

## POETRY - ALAN W. - 1ST PLACE

### The Whisper

The careless, callous, crass, cacophony,  
Of dingy, dreary, dismal, deepening strife,  
The gripping, griping, grumbling, groaning sea,  
Of vapid, vast, vicissitudes of life.

My unprolific, paltry pay that pales,  
Compared to bloated, boastful, bossy bills,  
Unfettered fear my failing faith assails,  
That subtly seeks to sink. . .then casually kills...

But then, I hear a voice from deep within,  
A whisper, soft and mild, emotions stirred,  
So faint, so warm, so clear, above the din,  
A voice that's felt, as much as it is heard.

And in this silky silence, I am awed,  
To hear, "Be still, and know that I am God."

## SHORT STORY - ALAN W. - 1ST PLACE

### The Ancient Sting

Arthur Chandler was a rich man. He was one of those people who had become so rich, monetarily speaking anyway, that making money became his myopic obsession. We can never get enough of something that doesn't satisfy. For Arthur Chandler, this was money.

Mr. Chandler was an art collector. His primary area of focus and related expertise were in the area of ancient Greek and Roman artifacts – bowls, pots, pitchers, etc. He had started out as a painter, but his appetite soon outgrew Top Ramen and Cup-a-Soup. Needs and wants are two different animals. For Arthur Chandler, he didn't need more, but he certainly wanted more.

In ways that he had forgotten, Mr. Chandler was introduced to the world of archeology. He started out on-site at several digs, mostly on the east coast of Africa.

By a stroke of luck, Mr. Chandler was added to a dig in Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania. The conditions were harsh, but he and several teammates found some implements that dated back several thousand years. After that, he made his way over to the Valley of the Kings in Egypt. This, too, served as another fascinating experience. Eventually, he made his way to "the Cradle of Humankind" – the Sterkfontein Caves in South Africa. No other place on earth had been the source of more hominid fossils. " 'Little Foot' meet Arthur Chandler; Arthur Chandler, meet 'Little Foot.' " It was a fitting moniker for the small skeleton that had been found in these same caves back in 1994, but it certainly contradicted the enormity of the discovery itself.

After paying his dues battling tsetse flies and then dealing with ensuing illnesses from several lost skirmishes, Arthur Chandler was done with on-site digs. That's when he began to wheel and deal in the world of ancient Greek and Roman antiquities. He enjoyed making more money in this new field of endeavor, but he still wanted more. Eventually, to his delight and simultaneous demise, Mr. Chandler followed a dark and murky downward path into the world of forgeries and counterfeits.

Arthur Chandler started to do his homework. He soon learned about several wild and bizarre archeological hoaxes, mostly from the 1880s and early 1900s.

Arthur Chandler first learned about the Calaveras Skull where in 1866, a team of workers Calaveras County, California claimed to have found a human skull in a mineshaft 130 feet underground. It took three years of research, but the skull discovery was finally debunked as a hoax by the mine's owner.

In another hoax, two talented Italians who were gifted potters created three large clay statues, named the Terracotta Warriors that were allegedly created by the Etruscans in the 5th century. Between the years of 1915 and 1921, the Metropolitan Museum of Art was proud to show off these newly acquired archaeological sensations. There was a problem, however, when the third masterpiece – an eight-foot tall Terracotta warrior – was created. Apparently, the swindlers made this warrior with detailed features. Unfortunately, one of the fraudsters used his own face as the model, so when some of the locals recognized the face, then the gig was up.

And then there was the Piltdown Man. In 1912, a man by the name of Charles Dawson, an amateur archaeologist, claimed to have discovered the “missing link” between man and ape. His discovery was named after the location in which it was found -- Piltdown village in Sussex, England. True to his word, his discovery truly was the missing link as it was found to be the conglomeration of a human skull and the jawbone of an orangutan.

All these hoaxes had served as inspiration for Arthur Chandler, and he had capitalized handsomely on several similar small-scale forgeries and counterfeits of his own. All his efforts had made him a very rich man.

On a sunny afternoon, Arthur Chandler walked down 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue toward W 57<sup>th</sup> Street in art district of New York City. He had his hands in his pockets as he softly whistled to himself, wondering about the next fraud he could perpetuate that would not raise suspicion of any kind. As he walked along, he carelessly turned into a convenience store to buy a pack of cigarettes when an artifact caught his eye. On the floor near the checkout counter was an ancient terracotta foot bowl painted black with an image of Dionysos and his Companions. If it were real, he estimated this Greek artifact to have been created around 500 B.C. He knelt down to take a closer look at the bowl. In small print, the bowl showed the inscription from Nearchos, one of the great artisans from that time period who always signed his pottery. If this were a forgery, then it wouldn't be likely that the swindlers would have included this level of detail. A bowl like this would sell to a museum for no less than \$45,000 dollars.

