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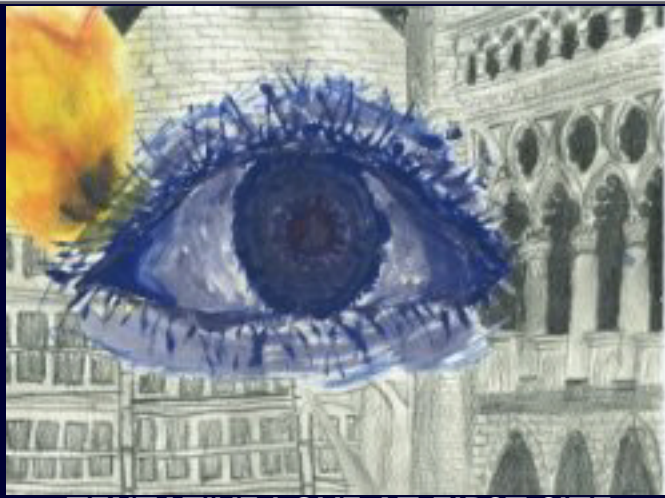
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Give
Feedback

Jump over to the [Teen Writers Discussion](#) (bulletin board) to give comments and/or feedback on this or other pieces of writing.

Use the **title** of the piece of writing as your subject line.

Remember your **P's & Q's** when giving writers feedback . . . stick to **Praise** and **Questions!**



TENTATIVE LOVE AT FIRST SITE

Tentatively running my eyes
over the soft curve of his brown mop top
the stabbing intelligence illuminated in his eyes
and the little rosy circles that bring out the contour of his cheek
bone,
I feel myself slowly morph
from an ancient monstrosity
to a bit of fire, and then-
a lusty purple eye.

Katie
11th grader
Little Rock, Arkansas

Life as a Screendoor (pt. one of 32)

she was alone
living it in the permanent fluorescent jungle
Like a mistmaid in a handbasket to hell
she felt as welcome as she could
but still was a screendoor in a yellow submarine

Hate abound and love lost eternal
in the shadow of past
the gaping-bright mouth og future looking good
way back
but now razoredge things cut her blind
like staring at the sun in December
pushing through the whitehot blizzard
against the walls and the words
remembering that there was
once

a shining star
(can't see it anymore... most no one can)
and that she wanted it
Thought maybe this was it when she went blind,
maybe she had reached the star and it was
nothing more than torture-fire
but now she hears it,
through the screams and the curses and the
honking horns
through the padded walls
the perfect sound she used to hear way back
when
innocence was real
dreams were in full color
and radios still went to ten on the dial
It was screaming six-strings,
a nasty-sweet beat that pounded the heart
the b-line that made thunder turn tail
But it was hollow, though perfect
They needed human voice and lightning soul
so all the meaningless words
all the condescending
all the narrow-shallow hallways of people
would fade away to a big, bright
nothing
and be but a pain of a memory
And so, with eyes slit but healing,
the unseen road opened up ahead of her
and all because she could still hear

Carmen

11th grader

Bowling Green, Ohio

The Vows of a Teenage Girl

I promise to hate myself
To loathe the reflection in the mirror
And if I can honestly say I love myself
I promise to find some other flaw that will work to complain about

I vow to never underestimate the power of batting my eyelashes
Or diets consisting of water and bits of bagels
Because every little pound lost
Is another boyfriend gained

I promise to cry at night and feel worthless
Because these hormones cause me to limit my successes
I swear that I will never consent to doing anything I feel is morally
wrong
Unless my friends tell me to

I promise to try my absolute hardest at every thing I do
And so when I stick my finger down my throat
I can assure you everything will come up
And that includes that diet pill I had for breakfast

The make-up will be of the perfect fashion
"Whatever's trendiest," I always say
The clothes, I swear, will be three sizes too small
And the pants...
Twice as tight

I pledge to never betray a friend
Unless she's totally getting on my nerves
And I promise to do one compassionate thing a day
So when that fat girl walks by
I guarantee I won't snicker in reply

I swear to go to bed every night
Wishing and hoping that these superficial ideas will pass
And that I won't have too many enemies tomorrow
When I start another day

I promise to forgive myself when I am older
And realize that this time is just another phase
And I vow to try and help my daughter
Understand that she is worth the highest praise

Caitlin
10th grader
Seattle, Washington

About the Author...If I've said it a once, I've said it a million times.
:-)

I'm just your average teenage girl. I love everything that has to do with life now that I am past any old aggressions and writing is my favorite pasttime--it's gotten me through the first half of adolescence...And it'll get me through the last half.

sweet amy brown

You came here for a feel-good movie
and found me sprawled in black pages
of pretension. I had put on mommy's make-up
and mastered daddy's gun.

