

teen **ink**

April/May 2022
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By teens, **for teens**

*Poetry & Art
Contest Winners
Announced!*

Teen Health

Educator of the Year Awards!

Did your teacher make the list?

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Altamonte Springs, FL

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Printed in Black Ink

by Madison Cossaboom, Newark, DE

Through the storm of shrill screaming and uproarious laughter, I drove my hands into my backpack and pulled out a gray folder. Carefully opening the folds, I scanned paper after paper in search of a crisp, stapled packet. My balance, along with my thoughts, began to falter as the school bus continued to make abrupt stops and jagged turns left and right. I slipped the packet out of the folder's grasp and handed it to my friend. With that simple exchange, I traded my life's work for anxiety and anguish.

My heart, soul, and passion were printed on a mere 14 pages in fine, black ink. Mentally, I was building walls of stone and brick to surround my fragile spirit in protection. If it were to be crushed at this moment, it would be irreparable.

I followed the movement of my friends' nimble eyes reading word for word, breezing through each line. As page after page was turned, the only thing my mind could truly focus on was interpreting her expressions. Sometimes her eyebrows lifted, or her jaw would dwindle lightly. With each modest change of character, my desire to view her imagination grew evermore.

Academically, I was often praised for my ability to craft and write essays above expectations. However, what my friend held in her hand wasn't proofread or edited. It was an undiluted, raw story – perhaps the purest example of my writing yet. I practically handed her a piece of glass and hoped that she wouldn't shatter it.

A tsunami of dread was almost guaranteed to crash over my heart as she flipped over to the last page. It was as if, perfectly timed to that precise moment, the bus suddenly became hushed and the jerking ceased. My friend peered up from the papers and her mouth simply gaped at me, whether in awe or discontent shock.

My eyes met with hers and awaited her feedback, but no words were exchanged. Her expression might as well have been written in an incomprehensible language. Only two sheer words were just enough to impair the silence and tension that was intertwined with

“My heart, soul, and passion were printed on a mere 14 pages in fine, black ink”

the space between us.

“Read this,” she murmured to a girl sitting behind me, passing the packet further from my embrace. Once more, I filed into the waiting room for my own story, anticipating the results that were my friends' opinions.

The story was tossed around the backend of the vehicle like a game of hot potato. Each sheet of paper had lost its brisk sense, now on the verge of crumbling and tearing. It was an utter reflection of my own certainty. Like the ocean, it swayed back and forth without end. I allowed myself to take one deep breath, then confront the possible mayhem my writing may have stirred.

If I ever saw a shooting star, I would wish upon it to have a documented film of every word, every phrase, every miniscule detail my friends gushed. The vexing wave that once towered just above my heart disintegrated into butterflies that now fluttered around in my stomach.

Opposed to giving me harsh criticism, they applauded me. They filled the air around them with nothing except empowering and elating comments. If my heart was an unscathed match, they transformed it into a blazing bonfire of determination. Amongst themselves, they talked about my work as if it were an award-winning novel.

As I stepped off the bus I could no longer hear the ear-piercing shrieks or the wailing of kids on the bus, only the praise and cheers of my ever-growing writing ambition. ●



Kidney Stones

by Marina Matson, Racine, WI

My grandma, an engineer and Russian native, was the most hardworking, persistent, driven, and goal-oriented person that I have ever met. She was the first female engineer in a big factory in Russia. She designed blueprints for an airline railroad in the Republic of Georgia and created many apartment building designs. I knew her as someone who always had a saying or quote for every situation. One of my favorites was this: *“в нормальных семьях по наследству передают драгоценные камни, а в нашей - только почечные.”* Or, “In normal families, precious stones are passed down, but in ours – only kidney stones.”

Because people usually develop kidney stones between 35 to 40 years of age, I haven't quite received my inheritance yet. But, is it possible that I truly inherited nothing from her beside the right genes to house kidney stones?

To get through blockades in life takes resilience, and that is something that I have inherited from my grandmother. To be presented with an obstacle, work through it, and still not lose passion and joy for life is hard. But reminding myself of how my grandmother pushed through her struggles motivates me to continue. One day, after making the necessary revisions on an apartment design, a two-by-four was dropped on her head from the top of

“ I felt lost. I didn't know who I was. 'Who am I without tennis?' I asked myself ”

a 20-story building, causing severe brain damage. But still, she defied her doctor's predictions, got back on her feet in two months, and returned to work in three.

Even though such a physically and mentally traumatizing event has never happened to me, it would be false to say that my various paths of life have been without blockades. For eight years I played tennis. Of course, since I started when I was five, it was just for fun. But by nine, I decided I wanted tennis to be more than a hobby, so I worked harder than I had previously, and eventually, I was ready for my first tournament. The thrill of calling “out!” and the feeling of the fresh ball against my strings sent adrenaline and dopamine to my brain. I emerged from that event with a trophy: first place in the consolation bracket! I knew I wanted to try again, to try to get an award in the main bracket. I started competing and practicing more and more until, eventually, I had collegiate-level

dreams. And, according to my coaches at the time, those dreams were completely within reach.

