



# **A Celebration of Stories** In the City of Literature

**February 2021**

Iowa City UNESCO City of Literature's

**ONE BOOK**  
**TWO BOOK**

A Celebration of  
Children's Literature  
in the City of Literature



# **A Celebration of Stories in the City of Literature February 2021**

## **The Write Stuff winners**

*Pieces are recognized for their language, clarity, structure, and emotional impact.*

Dustin Nguyen, 1, Borlaug  
Sophia Nguyen, 2, Borlaug  
Abigail Chen, 3, Wickham  
Olivia Rantanen, 4, Willowwind  
Mirka Punekar, 5, Coralville Central

Leon Xie, 6, Wickham  
Maxwell Brown, 7, South East  
Junior High  
Luis Holanda Solano de Almeida, 8,  
Scattergood Friends

## **From the Heart winners**

*Pieces are recognized for their creativity, passion, and expressiveness.*

Lake Spak, 1, Mann  
Anjana, Mathews, 2, Wickham  
Lyan Hussein, 3, Coralville Central  
Ezra O'Connor, 4, Lemme  
Maggie Nguyen, 5, Borlaug

Adelaide Capps, 6, Mann  
Siena Brown, 7, South East Junior  
High  
Claire Franzwa, 8, North Central  
Junior High

## **Honorable Mention**

*These students' work was deemed to be of excellent quality.*

Nate Cwiertny, 2, Weber  
Inaaya Ali, 2, Wickham  
Amara Pfeifer, 3, Wickham  
Cora Beland, 4, Coralville Central  
Anaya Patil, 5, Penn

Hattie Galloway, 6, Hoover  
Ben Haines, 6, Lincoln  
Katelyn Wu, 7, Clear Creek Amana  
Anora Klauke, 8, South East Junior  
High

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Coralville Public Library, North Liberty Community Library,  
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Haunted Bookshop, Iowa City Downtown District

## Going To Adventure Land

John was very excited because he was going to go to adventure land.

“You cannot wear pajamas to Adventure Land,” said his mother to John’s sister named Hazel and John.

“Okay,” said Hazel. John and Hazel went and got their clothes.

John’s family went to Adventure Land! After they arrived, they came to the ticket seller. They bought 16 tickets. They saw a rollercoaster, they wanted to go there!

But there was a long line. Oh no! “Well let’s go on other rides,” said Dad.

They came on the teapot waterslide. Each had to pay 1 ticket. They all did three rides and paid 12 tickets for the whole family.

They had 4 tickets left and the line at the roller coaster was empty! But they had to pay 2 tickets each. Uh oh!

So they had to do a maze to get 1 ticket each! They finished the maze and got a ticket! They got on the rollercoaster.

It was a fun day for John’s family.

## My Trip to Kent Park Beach

After lunch, I went to Kent Park in our red car with my family, including Dad, Mom, Maggie, and Dustin. We packed some sunscreen, an umbrella to block the sun, some beach toys, and shovels to dig in the sand. We made drippy sand castles that were so big to fall easily. After that, we got kind of bored. We wanted to bury one of us in the sand. We all played “rock paper scissors” and picked Dustin. So we buried half of Dustin’s body in the sand. We used our three shovels, two of them were purple, and one of them was orange. We all laughed so hard. That was the first time Dustin was buried and he felt so funny on his skin.

Next, I also paddled a boat with Maggie. The paddles were very heavy, so Maggie had to paddle, not me. When we were in the middle of the lake, we were super hot. There were also dragonflies flying above me. They scared me.

“It’s okay, they are beautiful,” Maggie tried to calm me down. We became bored and wanted to get out of the lake to the sand. There was a hill with a bridge and under there were some rocks. We were getting closer and closer and Maggie tried to turn. There was a big rock and the boat hit it because Maggie couldn’t turn. Maggie told me to help her paddle. I was doing the opposite. I was just making the boat heavier. Then Maggie had to paddle the boat by herself. The paddles grew heavier and heavier on Maggie. We felt very happy when we finally made it to the shore.

I wanted to have a contest to build a lake in the sand. Maggie was on my team and Dustin was on his own. I said the goals were that lakes had good design, strength, and could hold the most water. Our lake was very big and Dustin’s was very small. We showed Mom and Dad our sand-made lakes and somehow Dustin won (you know, because if he lost, he would get super mad).

Now, we had to go home because it was almost time for dinner. On our way home, we stopped at an ice cream shop. Maggie and I ate vanilla ice cream cones. Dustin ate a twisted ice cream cone. I learned that twisted ice cream is a mix of ice cream flavors, chocolate on left and vanilla on the right. Dad and Mom shared a cup of vanilla milkshake.

What a fun afternoon! I love going to Kent Park Beach!

## The Night

The night is filled with darkness and adventure.

The bright moon shines,

With shadows of trees underneath.

The night is silent,

And the wind is whispering secrets.

The trees sway with it, creating a small sound.

The moon is bright, illuminating a small squirrel's face.