Arthur tried his best not to hyperventilate. Why would a bowl of that magnitude be on the floor? He soon answered his own question when he saw a small gray and white speckled kitten wander over to see if the bowl still contained any cat food.

Arthur, ever the con man, tried his best not to show too much excitement at this discovery. He also thought that if he suddenly offered to buy the bowl, then the random offer would trigger a thought in the owner's mind and raise suspicion as to why he would want to buy the cat's food dish. Instead, he would nonchalantly offer to buy the cat and get the bowl that way.

“That is the cutest cat I think I've ever seen,” Arthur said awkwardly.

The owner, a thin elderly man with ruffled hair, didn't say anything. This was New York City where every passing comment from a customer, no matter how innocent or harmless, didn't require acknowledgement. Arthur Chandler continued.

“I had a cat like that growing up. Wow, that kitten brings back a lot of memories.” There was no response from the owner. “Happy memories,” Arthur tossed in.

“Do you want to buy something or not?” the owner grunted.

“Well,” Arthur replied, “I came in here thinking I was going to buy a pack of cigarettes until I saw that kitten. I know this might sound weird, but can I buy your kitten instead?” Arthur said nervously.

A long moment of silence was broken by the owner's reply. "Sure, you can buy the cat. What's your offer?"

Arthur gave a sigh of relief that he didn't appear to be a complete nut job. "How about ten dollars?"

"No deal," the owner said without any emotion.

"Ok, how about twenty dollars?" Arthur countered.

"I'll sell it to you for ten thousand dollars," the owner said.

"Ten thousand dollars? Are you..." Arthur heard the sound of his own elevated voice from outside himself and quickly tried to calm himself down. If he bought the cat for ten thousand dollars, then he could still make a thirty-five-thousand-dollar profit on the bowl. As crazy as it seemed, he accepted the offer. "Ok, I'll buy it," he said.

Arthur Chandler's stomach was in knots. He felt like he had been beaten at his own game, but he would still come out on top. He reached into his wallet and extracted the money, ten-thousand dollars in cash, and handed it to the owner.

"I said fifteen-thousand dollars," the owner said gruffly.

"No, you didn't! You said ten-thousand dollars!" Arthur protested. He looked around the store, but no one around him seemed interested in serving as a witness.

"Then no deal," the owner spat back.

Arthur quickly did the math and knew he would still come out on top. "Ok, fine, here's your fifteen-thousand dollars, and that's final!" He pulled out the money, handed it to the owner, and then quickly reached down for the bowl.

"The bowl's not for sale," the owner said brusquely. "You offered to buy the cat, not the bowl, remember?"

Arthur felt the temperature of his cheeks rise in step with the humiliation. "How much is the bowl then?" he asked, feeling like a Sumo wrestler was sitting on his chest.

"I'm not selling the bowl," the owner said, this time with a smile. "That bowl has helped me sell a lot of cats."

## SHORT WORK - ALAN W. - 1ST PLACE

### Farewell

George continued to pack his bags while his family looked on with unrestrained sadness. He was preparing to embark on a trip -- one for which he and his family had been putting off for a long time and never wanted to talk about. The terms of the trip had been set, and there was very little, if any, room for debate. The non-refundable ticket had been purchased long before, and unfortunately, it was a one-way ticket, too.

George was born in a cold country way up north somewhere. It was one of those countries that everyone had heard about but didn't really know where exactly it was located. It was a country that spoke multiple languages, so George was raised speaking both English and French. Who would've thought that this young kid would eventually grow up to become a citizen of the United States?

George's dream was to get into broadcasting. After getting a job reading national news on CBC radio, one door led to another, and he eventually found his niche hosting game shows. He was a natural, as they say, and he had found his element. His cadence, intonation and voice inflection were just as thrilling to watch as the game show itself.

George loved his family, and his family loved him just as much in return. He had been married twice, and his second marriage lasted more than four times longer than the first. He would leave a lasting legacy on the world with both his son and daughter from his second marriage.

George was not unfamiliar with danger, either. More than once had he sidestepped the long reach and bony grip of the Grim Reaper.

On one occasion while driving his pickup truck along a country road in a rural part of California, he fell asleep at the wheel. Luckily, after sideswiping a string of mailboxes that lined the road, his truck flew over an embankment and came to an abrupt rest against a utility pole. By the grace of powers unseen, he was alone, and he was not seriously injured. After four days of rest, he was back to work.