You don't like me this way
I saw a happy little girl
and I saw her smile..
Holding the guns with such
sexual/violent expertise.
Now I am black and gold
ready at the door
to greet you.

You think you have some sort of deed to me,
that virginity is a metro card for my body and soul.
But you haven't renewed
and in your absence I have thrived like Cain
killing that which you left behind
to come back and feast on
to snuggle in your large arms
like a little sister

it would be some sick universe

I just don't understand
you say
holding a limp gun in your hand
transmuting
jesus
santa claus
first-time lover
wanting for me to melt back
into the mold of sweet amy brown.

About The Author:

this poet is just a poet. no fringes or ornamentation. sheez, i hope that didn't sound too pretentious..

Mother's Past (A Song)

There was a dead-eyed bar
Mile or twelve outside of town
Where the pavement ends
Where the sun goes down
He didn't drive
He just walked in
He thought I was loose
He thought I was a lesbian
I know because I was there
Wearing a t-shirt and braided hair

Guitar, it slung so hard
Thought my ears were going to bleed
His hair was as long as mine
I took a drink I didn't need
Sang a tune
Shared a smile
Shot the moon
Moved a mile
I knew I was far-gone
I forgot the verses to my own song

Didn't eat
Pulled a seat
Dollar shots
Aching heat
Bending back
Being watched
Dirty eyes
Love forgot

He threw his case in the back seat
Struck a familiar chord
I started the engine up
We knew what we were headed toward
Phantom pain
Like a song
He knew all the words
I didn't, but I sang along

Didn't speak

Leather seats
Turned it up
Wasn't clean
Swerving hard
Radio
Starry eyed
Should've known
Should've known

About the author of "Mother's Past"

I've published plenty on this site before, but this is the most personal for me. These are the lyrics to a song I wrote, which was based on a story my mother told me about the first time she thought she was in love, but she was just drunk. There may be a lesson there, there may not.

Aurora Misery

We touched fingertips through a fragmented mo(u)rning;
skin so meaningless among warmed over tears and stale breath,

Coffee led your daily ritual
Dipped and sweetened in cream and sugar,
so very inferior to the chocolate milk I consumed,
breakfast always died down as you burnt the last pancake
and swore to stick to cereal,

and yeah,

We were wrong to have stolen dreams,
from the deep sleepers in the early dawn,
As we spun them out in front of our bare feet
and

Collapsed in the sweet afterglow,
We could only wish to see loveliness at it's fullest.

Stephanie
8th grader
Topeka, Kansas

I'm screaming in my white page

The thoughts surge
from my heart
to my tears
to my hand

I'm screaming in my white page
Crying. Sobbing. Shuddering.
Not really knowing
what'll happen next

The huge loneliness
sweeps through me in waves
breaking at my eyes

and I'm screaming in my white page
Crying. Sobbing. Shuddering.
Knowing that I'm alone
A thought I can't bear.

Karen
10th grader
Saltillo, Coah., México

About The Author:

Karen is a short, witty, smart 15 year old who loves to be with her friends, specially with her best friends, and sometimes alone. She has liked poetry since she was very young, and since she was 10 or so she has written short stories, which she plans on publishing someday. She likes to read paperbacks, of which she has a vast collection. Her favorite book is Anne of Green Gables. She wishes to become a great writer one day.

Clock

The clock seems to be ticking a little faster than it should

If I could break every clock in the entire universe, I definitely would

But I know that time can't be stopped and a person shouldn't dwell on their past

We can't change what's bound to happen nor can we make the good things last

The clock must keep on ticking, even if we don't want our lives to move on

We must focus on what lies ahead because yesterday is already gone.