Dark clouds drifting around, and then covering the moon.

Uncovering and recovering.

The squirrel scampers on, out into the dark.

Owls hoot, calling for mice.

Flying high above the trees.

Flowers sway silently with the wind.

Grass is flattened by the wind.

The breeze is careful not to whisper too long, frequently stopping.

The light is being covered by the dark clouds, and only leaving the dark.

The dark has nothing but stars to counter.

And the moon's light reappears.

Slowly, very slowly, the moon is drifting away, leaving the sun to illuminate the land.

### The Earth

The owlette lets out a piercing cry of hoot. The night is surrounded by darkness. The crickets create a cheerful tune. And the glowing light of the moon illuminates the night. Hooting till day. The night time is a calming time. The darkness of the night is like a cloak. An owl dances gracefully in the air. The owlette takes a deep breath and takes a leap to the sky. Gliding like a ballerina the owlette glides until day. The sun, a glowing ball of fire illuminates the sky. Tearing the cloak of night and surrounding the world with light. The night creatures disappear like water to the sun.

At last when the warmth seeps through, and the deer come trampling on in. The eagle follows with a giant *swoop* and the birds start with a hum. At last the day is about to be wrapped up and the night orchestra begins with a croak and a chirp.

A soft hum from cicadas and crickets start the night with a calming song. The world falls asleep and darkness floods the world. The calming night and mysterious light from the glowing pale moon. Pollen dances and gathers in the air and graceful owls swoop through the dark evening sky.

The smell of honey is strong that throughout the world, birds come on over. The extremely busy bees fly swiftly through the air carrying the sweet pollen. A crisp smell of apples fills the air, leaves dance and glide to the ground. A bear pounces and catches the playful fish. At last when the air cools down the cicadas chirp a cheerful song.

Hooting owls hoot until day breaks through. When the snowflakes start dancing around and the air is dramatically colder. Snow continues to build up once more. With a great flash in a snowstorm, the end of the season is coming to an end. But the year just started so once more. The end of the year will be a new start. Sun shines and thunder strikes but all is still. Wind whips around like a lasso and rain pours down. Snow builds up in piles of flakes and heat radiates. Hurricanes swirl with water and tornadoes whip around with wind. Swirling winds and swishing water surround the world. That is our home, Earth.

# The Comeback

Why? How did I achieve this? Who made this magically happen? I knew the answers to all those questions. Me. I can't sleep. I had just won the semi in the US open. This is huge for me, now that I am in the finals. But could I? Do I have the courage to play her? I have to play her. The queen. Bianca Andreescu. She is my idol, and I have to *play* her. How is this achievable? I closed my eyes and started to drift off to slow sleep.....

"Come on Mirka! Don't be so nervous! You *can* beat her!" My coach had given me the pep talk before the game. It really helped, but then it didn't. I was still so nervous, and I had so many questions. I started to warm up my body, and in about an hour and a half, I was called out. As I stepped off the elliptical, it felt as if my legs had turned into jelly. "How did I get to do this?" I whispered to myself. I took a few deep breaths and walked out to the court.

"WHOOO!!!" the crowd cheered. "GO MIRKA!" There was a huge uproar in the bottom left corner of the stands. There were all my family and friends all cheering for me. I felt as if I was floating! It was such a wonderful feeling, until she came out. Bianca Andreescu. There was a much louder cheer in the crowds when she came out. How did she look so calm? I was already sweating, and I haven't even started to play. We both went to shake hands with the umpire, and they chose a little girl to come to take a picture with us. The umpire grabbed a coin and threw it into the air. I called heads, but it was tails.

"Return," Bianca said. Oh man! I really wanted to return! We both took a picture with the little girl and set out to the court. "Breathe," I told myself and took a deep breath. I bounced the ball three times, threw it into the air, and I hit the ball. She returned down the line to my backhand, but I knew I wouldn't mess up because my backhand is better than my forehand. Normally, with people it is the opposite. I hit the ball back crosscourt to her backhand, she returned to my forehand, but it was really close to the net. I ran as fast as I could, I hit the ball, but it went out.

No! First point and I lost it. But I told myself, "It is just one point. You can get more." But that didn't help. I lost the first game. Now it has her serve, and I have seen Bianca play many times, and her serve is really strong and powerful. Bianca bounced the ball 5 times on the ground, threw it up and, WHACK! She hit it so hard, and placed it so well that it was an ace! What am I going to do?

WOW. I literally lost the first set 6-1. I just won one measly game. I am not tired at all, but I do need a break. My coach had come down to me and said: "Mirka! You could've tried harder. "I know!" I said. "But she is so good!" "Calm down," my coach said. "You need to relax." I took a deep breath, but it didn't really help. I took a few more, and then I started to calm down a bit.

I got back onto court, feeling pretty pumped up! It was her serve, but I felt pretty confident that I could return it. But once she threw the ball up into the air, my stomach tightened. A big lump formed in my throat. I felt so nervous again! Why? I lunged forward to attack the ball, but I swung too hard! The ball went out. I felt a bit sick. But not the sick where you throw up. The sick as in feeling too nervous.