However, like my grandmother, when my game started to reach new levels, disaster struck. However, my disaster didn't identify as a two-by-four. It goes by a different name; Snapping Hip Syndrome. Like the Joker, Snapping Hip Syndrome has an evil best friend – hypermobility syndrome. My doctor said that if I continued to play tennis, I would be in a wheelchair before I was legally allowed to vote. I felt lost. I didn't know who I was. “Who am I without tennis?” I asked myself.

Then, like my grandmother, I started healing. Not only physically, but also mentally. I realized I had made tennis my identity, and without that, I felt empty. So I decided to change that. I pursued many new activities to rediscover who I am. Through that process, I tried to use my inherited strength, determination, and drive from my grandmother to power through the hard times when I missed the feeling of my racket striking a moving ball. But I found new feelings that drive me; the clickity-clack of my keyboard as I conjure stories and books, and smooth swish of the bottom of my heels as I waltz across the floor, and above all, the electric buzzing in my brain as I finish a book in the early hours of the morning. 🌞

Demonizing Addicts

by Ash Southwell, Highland Village, TX

Artwork by Kaeya Patel, Washington, D.C.

I could see that she was killing herself. I could see the excitement in her face every time she injected that poison into her lungs just to feel a temporary buzz. It hurt to see her own self-destruction consume her. Every time we got home, she would reach into her bag and put the poison to her lips. I knew she didn't care about her well-being, and she didn't consider how her actions affected me. She was too far gone in her obsession. That's the difficult thing about addicts—they're aware that what they're doing is unhealthy, but they lack the motivation to make an effort to stop. They lack the ability to recognize their problem. They lack the empathy necessary to see that they could be hurting others. That's why I feel bad for them. That's why I stayed by her side.

Addiction is a heavy burden that weighs down everyone, especially the addicts themselves. It's common to demonize addicts and paint them as abusive monsters. While I agree that addiction can make people do or say twisted things, I don't agree with the general stigma that surrounds it. Addicts are just scared children who are desperately trying to survive. What if you were depressed every day and your suffering became so unbearable that you considered taking your own life? Of course you would chase that one thing that makes you forget about your pain, no matter how temporary that relief is. Addiction is just the result of unhealthy coping mechanisms. However, that doesn't erase the pain you cause to others. It doesn't excuse your words or actions. That's why addiction is such a tough topic to tackle. Addiction hurts everyone. And I needed to tell her that I was hurting.

The night we fought was a mess. I remember telling her how her substance abuse affected me. I told her she had a problem. She was drunk on the other end of the screen and started spitting insults and excuses at me. I couldn't bear to see her like that. It hurt too much. I poured my heart and soul out in front of her as if it was an

offering for the gods, and she discarded everything. My eyes were glossy and thick with tears. I sat and watched her in silence as my brain tried to comprehend the gravity of her words. Then she said it. The one thing that broke me.

"Why don't you just leave me if I'm such a hot mess?"

Everything was finally clear. She would rather lose me than lose her drugs. But I would rather lose the world than lose her. I would rather lose every drop of blood in my body than lose her. I would rather lose my own life than lose her. And I know she felt the same way. She was just in so much pain that she wanted to push the problem away. She wanted to push me away.

I spent day after day watching her slowly kill herself, and I said nothing. Like all addicts, I knew she was in pain and just needed help. She didn't need a lecture or punishment. What she needed was my support. That's all I wanted to give to her. I just wanted her to know that I would love and help her through every step of her recovery.

But she didn't want my help, and you can't help someone who isn't ready to be better. So I stayed by her side, ready and waiting to hold her when she cried, ready and waiting to serve her every need, ready and waiting to be the best friend I can be for her. I just want her to be okay. I just want her to be safe and happy. 🌱

If you or someone you care about needs support around substance misuse or addiction, please call 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or visit www.samhsa.gov



Artwork by
Aesha Jackson,
Louisville, KY



Artwork by
Evy Mansat-Gros
Greenville, SC



Artwork by Clara Robinson,
Boston, MA



Applying Oneself

by Erik Rosenkranz, Clarkston, MI

Artwork by Clair Kim,
Seoul, South Korea

As I sit in the cold chair in the plain room, I feel as if I am on fire. My heart is beating at an inhuman rate, and I feel as if I couldn't see five feet in front of me. It's not like rehearsing to myself on the car ride over did any help, I think to myself. Now I've learned about the natural "fight or flight" response to these types of situations, but neither option was particularly appealing to me in this moment. I felt mentally and physically paralyzed, as a hand extends from the figure in front of me, now hanging in the void that I am conventionally supposed to fill.