Victoria
11th grader
Houston, Texas

About_The_Author:

My name is victoria. I love to write poetry and hope to become a writer someday.

Diagnosis

I'm all different in my own way
but that's expected
or so they all say.
I can't complain
I thank God,
I'm not all that sane.
where do you pin the blame?
when you're completely sane.
I forget my years
as though they never happened
but they still come back and haunt me
like I never left them.
is "normal" a word
or an idea
cause I still can't find
that line they drew.
where do you pin the blame?
when you're completely sane.
And I'm not all that sane.

Chris
10th grader
Tuscaloosa, Alabama

About the author of Diagnosis: This song is about me realizing that I'm not normal and that I'm thankful for it. I just want to be different and in this song I praise myself for not being so.

Layer

Ashes of many crutches
Sleeping place of disgrace
Garments recycled from the floor
Stains of my self-hate
Different fluids
The unsettled come to watch in retrospect
Bring upon them the lapse of reality
Or what was reality
Many guests stirring
Emotional scent
Whitlings long Forgotten
The melting Pot
Ratio of laughter, love, and ways out
Prayers been said
There's more memory here
Than the origin of my birth
No occurrence of outside intrigue
My womb
Every demented plank and cornerstone
All resourced from my fetal position
Time to make more...

Chris

12th grader
Belleville, Illinois

About The Author:

I'm a 17 year old High School senior. I have a deep interest in music (of every kind). This poem is a reflection of the many nights you spend alone in your thought. The good, the bad, and the tragic.

strong

i am
sick of being
strong;
putting up with
him
like a bad
habit
i have to kick;
his every word
a cliff edge
to dangle on
or fall to

black oblivion,
these two word
sentences
all

i
cling
to

i cry
he laughs,
the ugly soul of his
a demon.

my tears create a
lake
and he can walk on water
but they freeze
from touching his
heart of
ice.

Starr
10th grader
Birmingham, Michigan

I Will Remember Her

More than "how to" talks
Or in any tangible way
She showed me a
better life.

She taught me many
lessons.

I was hooked.

I wanted to be taught.

Everyday there with me,
with

more and more
morals,

words to guide me.

With only a few words
She said so very much.

She used to complain
if i complained.

I matured.

She told me she

had not an easy life.
I was lucky.
I knew I was,
she just made it more apparent.
I wanted her to love me.
She wanted me to
be myself.
I tried.
I succeeded.
She's gone.

Now in silence,
She teaches me
more and more everyday.
I love her,
I miss her,
But I WILL
remember
her.
The lessons she taught
are now so valued.
But I only
wish
I could let my
feelings to her be
audible.
I pray she knows how I feel.
I will never forget her,
I will always
remember her.

Jessica
9th grader
Hartford, Connecticut

I dedicate this poem to my late grandmother whom I will always love and cherish. She will always have a place in my heart, where ever I go and through whatever I do.

Why am I here?

What good am I?

Why am I here?

These questions swim in my mind
and echo in my ear

I haven't found my purpose
I can't find my place
These thoughts cloud my eyes
and age my face

Somebody, tell me please

Why am I here?

I seek the answers
but find only tears

Was I given life to live
or to suffer and die?
Please baby, tell me
while I hold you and cry

Nic

12th grader

Spokane, Washington

About the author of Why am I here?

I'm 17 and enjoy writing poetry and short stories.

Anonymous

I see you beneath your shield of
Self protection.
You do not want me to know but already
I am you.
I have always been you, your blood,
Your guilt, your child.
I am happy, no- not content, but
I am happy.
My love has broadened, my trust
I have given.
From strength to strength I have
Risen.
I have hope because I have
forgiven and I have forgotten.
You are nobody I know.

Jabin

London, England

About the author of Anonymous. I'm from England. This poem is about an angry child after discovering her real mother who gave her away. It's the initial reaction of anger and also realization about who he/she really is rooted from.

Melting

Lucidly,
she cups her ribs
watching the television screen
scream.
Hungrily
she fights back sobs
stoicly trying to stay
sane.
She mumbles bits of incoherence
and tries to rebuild what was destroyed
but all that she can keep in tact
is a set of ribs and some tears.