"What in the world is happening?" I thought to myself. Why am I losing so badly? The score was 5-0, her serve. I need to focus. I got to have a break because Bianca got a little injury on her ankle. "Breathe," I told myself. It didn't help me though. My coach came down and said: "Mirka, who made it to the finals in the U.S. Open?" "Me," I mumbled. "Who made it this far?" "Me," I said, a little louder. "Who dreamed of winning this ever since you were a little girl?" "Me!" "Mirka, you have got this. You just need to believe in yourself, and try as hard as you can!"

He's right. I have got this. I can do it. I just need to believe in myself. I set out to the court, and took a few deep breaths. "I've got this," I whispered, to myself. Bianca bounced the ball a couple of times, threw it high into the air, and hit the ball. She hit it pretty hard, but I returned it flawlessly to the deep corner of her backhand side, she hit the ball back, but she hit it too hard, it went out.

Yes! I won a point and didn't make any mistakes! And it kept going like that! I made it to 5-5. I had also found a new strategy! Hit consistently to Bianca's backhand. Her backhand is great, but it is the weakest of all her shots. She either hit out, or in the net. I was making her tired too! I kept making her run so she got tired. When we went to take a short break, I saw that she was breathing heavily. But her coach also was giving her a big lecture on my weaknesses that he spotted. We set out to the court again, and Bianca didn't look tired. In fact, she was the exact opposite of tired.

It didn't ruin my game. I kept playing my style, but was hitting a lot harder now. The score got to 6-6, which meant that we had to play a tiebreaker. I pushed and pushed myself to play. Until I had found it. Her giant weak spot. Deep backhand. I always tried to force the ball to the baseline on her backhand side. It got me through! I won the tiebreaker 7-6! I couldn't believe it. But the game wasn't over.

I feel pretty good right now! But she doesn't. Bianca looks as fierce as a tiger. Ok, I think all my shots are really good right now, but I need to improve my mental game. Ok, for one thing I know that Bianca's weakest shot is her backhand. But her strongest is her forehand. Wait a minute. Hit to her *forehand*. I know that may sound crazy, but if she keeps messing up on her strength, she will get frustrated so she won't play as good. Got it. I set on out to the court, and took a big deep breath and whispered to myself: "I can do it."

Oh my gosh. She is playing really well. The score is 4-4. I kept making her mess up on her forehand, but she isn't getting frustrated! Wait a minute. That's it! *Hit the ball short!* I didn't want to try it because in most players, coming up to the net means they will finish the point. But if I make Bianca come to the net, and I hit a pretty good passing shot, there is no way that she can return it!

This is the moment of my whole entire life. I am so so so nervous. I can't believe it. There is no way that I can do this. It is a *championship point* for me. How can I do this? Most players always mess up on the match point. Wait. I have to believe in myself. I can do this. I will do this. I am going to do this. It is my serve. I bounced the ball 5 times on the ground. I took a deep breath. Tossed the ball into the air, hit it, not too hard though. It bounced to Bianca's backhand. She returned it down the line to my forehand, I hit it deep to her backhand, and she hit the ball out.

I felt as if the world had stopped. I couldn't believe it. I won! I had won the U.S. Open! I couldn't believe it. But how? Who did this magical thing? I knew the answer to that question. Me.

## The End!



## **A Look Back**

January 26th, 2558

\*Note: This is a fictional piece that is written from the standpoint of a person that lives in the far, far future.

When we look back on 2020, we see something different from years like 1776 or 1879. Not a brave stand against oppression or a brilliant invention that quite literally made our future brighter, but a terrible sickness that ravaged the entire world. It made everyone stay inside, and have no contact with anyone else. It would have been terrible. We must consider the people that worked tirelessly, 24/7, to create the vaccine that we have now to eliminate any threat of COVID-19 from rising once again. Though the technology they used was nowhere near the complexity of what we have today, they were still able to save the world with what they had. These people were prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice, to save humanity or die doing it. They knew that it would be dangerous, yet they still worked on, undeterred by the seemingly insurmountable threat of COVID-19. The heroes that we hear about in our history books are the stuff of legend, and rightfully so, as they were truly thinking about the greater good. We remember March 17th as COVID Memorial Day. \* The official name is COVID-19 Hero Remembrance Day, but most people use the informal designation. \* The mRNA vaccine breakthrough that paved the way for the COVID-19 vaccine was used to create the Disease Prevention Library, containing the vaccines for all discovered viruses. Many technological advances have been made as well.

VR technology was perfected in 2235, so meeting with people has become easier. With the power to meet anyone anytime, making advances in biology and technology creating the Disease Prevention Library was finished near 2340. The 100 years between 2400 and 2500 were used to patch up conflicts between countries, and 2500 to 2550 was peacetime.