It was a sunny summer afternoon and I was out playing basketball with my brothers. It was then when I received a text from my friend. The breeze stopped and my basketball became suspended in the air as I read his text. He informed me that there was a job opening for a tech position at a local library.

At this point in my life, I never had experience in a job. My immediate thoughts were of hesitation, but not of outright rejection. Getting a job to me was a nerve-racking idea. How would I apply? I don't even have a resume yet. What experience should I have in order to be compatible for the position? I knew that I had to "put myself out there" and "apply myself" sometime relatively soon, but I just didn't know if now was the right time for me. I was procrastinating on the inevitable.

“I knew that I had to 'put myself out there' and 'apply myself' sometime relatively soon, but I just didn't know if now was the right time for me”

After I came inside and told my parents about it, I received encouragement to apply. After all, I had just taken a class about computer basics and got a certification. I would finally have something to do over the summer, and I would get paid for doing it! This was a rare opportunity for something that I would only ever see once, so I decided to take up my friend's offer.

That night, I began filling out the required paperwork necessary for myself, the employer, and my school. This was an arduous task for someone like myself, who had never filled out paperwork. I then began to create my resume. I looked at a sample template online in order to do so. Everything went smoothly until I got to the "experience" section. It was then that I realized I had no real-world experience with this kind of thing, other than a small event I did last summer.

The feelings of hesitation resurfaced like a pot of water beginning to boil. After all of this work, I now just realized that I don't have any real world experience? Was I simply doing all of this work for nothing? Despite all of these thoughts running through my head, I found myself ignoring them. I reassured myself that this job was an experience that I had to have, regardless of the outcome. I powered through the rest of that resume knowing it was integral to my journey. The following morning I called the employer and scheduled

the interview.

About three weeks later, I received an email from the employer informing me that while I had decent experience and was able to grasp the concepts I needed to know for the job, I had lost out to another, more experienced applicant. I still remember the split-second drop my stomach did, but I didn't really feel it. This natural gut reaction was not equivalent to what I was really feeling: gratitude. Although I did not get the job, I was thankful for my friend's suggestion, the opportunity that the employer gave me, and for my parents who not only let me, but encouraged me to go through this experience. With this experience in my past, I am now able to move forward in life more confidently, as I know what is to come in my future. Applying oneself, I realized, isn't about the prospect of success, but about the experience and journey that one will always go through regardless. 🌟



Artwork Contest
**Where Do You
See Love?**



CONTEST
WINNER!

Artwork by Claire Yoo,
Euless, TX



*Artwork by Austina Xu,
Cupertino, CA*



Photo by Amber Yu, Trenton, NJ



Artwork by Jyothis Maria John, Ernakulam, India



*Artwork by
Ela Ponnachana,
Vancouver, BC,
Canada*



*Photo by
Avery-Grace Payne,
Cypress, TX*



Ms. *Perfect*

by Lauren Gelwachs,
Hopkinton, MA

Just look at her. I mean, she’s perfect. Her face is perfect. The perfect nose, the perfect lips, her blue eyes spaced perfectly apart. The mirror next to me showed quite the opposite. My nose with its bump right in the middle, holding my glasses into place so I never have to push them back up. My dirty blonde hair that everyone tells me is actually brown is nowhere near her perfect blonde hair. My outfit could never look as expensive as hers.

I know it’s just an advertisement, but that... person, is everywhere. It’s the same girl every time, same hair, same eyes. Every feature is the same. It’s just what they are advertising that’s different: the makeup on her face that doesn’t make her any prettier than she already is. The extra expensive clothes that my family could never afford. The purse she holds is different in every photo. The only other thing that remains the same is the purple button right underneath the picture, reading “Want to look like this? Click here,” but I have never dared to click on it.

After taking one last glance at it, I slam my laptop shut, a little extra violently than I had intended. I had to double-check I

hadn’t broken it just in case, so I flipped the lid up fast enough that she wouldn’t display across the screen again, and shut it quickly after examining the screen for cracks.

“You ready, hun?” My mom shouts up the stairs and reminds me of our dinner out with my sister, who’s home for the night.

Delaney was always the pretty one in the family. She had the perfect blonde hair and the perfect nose. She was the one who got good grades and the perfect skin. My two brothers and I, well, we are the opposite. She was the definition of perfection, and no one understands where she got it from. I wish I could look like her sometimes, but I don’t want to let anyone know that.

“Yeah, just a minute,” I yell back down, hoping the sound is carried to her so I don’t have to yell louder.

I head to the bathroom and turn the curling iron on. While that heats up, I go back to the bedroom and grab the dress hanging in my closet. I neatly took it off of the hanger and put it on, making sure not to wrinkle it so I wouldn’t have to iron it again. Back in the bathroom, I finish curling my hair and go downstairs.