Katie
11th grader
Little Rock, Arkansas

Said

Savor the cold of ice on the tongue
Cream so smooth, twang of fruit
Dash of crimson for the blast
Dye the end in lavender of time
Gild in emerald knowledge true
Cast a glow of friendship
Beating steady in daffodil
Unmask the clown knocking on the door
Rouge emotions shade the mind
Love glazes salmon fireworks
Indigo parade with pomp of progress
Flaunt the illness, mud three inches deep
Cover with steel the war raged red
Reform your perception
Adapt to the consciousness
Shift the thoughts
Distortion of responses
Blow up the buildings
Break out the money
Eruption is coming

A horde of frantic bombs
Backfiring on the date
Blast the feelings numb
Blow off the reprimands
Detonate the next show
Ice Cream and Explosions
Melting and Dissolving
Sensation of the Century
Anyone got an Aspirin?

Sarah
12th grader
St. George, Utah

About the author of Said: I have been writing poetry for about 5 years now, but none like this one. This is brand spankin' new for me. This poem won me first place in the theme category at the county fair where I live.

No Remorse

Deep in the realms of fear,
you can hear the cries of the tortured souls
echoing off the enclosed walls.
Souls that will never be free
of the burdens they carry on their shoulders,
the blame rests on them.
Serial killers, rapists, prostitutes,
bitter feelings borne into them,
they are left to face the consequences.
No one wants them,
they are left alone,
tortured by what could have been.
They lived their lives the way they wanted,
and as a consequence,
they have to face this hell.
This hell with no pity in sight,
all that's expected is torture,
there is no forgiveness.
This is the end of the line,
there's no turning back,
what's done is done, and cannot be fixed.
This torture will last for all eternity.
Listen to the pained cries, they will never cease.
There is no remorse.

Christa
9th grader
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

About the author of No Remorse.

I have been writing poetry and songs since I was 6 years old. Just this February, I entered one of my songs "I wanna be a superstar" into a contest at <http://www.prozzak.com> and won for "Most Humerous." If you are interested in reading that song, go to the above address and scroll to the bottom of the page and click on "And the winners are..."

That was my first work that has been published, and I'm hoping to publish more of my poems/songs. My goal is to write and publish a poetry book.

Us

Don't you even
What do you think you're doing
You can't talk to her
She's not one of us
Don't you bring
Her over here
She can't sit at our table
She's not one of us
Don't you tell
Her about that time
That was our joke
She's not one of us
Don't you dare say
After all this time
All we've been through
That I am no longer one of you

Michelle
9th grader
Windsor, Connecticut

About The Author:

I saw this happen to a girl in our school caf once...it mad me kinda sad so I wrote this

The Never Ending Nightmare

Wondering through the well-lit halls of our schools, we, the students often complain about the inhumane weight of our book bags, the two hundred sit - ups completed in physical education or the oncoming doom of deadlines.

Rarely do we stop to consider, that we, as part of the female population are extremely fortunate to be allowed to receive any kind of education at all, which spans beyond the basic ABC's. Unlike us, Afghan women and girls of all ages are denied the basic right of attending school after the age of eight and are banned from enrolling in universities.

The nightmare began on September 27, 1996, when the capital city of Afghanistan, Kabul was captured by Taliban (or Taleban), a radical militia group which overthrew the government in an attempt to reinstate 12th - century Islamic purity. This single day became engraved in memories of many Afghan women, for it brought an end to their fundamental human rights. Women, who made up 40% of Afghan physicians and 70% of teachers, were forced to leave their jobs and became contained solely to household chores. They could no longer seek medical treatment for the most basic of ailments, for only female doctors were given permission to treat women and those fled to cities such as Pakistan. In effect, women began to die from simple colds or during childbirth, from the lack of necessary medical interventions. In addition, women became required to hide every single inch of their skin under a "burqa," which resembles a tent worn as clothing. Showing even the smallest strip of skin resulted in women being lashed with metal cables, car antennas, belts and leather cricket bats until their body parts became broken. Leaving the house without a relative male companion was illegal, as was talking to any male outside the immediate family without the presence of the same relative. Households that housed women were required to paint their windows black, so that passing strangers could not look in. Many, faced with pressure of poverty and their starving children, were forced into becoming beggars or even prostitutes. Romantic association with any male before marriage became prohibited, and offenders were punished publicly with a hundred whips, or in the case of females committing adultery, they were subjected to death. Men have been known for burning their often-pregnant wives alive, and yet the so - called government failed to interfere and at least punish males for such acts of violence. And although nothing in Qur'an encourages such behavior towards women, who are promised equal rights in every