Currently, we are finishing up terraforming Pluto and preparing to make a massive step for the advancement of mankind. The solar engine is almost complete and we are ready to move our own solar system. Exploring the galaxy will be tough, but is a necessary step if we are to satisfy our own goals of finding extraterrestrial life. We are preparing for the broadcast that signals the test firing of the solar engine, because it will happen in a few days. The protective shielding is almost finished, and luckily we were able to snag some 5th-row seats before their price skyrocketed to 100,000 dollars.

Since 2020, many precautions have been taken to ensure that no pandemic or catastrophe, no matter how severe, can be neutralized with a call to action from the push of a button. These 538 years have been used well to make certain that humanity will succeed. For those that are reading this in the far past or distant future, though a goal may seem insurmountable, given enough time, it will become possible without you even realizing it.

“It’s nice out here, isn’t it?” I said. I looked around at the scenery as we paddled down the river in our kayak. The sun was bright, the nature was green, and the water was sparkly clear. A perfect day.

“It is, isn’t it Evan?” said my brother Tim in the seat behind me. “And to think that we could have missed this for that boring safety talk.”

Since staying here at our grandparents log cabin for the summer, we’d been forced to attend a lecture on wilderness safety. Don’t eat random berries, don’t start a forest fire, yadda yadda, stuff like that. The worst part was, Grandpa Marty was making me and Tim do this every week!

“Yeah,” I said. “But I still feel bad about sneaking off like this. Doesn’t it seem a bit ironic that we’re sneaking away from a talk about safety to do something that’s clearly unsafe?”

“What’s unsafe about it? We’ve been paddling on boats since we could talk! Grandma and Grandpa just don’t trust us because we’re kids. That’s ageism you know. It’s a real word. Look it up.”

I still wasn’t convinced. But then I noticed something. “Hey, Tim... does this path look familiar to you?”

“No, not really. Why?” He kept paddling until he fully grasped what I said. “Wait, where are we?”

We both spun around in our seats to look at our surroundings. It didn’t look like the path home. The shape of the river, the trees surrounding it, none of it was right.

“Oh shoot, we made a wrong turn back there.” I said. “Ok, it’s fine, let’s just turn back.” As soon as I said these words, it seemed as if the river itself began to shake. “Oh that’s not good.” I said as I began to panic.

“Stay calm dude,” Tim said. “We’ll head to shore.” He began to paddle towards land, and I followed suit. But the river had its own plans. The current became stronger and stronger, taking us faster and faster down the river. And then something even more troubling came towards us.

“Rocks!” I shouted. “Watch out!” There was no way to steer anymore, so in an act of desperation, I stuck my oar out to push us away from it. It worked, but not before the oar snapped in half. And then I realized the worst. “Tim... do you hear that?” What we heard was the sound of gushing water. Or more precisely, a waterfall.

You know, in most movies, the heroes are always saved at the last second. Well, I’m sorry to inform you reader, but that is not how my story is told. When we went over I felt weightless, like I was in an empty void, with nothing but me and the air around me. It was almost relaxing. That is how my life ended, but this is not the end of the story. This is merely the beginning...

## Undercooked

The cold night air lashed through an open window, as the intermittent sound of an unknown rodent's scurrying echoed ever so softly through the black marble room. Pots and pans scattered endlessly through the grimy countertops, and damp dish rags slapped gently on tiled walls to the rhythm of the chilling breeze. Suddenly, a large hand reached out from the darkness, and yanked the metal pull rope used to activate the room's ceiling light. It took a couple tugs, but eventually, bright beams shot off the glass dome to dispel the shroud. The tired eyes of a tall, green skinned orcish man slowly analyzed the room, as he reached out and grabbed his cleanest potato ricer. It took a few seconds of examination, but he spotted it. His favorite apron. He dashed over and grabbed the white cloth, holding it mere inches from his face. He carefully read the embroidered letters, as he had many times before. "To the greatest chef in the world, and my favorite grandson, Finn Loussman. From, Oma". He Smiled softly at the familiarity of his Oma's sweet words, even if they were forever ingrained in a filthy, food-stained drape. Every time Finn read his apron, it tickled his heart with joy. At that moment, he knew whatever happened today wouldn't matter anymore. It was guaranteed to be a good day now. He quickly put on his apron, and laid the potato ricer in a perpendicular line to a fishnet sack of skinless potatoes. He grabbed a heavy, cast iron pot from the rusted sink, and filled it with a vast ocean of viscous store brand vegetable oil. He swiftly seized a handful of spuds from the sack, and made quick work of them with his trusty potato ricer, squelching them into a sufficient mound of tuber mash. Finn's mind was completely engulfed in his cooking; everything around him was swallowed by an imaginary darkness, only leaving the tools and ingredients necessary for his Oma's favorite dish, Thüringer Klöße. He was so absorbed in his cooking, that he only barely realized the abrupt knocking on his splintered, oak wood door. His bright smile wavered slightly, before he let out a frustrated sigh through his clenched teeth. "Ugh, What schluckspecht is knocking at my door at this hour? Do people have any concept of time in this town?". Finn amused himself with the thought of whoever was at the door being a *schluckspecht* (A German insult describing an alcoholic), but he knew for a fact that it was another corporate crony here to give him his usual scolding about his "Inefficacious business plans" and "depleting economy positivity". Finn swore that those words were made up; simply created to scare him into a complacent state. But under his jokes and playful ignorance, he was worried. Very worried. This was his only source of semi-reliable income, and he was scared he would lose it to whatever tax hungry business fat cat kept sending these "Prioritarian Collectors" as they're called. How would he support himself and his Oma under the circumstance that he could end up losing his business? Would he have other options? These thoughts perpetuated in his head, causing large beads of sweat to start formulating on his forehead. The heavy knocking rang out again, this time with a subtle hint of impatience embedded within every bang made on the door. Finn took a deep breath, and made a begrudging effort to open up the entrance to his home. Behind it stood a stumpy man, who was currently wearing a frown on his tired, dumpy face. He sported a cobra black suit, in combination with a blue tie splattered with white polka dots, which then sat atop a spotless, white undershirt. His hair was a coffee brown, and styled in a very professionally done center part. His eyes were temporarily transfixed to his gold plate watch, and his feet tapped on the porch floor in annoyance. He seemed to be in a hurry for something. When he realized that Finn had finally answered the door, he quickly wiped away the nasty scowl from his face, and replaced it with a regular salesman smile. "Hello, Mr. Loussman. My name is Jonah Wilson. How are you doing on this fine morning?"

