see it a different way

Let's look where we are now  
We are going to return  
We're continuing to grow  
And we're continuing to learn

I can clearly see the day I have dreamed of:  
The day when we are fully united  
When all of us Americans, join hands  
And I see the spark, the one that we ourselves have lighted

I see the place I've always seen  
And I hope that in the future, the next generation  
Will inherit this country in a better place  
And I will tell the story of our resilient nation



Our hands intertwined. Her fingers were bony yet soft. I traced my finger around her bulging knuckle, feeling all the grooves of her scars. She once told me about the one on her ring finger. How the doctors took it off by cutting her finger open because she was pregnant and swollen. Although, that day was not the birth of me, but the birth of *her*. She's fourteen now. She strides proudly like a lion. She has light brown hair and strands of pink popping from the array of curls positioned on her head. She wears black, and make up too. Way too much eyeliner rims her eyes. Her eyes usually glow with an enchanting golden sparkle, but they were soft and somber as we approached our destination. She stood tall in her rounded black dress, silver stitches lining the bottom. I swallowed hard as I looked up at mom. She had long blonde locks all the way to her knees. Straight and silky, the tips light as fluffy snow running down the sky on a cold winter day. She had amber eyes, the same as Lilah. Mom was wearing a pale pink floral dress that reached just above her knees. The sleeves puffed out and her broad shoulders were uncovered. A delicate brown belt was twisted into a swirl with a shiny golden buckle. Her lips were cherry red enlightening the bubble enclosing around us. She had a long button nose and freckles scattered across it, just like me. Sometimes I wished I was my sister, Lilah, so I could share the same traits as mom. I clung tightly to the shared freckles across our faces. I have jet black hair with blonde tips. Dark brown eyes and big bushy eyebrows. We rocked our arms up and down until we swung to the sky. A squirrel scurried past us as mom bent down to examine it at the root of the tree. She leaned down and stared at its black beady eyes. It ushered up the tree disappearing into the leaves. Lilah walked past us. She turned around and looked back. Her eyes were puffy and red, drowning in melancholy. Just a look at them filled my mouth with a bitter taste like unripe persimmon.

"Come on. We have to get going. We're gonna be late." She grabbed my hand and tugged me up. I stole a glance behind me, to discover mom was gone. I felt myself gulping for breaths of air as nausea flooded my brain.

"Where did she go?" I asked, my mind spinning. Lilah looked around as her shiny black shoes clapped against the ground. Her eyes wandered around the intersection and landed on a short old woman. She had white hair coiled into a knotted bun.

"Her?" she questioned. I shook my head.

"No. Mom, she's gone," I urged. Lilah shook her head and grabbed my hand. Her larger hand palmed against mine.

"Mom's gone, sweetheart. I can't deal with this right now. Just one hour, okay. One hour," Lilah desperately pleaded. She was referring to the funeral. It couldn't be real though. Mom's alive. I see her. Sometimes she's waiting at the schoolyard gate smiling her cherry red smile, and sometimes in bed she embraces me like a honey-filled bear. Lilah and I rushed to a long window-filled building. I was a lamppost, unable to move. My senses slipped away and I felt I was falling. I caught myself, grabbing onto Lilah's shoulder swiftly. She leaned sideways and helped me up. Her hand reached up to my face and turned it to her gaze.

"You okay?" Her eyes burned into me. I shook my head, escaping from her eyes.

"One hour," she repeated. The words echoed through my head. Lilah pushed open the large hickory doors and released the solemnness of the building. A glassy light fixture lit up the hall with a dim yellowness. Lilah squeezed my hand as we sat down together. A light-colored man with gray hair recited something aloud, my thoughts jumbled. When my eyes landed on the casket, my mind could only focus on one thought. *She's not dead*. I looked at Lilah's wet eyes

as tears streamed down her face. I shot up and raced towards the coffin. Before Lilah could catch me, I opened the lid. Mom's ghastly face and pungent smell consumed me. I spun into a fit of coughs and tears until the room went dark. I answered my burning question.

Flight For Hope

By Jila Sponzilli

My soul is breaking into pieces  
My heart is aching with pain  
All because of what?  
Sorrow?  
Yes it is sorrow ...  
so my head likes to say  
But what about my misery, my doubts over life?  
Why is it always finding a way to crawl back inside of me like the air I  
breathe?

So I try to hide.  
I try holding my breath  
but I am too weak to let it all go.  
The memories of anger...  
I need to let it go  
But how?

The reply is too distant, too absent, away from me.  
I run as fast as I can to try to reach it  
but it is as distant as well as is absent.

I lose my breath and lose my dream of ever coming to the sky.

In darkness, you feel scared,  
but not of being in the dark;  
you are scared that  
you may not be alone in the darkness.  
You wrestle in your head,  
and pray that my soul is safe...  
that I can live another day  
on this beautiful Earth.  
I hope that I will survive among humanity.  
I hope.

When life falls down from the sky,  
and it is as well overwhelming to stay  
Lift up and march  
back to the beat.  
The only other choice is to believe.  
Accept that you are just  
you are commendable  
and consistent with life's difficult work.  
Don't quit!

The immense crowd screams in your ear.  
Overwhelming your brain with a rule that scares you with fear.  
Some of the time the world appears so little  
as you cry  
but in reality the world is as huge as your heart,  
in spite of the fact that you cannot precisely see it.

Hope knows no fear when the worst is among us.  
Hope is the water to the fire.  
The stars to the sky.  
The salt to the pepper.  
It is continuously there, and it is continuously sparkling, shining before what  
is the worst of us.  
It is there in the event that you search for it and look for it.

We all share a combination of shining white wings that sit in our closet  
when we are feeling down.  
These wings carry us to where we need to go when required.  
I listen to this call and keep in mind that they are there for me.  
I snatch them from my room and clear my eyes.

I fly fast to the dismay of my devils.  
They're all staring at me but I am higher than them  
At last I am free.  
At last I can breathe with peace and serenity

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