aspect of life, violations of Taliban de It is often hard to believe that through all the human advances, very few of us ever take action against such obvious outbursts of misogyny, which should have been an aspect of the past. Unconsciously we believe that problems have a way of taking care of themselves and if we are not to do something about them, someone else will. The sad reality is, the problems will remain until someone decides to stand up and take action, to make even the smallest voice count. Until then, Taliban will continue to enforce their tyrannical measures on the women of Afghanistan, causing many more to lose hope that the terror, which continues to this day, will ever end.

If you would like to help the situation in Afghanistan, please visit www.feminist.org for more information.

Vera
10th grader
Cleveland, Ohio

The One-armed Statue

She stood silent in the garden along the path to the fountain. Her long robes were draped over her, with one foot raised in a dancing step and an arm poised gracefully over her head. Her hair tumbled down over her shoulders, full of blooms. Her skin was white as white, smooth and cool in the evening.

Amadeo ran quickly down the path, pausing only to break a white rose from it's stem. He approached her and smiled warmly. "A gift," he told her grandly, "for one who surpasses the definition of beauty." She stood as motionless as ever. Sighing, he tucked the flower into her lowered hand.

"If only you could accept, dear Liliana." He kissed her cheek, getting no response, and not expecting it. He then sat at her feet and brought out his flute. "I wrote this for you." He began to play.

It was a song of sorrow and joy tied together in a blissful melody. The song was his soul, telling the story of a beautiful and impossible love that lived only in his heart and in the garden.

The notes where cut short by loud footsteps on the brick path. "Very pretty Amadeo." He stopped playing and looked up at thew intruder. "Though I think you could us your time more constructively than making music with your statue."

"What do you want Cristo?"

"Nothing but your company, little brother. Not to mention I always enjoy a visit with your little marble lady here." Cristo plucked the rose from Liliana's hand and let the flower fall to the ground, crushing it under his foot.

"Why must you disturb us? Do we mean you harm?"

"You can not continue to do this, Amadeo. She is but stone on a pedestal. You need a real wife that can make you happy, not a statue in the garden. Cast off these childish fantasies."

"Liliana brings me joy. I know as well as anyone else that you are not happy with your wife."

A spark of anger flashed in Cristo's eyes. "Your heart cries out for her to speak, to accept your gifts of love. But she does not, and she never will. You are not any happier than I!" With those words he picked up a loose brick from the walk and hurled it at the statue, aiming for her face.

The brick missed her lovely face, striking her upraised arm instead.

There was a loud crack and her arm, severed at the shoulder, fell to the ground. "No!" Amadeo wailed. "How could you? Look at what you've done to her!" With that he launched himself at his brother, tears in his eyes.

Cristo, being a bit larger, easily fought him off, throwing Amadeo to the ground in front of the ruined statue. "You need to grow up, little brother.

It's just a hunk of rock." He stalked off, leaving Amadeo alone with his love.

"Oh, Liliana," he cried, tears running freely. He kissed her face and clutched her body to him. "He disfigured you forever. You were perfection, and now you're not. It doesn't matter though. You are still beautiful and I will love you forever."

His tears lay on her face as he left her. After one final kiss he turned away, feeling hopeless.

"Amadeo!" a female voice said behind him. He turned around quickly. Gone was the statue. In its place was a woman pale as marble. She stepped off the low pedestal.

"Liliana?"

She rushed towards him, wrapping her only arm around him. "You

did it," she whispered. "Your devotion, which you proved to be eternal, set me free."

Lea
11th grader
Akron, Ohio

About_The_Author: This is just something I wrote while I should have been paying attention in History class. It's no great work, but I like it.

Sparky And Varnish

Michael cried himself to sleep again. It was late, four a.m. He didn't want to wake up his parents, he was afraid his dad would yell at him again because he was fifteen and still having nightmares. Michael thought his dad didn't like him very much. He loved him, because he was Michael's father, and when a father has a child, he automatically loves him. But he didn't like Michael.