PUPPIES ARE CUTE,  
they like to SHIFF.  
They are FLUFFY and  
SHUGGY and they like to eat  
meat. They like to go to the  
zoo but they can't, because  
they WOULD eat the  
PENGUINS!

LAKE SPAK  
First grade  
MANN

## My Dream Life

It all started in India when I heard my parents talking in the night about going to the United States. I tried to sleep that night; I couldn't wait to jump back into my parents' bed to get answers to a thousand questions that popped into my head all through the night. "Appa, are you visiting the United States? Who all are going? Can I come? Can I come? Are we going to Disney World? Are we gonna see the Statue of Liberty?" I saw the surprise on my father's face as I blurted out a hundred questions at him. He said, "Anjana, we will talk about it later."

Soon, after overhearing more discussions, I realized that my family is *moving* to the USA, not visiting for vacation! Gradually, my excitement faded as I realized that I was leaving all my friends, cousins, uncles, and aunts. My father announced that we are moving the next month. He seemed very excited and said he got a *DREAM JOB*. "But, what about me? My friends will miss me!! And I guess I will miss them too .." I argued with my parents but got a sassy response. "You can make new friends!" How rude of him!! Not fair!! Just because he got his "dream job" doesn't mean that I have to suffer! How can he expect me to do that?? I proposed a new deal. "How about Amma and I stay here, and you can keep your "dream job". How about that?" Then, I noticed my mother's face beaming with pride and the next destroying announcement came, "Anjana, I want to go to school there". My head exploded; my face turned red. It felt like a volcano erupting. I said, "What is the problem with the Indian school?" "Well...", said Amma. "Well, what?", I said. "I can't study much here. The American schools are more advanced." My face dropped.

In a month, we moved to the USA. We settled in an amazing house that had a pool and a swing set and the best of all--- a water slide! I was beginning to think this was an okay idea. After a few days I saw my neighbors outside. They had a puppy named Hoppy. They even let me pet her and she started hoping. Their kid, Izzy, said, "She thinks you have treats. I think she likes you". Izzy asked if I could play with her, and my parents said yes. In a short time, we became friends even though it was very hard for Izzy to understand my Indian accent. And versa visa (or something like that ...)

Soon, we got to have playdates.... the best part of American life, or so I thought! I got to eat my first pizza (pepperoni pizza that is ... I am not vegetarian by the way!) in the first week of my new life. But my best discovery so far was the salted caramel ice cream (wait, let's be honest... Deciding between mango-pistachio ice cream and salted caramel is impossible!!). I got to visit my new school where I would be starting second grade to drop off supplies. The school building and the classrooms looked very different from my old school in India. I was getting very nervous.

I remember my heavy breaths and my shaking legs as I was walking down the hallway when my dad took me to school on my first day. It was a hard day because everything worked very differently than I expected. My teacher was very friendly and it did not feel like she was teaching me hard stuff. I loved the stories that she read to us. I loved the games that we played in class. I loved the show-and-tell times. I loved the starstudent part where I got to show my special Indian dancing. Now I know the best part of my new life is my school. Every day I look forward to going to my class and being surrounded by my buddies. I love my new life! Just like Appa found his dream job, I found my dream life!! The end.

## The Fall

*Boom!*

The house shook in fear just as the rattles came from my sister who starts to shiver. A chill passes by, then she starts to cry. I look at her tear-drowned face, tears seeping down her red cheeks. I held her hand in mine and squeezed.