“Is everyone ready?” mom shouts, unnecessarily loud since everyone was already downstairs. We head toward the door, so she gets her question answered without a response.

The car ride was the same as it always is. The narrow roads leading to the restaurant were the same ones we always drove down to get to the center of town. Peering out of the window, I saw that the billboard we always pass at the blinking light wasn’t advertising the usual electric car. It was the girl again, sitting there with her brand new phone. It’s like she’s following me, out of nowhere.

“Did that billboard change to some dude holding a phone?” my brother Dylan asked, as he also looked out the window.

“No, it’s a girl, Dylan. I think you should get your eyes checked,” I responded back to him.

“It is very clearly a man. I think you should get your eyes checked, Lana.”

“What does he look like?”

“He has short brown hair, and is dressed like he is going to some country club outing

or something.”

“Mhm,” I respond sarcastically. I don’t even try to ask my other brother, Landen. He’s always in a world of his own, so there’s no chance he even glanced at it.

Dinner went by quietly and quickly. My mind was only occupied by that billboard, and very few words left my mouth. Back home, I went into my room and opened up my laptop again, only to find that girl advertising her perfect outfit to me, just as I had left it.

“Click it,” I hear from behind me, and it makes me jump a little bit. Delaney, now standing behind my desk, points her finger at the button on the screen, right below the image of the girl. “Just click it. There isn’t any harm in a little button.”

“But I don’t know what it does.”

“Does it really matter? What is the worst thing that could happen? Maybe it will ship her outfit to our house.”

“I don’t know Delaney, it seems a bit weird.”

“Just press it, okay?”

“Fine,” I respond defensively. I hesitate for a moment more, but I could use the set of clothes she has on her. Or maybe her

hair color, or her nose. Even her eyes. Who knows what will happen, but no risk, no reward, right? So, I click it.

My mind goes blank for a second. I can’t see, hear, or touch anything. My bedroom disappeared from around me, and everything was black. Delaney was gone, and it was just me.

All of a sudden, everything reappears. Except this time, I must be standing next to my bed, looking directly at my desk chair with my laptop open. The laptop didn’t have that girl advertising anymore, in fact, there wasn’t even an advertisement popping up. After a second of confusion, I see someone sitting in my desk chair. It looks like Delaney from the back, but it couldn’t be because Delaney was standing right beside the chair. I couldn’t see her face, but she had that perfectly straight blonde hair in that outfit just displayed on the laptop.

The girl swivels around to reveal the exact replica of the figure in the advertisement. What? No, she isn’t real, I think to myself. I go to take a step forward, but I don’t move. Not an inch. Panicked, I try to reach for the chair, an arm length away from me. Again, I don’t move at all. Looking down, I realize I am not in my own body, it’s as if I am just viewing the scene in front of me like I am in a movie theater. A gut-wrenching feeling

grows in my nonexistent stomach.

Even with my vision glued to the scene in front of me, I hear a faint cry. I can’t turn my vision to look in the direction of the cries, but the sobs get louder and louder.

“Who’s there?”

“I am so sorry Lana,” she says, in between catching her breath.

“What? What do you mean? Who are you?”

And then, I realize.

“Delaney?” I hear from outside my bedroom door, and Dylan opens it and walks in. Surely he would realize something is wrong, especially if some random girl is sitting in my chair.

“Mom wants you guys to come downstairs, we have a surprise,” he says.

What? No, no, he must have seen that girl. There is no way he didn’t recognize that it wasn’t me. It’s so obvious.

Behind Dylan, Landen runs into the bedroom and leaps right onto the girl’s lap. He hugs her, and she hugs him back. He didn’t notice anything wrong. Nothing. 🌸

**Artwork by Genevieve Gungor,
New York, NY**

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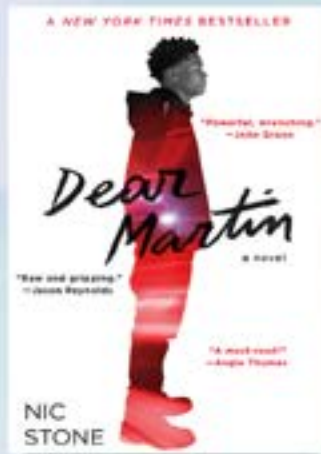
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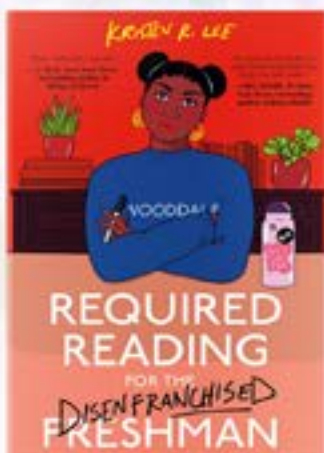
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