He was still having the same dream, the one where he's standing in the middle of the freeway with his dog, Sparky. The dream never really ends, they're just standing there, with the cars honking, Michael crying and Sparky barking. The wind almost knocks him over. Sparky died when Michael was ten. Almost every night after that day he would have the dream. His mom had tried to tell him it was all right, but he could hear the worry behind her voice.

It was fifteen minutes later and Michael still couldn't sleep.

"4:15 isn't bad," he thought. "I almost got five hours tonight."

He decided it was still too early to do anything, so he headed down to the basement to do what he usually did when he can't sleep. Michael painted. He had turned the basement into a studio three years ago. He always felt calmer when he had a brush in his hand, and paint stains on the front of his shirt.

His father thought he was crazy, coming home straight after school, taking a cup of coffee, then going to the basement.

"Crazy kid," he thought. "Probably doesn't even go to school, probably hangs out under a bridge and smokes."

His father was wrong; Michael went. He also thought that smoking was one of the most awful habits on Earth. He finished all of his homework in class, and at lunch. He didn't eat, he didn't need to. He ate at night.

He used to eat whenever, but that was when Sparky was around.

Michael thought of Sparky and started crying again. Not sobbing, but the silent type of crying that you do when you don't want anyone to think you're ridiculous. He had mastered it to an art.

Just then a light came on. He heard footsteps, and wiped his eyes. He hated his parents to see him cry.

His mom walked into the room. He breathed a sigh of relief.

"Sweetheart, what's wrong?" she asked.

"Nothing," he mumbled.

She had already known what was wrong. She had found Michael here many times. Painting and crying. That's how her son spends his days. One day, it was when he turned thirteen. She had asked him, "Would you like to invite a couple of friends to go somewhere for your birthday?"

He had just looked her straight in the eyes, his eyes were a light grey and red rimmed. "What friends?" He had asked. She just turned the other way as Michael went to the basement.

"I, umm, couldn't sleep," he sniffled. "So I just, came down here to paint."

"What have you been painting lately?"

"Nothing."

"But you just sa-"

"I was thinking of something," he said. "How does a bridge over a river sound?"

His mother delighted that her son had asked her opinion, answered quickly.

"That sounds great! Michael, you know. Your painting has gotten so good that I think we should call someone from a gallery."

"I keep my stuff," he wiped his nose, "over there, by the stairs."

Sure enough, there were about fifty canvases stacked on top of one another.

"Well, you better get ready for school. Do you want me to make you something to eat?"

"No, I'll eat at dinner."

Michael went upstairs, got dressed, grabbed his green jacket and

headed out the door.

* * * *

"Hey, Dave. Here comes VanGotchi!"

That was Stefan. He's your normal everyday guy who enjoys making people miserable. He had been on Michael's case since sixth grade.

"His name was Van Gogh, not VanGotchi."

"Was I talking to you, whiner?"

Michael just walked away. He had gotten use to the name calling.

Paintball, whiner, VanGotchi. They were like a part of him now. He tried to convince himself that they were just showing their ignorance. Yet, everyday he seemed to bring himself to the same conclusion.

Most of his teachers thought he was the quiet type who spent a lot of time studying and what not. They also thought that Michael had some odd fascination with clocks. He was always looking at the clock and counting to himself. Forty-five minutes, twenty minutes, ten minutes, two minutes. It made the long horrible days go much faster.

Just then the bell rang and it was time for lunch. Michael did not like lunch. Even though he disliked it, though, it did have sort of a pleasant solitude feel.

He went up to the library every day to do his homework. Today's assignments were fairly difficult, but he finished them quickly. He decided he would read.

"Excuse me," he said to the librarian in his almost inaudible voice.

"What book would you recommend?"

"Well, why don't you look over there in the eight-hundred section?"

"Thank you."

He walked over and read the titles of the books. Nothing seemed interesting. He walked down the stairs and waited behind the door until the bell rang. When it did he walked with hands jammed into jacket pockets, face looking down, to his next class. He almost had a smile on his face.

His next class was art.

"Bonjour class," said the accented art teacher. "Today, we start painting project."