“It’s going to be ok, Abby,” I assure her. Abby snivels and clings to my arm tighter.

“Get in the basement!” I hear a dim shout. I lead Abby to the voice. Though the repeating, blaring sounds push us off our feet and we start to hurry in a run. We nearly fall on our last step down the stairs. I finally realize who the voice was after my sister suddenly lets go of my hand and start to huddle around Mom.

“I’m so glad you two made it!” Mom kisses Abby on her forehead.

“You too, Mom,” I hug her back. Suddenly we are interrupted by a huge crack and a flash of light. Abby starts to whine. I start to shake in fright. Mom explains to us that it’s just lightning and there is a special kind of storm called a tornado outside. But that only makes Abby and I cluster tighter. I wipe away Abby’s tear and smile at her.

“What if the whole house crashes down?” Abby asks, clenching her silver horse with tight eyes.

Abby always says that it’s her good luck charm and she will always cherish it since Grandpa gave it to her just before he passed away. Abby used to love his magic tricks and would simply laugh when he failed. Grandpa was an artist for clay creations, and we both used to adore aspiring to be just like him when we were little kids. He will always remember his kind, gentle blue eyes.

But before Mom opens her mouth, we are interrupted by the sounds of abrupt, loud crying. We all look up to the sight of Dad’s drenched coat and rolled up his sleeves. He had just made it from work. He always worked late, but his face showed terror as we all thought the same thing out loud.

One word comes out of Dad’s mouth: “Mia.” Mom mouths to him. “No,” her face frozen with emotions, tears coming down her once-calm state of thought. She knows what will happen, one way or the other, what would escalate would leave her in shreds of awry. Dad is already gone in a blink of an eye. We stare restlessly at the door for the next grueling 3 minutes, 37 seconds. Then... it happened. We heard the clumpy footsteps again, and our gaze rose tentatively. Dad made it, only 3 steps, precisely. Just *three*. But then, came the *fall*.

We didn’t even notice that tree beside our yard before it fell. It crashed down in an instant! And my father fell on the ground as his face filled with pigments of horror as he looked upon each and every one of us, each with a distinct look that *spoke* to us. Assured, he *let go*. Not just of Mia, but for once in his life, he finally *fell*, but knew for once that he didn’t need to keep trying to take care of us and show us just how much he loved us.

We already knew every bit of it.

\* \* \*

With one last kiss upon the rigid stone of his grave, I knew completely that he loved us, just as much as he did on the ground as he does up in the sky.

And I, too, simply *let go*.

Someone like me

In school, among students, there is a model male 4th grade student, created by 4th grade students. Someone who likes sports and is tall and strong and only shows affection to sports. But no one is that. Yet so many boys my age are trying to sacrifice many things to become that.

But they will never become it.

Everyone is different.

No one is normal.

If you, like me, have long hair, you're considered a girl. And also among boys: why is being a girl an insult? What is wrong with people of the opposite gender. If you like science or math or science fiction you're officially a nerd. You ask yourself, why can't I pursue what I want to pursue, why can't I be me!

In school you can't. You are forced to be judged harshly because you have thin arms or long hair. Because you are not that model 4th grade boy. But no matter what you do, you will never become that. Trapped in this system that leaves almost every other boy like me out.

They say that you need to be the model 4th grade student to be happy. But you don't. The fact is, you trying to become the model 4th grade student only separates you from what makes you happy. While at one point when you're accepted you may feel happy for a moment, soon it fades because you have left everything you loved behind. School is an endless cycle of madness. But we made these social norms. We can change our social norms for the better and make everyone included, no matter what you like - no matter what you look like - no matter what you like to do or like to play. Because no one is the same. Everyone is different. And you are special and great in your own way. No matter what you think or what other people think.

## A Magical Vacation

Last summer, my family went on a vacation--a vacation like no other. It was magical! First, I went to the beach in Florida with my family, including my sister, Sophia, and brother, Dustin. During the ride, Sophia was carsick and Dustin was sleepy.

My family planned to play at the beach. We unloaded our sand toys and other must-haves for a beach trip. I led my family to a shady spot on the beach while carrying a bag of sand toys. During the walk to the shady spot, I stepped on a crab that was, shockingly, wearing a tuxedo!

"Ouch!" I whimpered. I lowered and took a closer look at the crab. To my astonishment, the crab could speak! He told me he was the host of a magical event: a dancing show of animals and creatures that humans thought were extinct or imaginary. I asked him about the venue and time of the magical event.

I couldn't believe what just happened! I pinched myself. I told Mom and Dad what just happened, and asked them if I was seeing things. They looked just as confused. Sophia was awestruck by what I told her about the crab. Dustin thought I was lying.

I asked Dad and he said the event was probably a scam, but encouraged me to attend it anyway. I asked Mr. Crab (which I now called him) what we needed to prepare for the event. He told me to just follow him. So my family and I followed Mr. Crab. We walked and walked and arrived at a gift shop. I opened the door. Mr. Crab urged us to look for misty liquid. I noticed next to a chair there was a glass of misty liquid. My family rushed over, followed by Mr. Crab. When Mr. Crab arrived he instructed us to each take a sip of the liquid. Dad took the first sip and he disappeared.

"Where did he go?" I exclaimed! Mr. Crab must have seen disappearances like this before because he looked so calm. He told me that my Dad had arrived at the magical event. So I asked Mom if I could drink the liquid. She looked frightened but she nodded anyway.

I took a sip and became so dizzy. The next thing I knew, I was up above the clouds, joining Dad. Sophia and Dustin soon appeared, and so did Mom. There stood a rainbow slide. Sophia, Dustin and I started playing on it. We suddenly saw Unicorns flying by. Dad and Mom looked shocked.

I then dragged Mom and Dad to a room that had a sign that read "Dinosaurs." We went into the room. There were all kinds of dinosaurs, even a few T'rexes. They were so tall I couldn't see their heads. We went to other rooms with mermaids, dodo birds and even a rat the size of a bull! That was terrifying!

At the end of the day, there was an animal parade. Animals wearing laser lights went out into the dark. Looking at the shapes, we guessed the animals and wrote them on a piece of paper. Sophia, Dustin, and I compared our notes on the animals. Dustin missed a few of them. We each got to pick a gift from the gift shop. I got a backpack with a sticker "Magical Animals."

"Wake up! Wake up!" shouted Mom. "We arrived!"

I opened my eyes. It was all dream! We grabbed some items and walked over to a shady spot. I accidentally stepped on a crab....wearing a tuxedo! The crab said he was the host of a magical event. I rubbed my eyes...



# Birds

When I was little, my family and I would play a game called non-stop, where we ran around the yard without stopping. It was just a way of getting me and my brother tired out, but despite that, I enjoyed it. We would run around the yard, racing each other, or just racing ourselves.

We flew, soaring away above the earth, where we would rest in the clouds, telling each other stories of birds. All kinds of birds. Made-up birds. Real birds. Wherever our imaginations took us. Stories of birds flying, Soaring up above the clouds, just like us. Sometimes we wished we could be birds, too.

But one day, my brother had an accident. He fell out of the clouds. I watched helplessly as he tumbled out of the clouds, to the ground. He landed in a bush in our backyard. We didn't know if he was okay, because he was unconscious. It looked like just a broken leg, but we didn't know for sure. My parents called an ambulance, and when they came, my dad went with my brother in it.

As soon as the ambulance left, my mom started yelling at me. How all of this was my fault, how we didn't know if he was going to be okay. How she couldn't believe that I would do this sort of thing. Then she started crying, crying, crying. We sat there for hours, hours until my dad arrived back home, with good news. My brother was going to be okay, but he would have to stay in the hospital for a couple days.

Relief flooded over me, and I hugged my parents. How I wish that he would have been more careful, had not fallen out of the clouds.

Four years later, I am thinking about the accident. I go to my brother's room, and ask him if he would like to fly in the clouds with me. We haven't done that in years, but he says yes. We head outside together, and race around the yard. Lifting up our feet from the ground, we fly up above the trees, and it seems like we are above the sky itself. We settle in the clouds, and I ask him if he would like to build a cloud house. I'm afraid it will seem too kiddy for him, but again, he says yes.

We pick up the fluff in our hands, and it is soft. Softer than I remember. As we stack little cloud bricks on top of one another, I am reminded of the day of the accident, when we were doing the same thing, laughing and playing. Now, we are just silent. I have an idea.

I tell my brother to grab another big cloud, and he does. I start tearing off chunks of it, and throwing it down to the backyard. When I am finished, I tug my brother's sleeve, and he seems to understand my message without me having to speak to him. We count to three, jump off, and fly through the clouds.

Soaring through the sky, I am reminded of the time when we used to play in the clouds every day. As we are flying, my brother tells a story of the most beautiful bird ever to live. She was all of the colors of the rainbow, and more. She doesn't just fly, she loops, zigzags, and flies up and down. We are almost there now. We land in the soft pile of clouds, and stare up at the sky,

laughing. I wish we still had the days that were carefree, giggling all the time. But now we've moved on, and we have to deal with it ourselves.

My hands flew back and forth, sewing the same few stitches over and over again. I wanted to close my eyes and rest, let the whole world drip away like water into a puddle, but I kept doing the same few stitches over and over again because I knew the boss would fire me if I stopped. Monica kicked my leg, but I did not let my eyes drift from the cloth.

"Yo, Kiva? Your stitching is wrong," Monica said. I looked closer and realized she was right, I had been doing it wrong all along. I looked down the assembly line and prayed no one would notice. I looked up at Monica. Her wild black hair was tied into two ponytails with two pieces of pink string. I always found it strange because the pink string and ponytails didn't match the rest of her. She wore her leather jacket tied around her waist and an old ripped t-shirt. Some people thought it was a style but really it was the only clothes she had. 'The goblin' (my boss) sulked in the shadows glaring at all of us as if we were here to kill him and not to work for him. He looked at the clock and began to yell. "Work is over, get out of here! Move it!" I stood up, but my leg cramped up suddenly and I dropped back into my chair. After sitting for so long my leg had fallen asleep and hurt to move.