Michael went to the back of the room to get his work. It was of a boy and a dog. The assignment had been to visualize your fondest memory. He looked at the drawing and almost started crying. He stopped himself short by closing his eyes and rubbing them fiercely. No more tears. He went to sit down. On his way he grabbed a pail of varnish and asked if he could take it home.

"Most certainly, Michael," she said. "I like to see my artists take their creativity home with them."

"Thank you," he mumbled.

He sat down and began painting the background first. A country road and a mass of pine trees behind them. He actually smiled then. A real showing your teeth, eyes full of happiness smile. That was the summer he got Sparky. He had been so happy. Running everywhere, laughing.

The bell rang. Amazed that the whole class was over, he stopped daydreaming and headed out the school building and into the cool autumn air, pail of varnish in hand.

"Hey! Look what we've got here!"

Michael thought to himself. "Am I the only one here who doesn't think he's the greatest guy alive?" Stefan was the most popular guy in school.

Michael hated him. Not because he was jealous of his popularity, but because of his personality. A sewer rat's contaminated bite would've been nicer than one of Stefan's long, drawn out stories about his favorite subject, himself.

"Hey, whiner, come here. I wanna talk to you about something. I need tutoring in Geekology, can <i>you</i> help me?"

Michael stopped for just a second, still looking at the ground, thinking.

About nothing really. He continued walking.

"Stefan, I don't have time for you today, I have to get home."

"Why? Are you late for some art class or something? Or do you just want to go home and cry?"

Michael didn't look at him, he didn't talk to him. He just started walking, after feeling like Stefan's eyes were no longer glaring at

him, he ran home. When he reached the door, he found it was already unlocked. So he stepped inside.

"Hello?"

"Michael!" his father coughed. "Son, I got sick at work today, so I came home early. How was your day?"

"It was fine."

Michael went into the kitchen to pour a small mug of coffee. He noticed the usual stern look on his father's face as he turned around. He turned back towards the coffee pot.

"Nothing happened? You didn't get a test, quiz, paper back or anything?"

"I got an A on an english paper."

"Really? What was it about?"

"I don't know, I have to go to the basement, Dad."

"Michael! You listen to me, I am trying to talk to you, but every time I even try, you lock me out and go to the basement. Honestly boy, I don't know why you still cry over that dog so much."

"Why do I cry over *that* dog so much? I'll tell you why. It's because every time I go to sleep, I dream about that dog. They won't go away. And it's still that same stupid dream. I'm standing in the middle of the road, I don't know why they just don't hit us, the cars won't go away, I can't go away. I see the dog every day dad. Every day to me it's like he dies all over again. Do you think I like people seeing me cry? Do you think I like people whispering that my eyes are always red rimmed, and it surely doesn't match my weird eye color. It won't go away. That is why I cry over *that* dog so much. Excuse me, Dad. I have to go to the basement. I have work to do."

He turned to walk away, and tears filled his eyes. He started walking fast, then he ran into the basement and locked the door. He had not said so many words to his father in months. It was almost as if it wasn't him. It was like all of the anger that he had been holding against everybody over the past few years, and just come up in one short argument. He was sad to admit that he did feel relieved. He listened quietly, trying to figure out what his father was doing. He heard the TV come on. "I can't believe it,"

he thought. "He didn't even care." He walked over to the stairs and realized he had left the pail of varnish upstairs. He sat on the

bottom step thinking for some time. He finally got up the nerve and walked up the stairs, as quietly as he could, and unlocked the door. He stuck his head out and saw that his father was asleep on the couch, he tiptoed to his backpack and picked up the pail. He went back to the stairs and was startled by his father's voice.

"Michael. Remember, I'm your father, and I love you."

"I know. But you don't like me."

"What?"

He walked back down the stairs, this time leaving the door unlocked. His father didn't come back, he was probably trying to figure out what Michael meant. He turned to the stairs again, trying to figure out what painting to choose. He finally chose the one that he had painted sitting at his bedroom window. He had put in every detail. From the rain hitting the pavement to the slicked back feathers of the robin that hid under a branch. He was proud of his work. He brought out his wall brush and dipped it into the varnish. He slowly painted a light coat of the clear substance onto the painting. He stepped back and sat on the bench; then he picked up the book he was reading. It was one of the first books that he had actually gotten interested in. Spending his lunchtime in the library had finally paid off. After an hour he looked up, and touched the painting. The varnish was dry. He took it off of the easel and walked upstairs with it. He had been planning this a long time. He looked out the window and saw that the sky was getting grey, and he could hear thunder in the distance.