"You okay, Kivana?" Monica asked. I shrugged. Monica shook her head. "You are the quietest little thing ever, here I'll help you home." She slid under the cold metal table to my side. She grabbed my arm and helped me stand up. We went to collect our money before we left the factory. I limped home leaning on Monica. Finally, we reached the trailer park where Monica left me at my door. "Quiet little thing," she mumbled as she walked to her own trailer kicking up dust. I looked at the money in my hand- \$5. I stuck \$1 in my pocket and winced. Mama and Papa need that money. But then I remembered school starts in two weeks and if I want to go I had to do this.

I pushed myself up and limped into the trailer. Mama was bustling about the trailer in a huff with baby Nina at her waist. Mama looked exactly like me. Short with a slender figure and long dark hair that enveloped her like a blanket. I slipped past her and into the room I shared with my older sister Sabreen. I reached underneath my bed and grabbed the old worn box. At some point it was from a Jack-in-the-box toy, but now only the box with its faded colors remained. I pulled out the flyer that read the list of materials needed to go to school. I looked at the money I had saved. That money wasn't going to get me into school. The door closed with a bang, Sabreen and Papa were home. I limped to the living room where Sabreen was picking up baby Nina and Papa was hanging his coat up. "How much did we make today?" We all gathered around the table. Sabreen put \$1.50 on the table, Papa \$4, and I put my \$4 dollars on the table. Papa mumbled to himself as he counted the money. "Well that makes, mm...that makes \$9.50. Well...okay, we can make it work."

The next day at the factory I kept to myself as always, not letting my eyes drift from the cloth. Late in the day Monica leaned towards me slightly. "Some of the workers are striking starting tomorrow, will you?" Monica whispered. I thought of Papa's face at the table every night, sad and worn out like paper stretched too thin. I thought of school, I was so close- I couldn't stop now. I shook my head. Monica sighed. "I thought you were quiet not stupid." She didn't talk to me again.

At home I hid my \$1 and gave the rest to the family. I thought of what Monica had said. Was it stupid not to strike? My family's income would suffer, I wouldn't be able to go to school. No, it wasn't stupid. I asked myself this over and over. By morning I had made my decision. Sabreen shook me awake. "Kivana, you have to get to work!" I shook my head. "I'm not going. There is a strike and I'm not going," I said repeating myself. Sabreen shook her head, "Mama won't like that." I shrugged and pulled my knees closer to myself glancing up at Sabreen. Sabreen stared at me before smiling slightly and leaving.

A few days later I awakened to see Monica standing by Sabreen's bed. She just stood there. I looked at her. Her eyes were black, darker than a raven's feather. I had never asked her age but she was at least two years older than me. "Boss gave us a pay raise. It's not much but all the workers are coming back. Look, I know you want to go to school...your Mama told me. Apparently, you're not great at hiding it," I looked up at her. Mama knew? For how long? "You work hard, and you deserve to go to school," she handed me \$20, the rest of the money I needed. I shook my head. "It's yours," I whispered. She shook her head and smiled. "Now it's yours. Jeez! You know you never gonna make friends at school if you stay this stubborn, and quiet! Take it," I took the money from Monica. She smiled one of those small smiles that you only see in quiet moments, happy, but not giddy. Monica got up and left. I stared at the money. I was going to school! I really was. I smiled thinking that not all angels have halos, some have pink strings in their hair.

By Claire Franzwa

Humanity is so rich in its history  
With so many things left unknown  
While some may wallow in self-misery  
Others want to overturn every stone

It is a garden rich in diversity  
A certain beauty identified by few  
Some may be gifted with generosity  
But many peoples' vicious views are askew

Some wait for an apocalypse to end all life  
Others look for an insignia of hope and light  
Many will place caveats among our futures with strife,  
Show us a future that we won't be able to write

So be curious, be strong, and blaze your own trail  
For they who write their own stories will always prevail

## UPCOMING EVENTS and OPPORTUNITIES



Summer 2021  
[www.MusicIC.org](http://www.MusicIC.org)

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Presented by the Iowa City UNESCO City of Literature

October 11-17, 2021  
[www.iowacitybookfestival.org](http://www.iowacitybookfestival.org)

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**The Paul Engle: Glory of the Senses Essay Contest**  
Writing opportunity for Iowa high school sophomores  
Essays are due May 21, 2021  
[www.iowacityofliterature.org/Paul-Engle-essay-contest](http://www.iowacityofliterature.org/Paul-Engle-essay-contest)

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**Poetry in Public**  
Local writers may submit poems for consideration  
Deadline: April 2, 2021  
[www.icgov.org/pip](http://www.icgov.org/pip)