"I'll be back soon," he said to everybody and to nobody. He hadn't even noticed that his mother had come home.

He walked down the street and turned to the right. He walked and walked until he could barely see the sidewalk in front of him. He knew he had been planning something, but he forgot what. What was he going to do with the painting in his hand? Why was he outside? He remembered what it was he was going to do when he reached the frame shop. He walked up to the door and knocked. The woman behind the register waved him away, mouthing the word 'closed'.

"Please?" he yelled.

She looked out and saw him standing at the window with a painting in his arms, she also heard the thunder. She looked at him once more and unlocked the door.

"Come in, already!" she said. "Why didn't you come earlier?"

He looked at the elderly woman in front of him, he could tell that she wasn't cold hearted and wouldn't yell at him.

"I wasn't finished earlier. Or maybe I was, and I was still walking. I'm sorry."

"Still walking? But this store is at least five minutes away from everything even by car. Well, enough of this. What can I do for you?"

"I want this framed."

"Well dear, I can tell that much. Come over here and choose a frame for that lovely painting."

"You like my work?" he asked.

"You painted that? It's wonderful! Such detail, and heart. You have a real talent young man."

"Thank you. I think I would like that moss green one. How much?"

"For you? I would say twenty. You do realize that I am lowering the price by twenty. But I'd be willing to frame it for you for free if you would paint something for me. You see, my granddaughter is turning five years old next month, and she just loves dogs. Could you paint one for me to give to her? It would be a great favor."

Michael thought for a minute and came to a decision.

"For you, yes."

* * * *

Later that night Michael walked home with a smile on his face. When he reached his house he walked in, kissed his mother on the cheek and walked up to his father.

"Dad, I'm getting something framed for you. And I'm sorry."

His father looked at him. Really looked at him for about a minute, then smiled, stood up and hugged him.

"What's for dinner?" he asked. "I'm really hungry, I haven't eaten all day!"

His mother gave him a quizzical look, she spoke up. "Well, we're having this new rice dish Anne told me about. It's almost done, why don't you sit down?"

Five minutes later the rice was done, and they were all seated around a table. Michael's father was smiling, still. His mother

looked at him and tried talking. "Did you have an alright day, dear?"

"Actually, I had a great day. This old woman at the frame shop, that's where I was. Anyway, she wants me to paint something for her to give to her granddaughter on her birthday."

"What did she want you to paint?" his mother asked.

"A dog."

Just the silence crept through the room. "I'm alright about it, really. It's for her granddaughter. I couldn't say no. And I was going to paint a dog soon anyway."

"That sounds nice dear, maybe you'll stop having those awful dreams once you get it out of your system."

"Maybe."

Michael started painting the very next day, he felt it would be one of his best works, the night before he didn't have a nightmare. He just slept without interruption. His mother was still dumbfounded why he was getting one of his paintings framed for his father. She questioned him later on the subject.

"Michael, why are you getting a painting framed for your father?"

"Because I want to show him I'm good for something. I want to show him that I don't just come home and hide in the basement drinking coffee."

"That's real nice, he appreciates it."

One Week Later

"I've finished your painting, are you finished framing mine?"

"Yes, I have it right here. How do you think it turned out? I really like the green."

"It looks great, here's the painting," he reaches and puts the portrait of Sparky in front of her. "It of my old dog, Sparky. When I use to have him, people always thought he was cute, so I painted a picture I had of him on the wall."

"She will love it! Here's your painting, I have to be going home now. Drop by any time."

"Alright, bye."

He walked home, he had a smile on his face, and he was happy to

be going home. He walked through the door, his dad was sitting on the armchair in front of the TV. He walked up to him.

"This is for you," he said. "I have to do my homework now."

Tera

8th grader

Spartanburg, South Carolina

About the author of 'Sparky And Varnish': She reads continuously, listens to R.E.M. and writes occasionally, when a topic comes to her.

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