On two separate occasions, George suffered a mild heart attack, but in both cases, he was back to work after a month of rest. Another time, he damaged his Achilles heel while chasing an intruder out of his hotel room. That injury kept him in a cast for six weeks, which was longer than it took for him to recover from either of his two heart attacks.

In 1996, George was given the opportunity to carry the Olympic torch through a stretch of Florida as it made its way to Atlanta, Georgia.

George reminisced about these and other memories with his family at his side. He spoke of their 700-acre ranch and all the thoroughbred racehorses they had training over the years. They reminisced over

his many appearances on TV, but none of those things compared to his being surrounded by the ones who he loved the most.

George finished packing and gave each family member a final hug. Tears were shed, and hugs were shared. At the end, George lay back slowly on the bed, got comfortable, and then slowly closed his eyes one last time.

Goodbye, George Alexander Trebek. We will miss you forever.

## **A Family of Bountiful Colors**

It was a cloudless sky  
And the sun shone bright  
I noticed a tree  
That grew to a great height

Its leaves shimmered slightly  
As the wind blew lightly  
The leaves were all a gleam  
With a bright shade of green

On the ground below  
Was a sea of vegetation  
A multitude of variety  
Formed a great aggregation

Great beauty across the landscape  
Offered many colors and hues  
Shades of red, yellow, pink, purple  
And a variety of beautiful blues

With blossoms among their leaves  
Plants of many shapes and sizes  
Imparted joy and wonder  
Fluttering in the light breezes

I began to wonder  
How does all this happen?  
From roots that live in black dirt  
Deep down in mother earth

What is the source of the color?  
And the many hues from light to dark  
This creation makes me wonder  
Was it done as a joyful lark?

I continued my walk  
And was truly awestruck  
Of this, God's wonderful work  
Realizing it was not all just luck

THE TROUT LILY

Division: Adult

Category: Adult Short Story



Tom pulled his phone from his pocket. His father's picture blinked up at him. A text message asked "Any luck?" *Thanks, Dad*, Tom thought, *for this colossal waste of time*.

With his father in the intensive care unit, Tom wanted to be at his father's bedside or church offering prayers for his father or maybe even at home trying to ignore it all. Anywhere, really, but in the woods looking for a flower.

His father had sent him to find a Trout Lily, a reclusive North Texas flower that only blooms for a few weeks each Spring. One of the first flowers to peek out from the earth, it hides in the undergrowth, turning its shy blossoms downward until the sun peeks through.

Tom cursed the hunt as a fool's errand, a mission from his father meant to distract him. Tom had to pry out the truth about his father's condition from a hospice worker that his father adamantly referred to as "just a friend from school". Despite his days growing shorter, Tom's father had sent him into the woods to hunt for the flower. Tom considered it a last wish and relished his father's toothy smile when Tom left for the woods.

A recent rain had given the cracked earth a sticky sheen and Tom's shoes were already stained from the red clay. Decaying logs and moss-covered rocks made the unmarked path slippery and his sweater already sported a variety of hitchhiking foxtails and cockleburrs. As he stepped through a copse of trees, a small patch of brown roots clawed at Tom's legs. He crushed them beneath his heel with a loud crack and smiled, although his victory over nature drew him no closer to the end of his search.

Tom's phone buzzed with another message from his father, "Remember, Jack London said that the journey's the thing".

Tom rolled his eyes. *That was Plato, Dad, not Jack London.* Tom's love of books had always competed with his father's love for the outdoors. He ducked beneath a withered branch and stepped into a clearing where five boys knelt over a pair of logs.

The boys wore matching khaki uniforms and the red-topped olive drab socks of the Boy Scouts. Tom smiled, remembering how his father had struggled to sew merit badges on Tom's uniform and how the uneven stitches always itched his chest.

"Can you boys help me? I've been out here for hours and I'm tired of walking around."

The tallest scout stood up straight, his face beaming above a uniform full of medals.

"Scouts always help people in need, sir!"

"I'm trying to find something called a Trout Lily for my dad."

The tall scout waved Tom closer, and the group parted to reveal their thin, wrinkled scoutmaster kneeling on the ground. His uniform was faded and weathered; hard-worn from years of helping scouts find their way.

"You're in luck, son," said the scoutmaster, pointing at a pile of leaves in front of him. "I was just showing one to the boys. It is one of the rarest wildflowers in Texas, growing only where the land has never been disturbed. They are also the first blooms; a harbinger that tells us that Spring is coming. It's a good sign of hope and promises for the future."

Tom knelt beside the scout master. A tender stem rose from the ground, its curving green leaves dotted with white splotches like a trout's scales. The flower turned earthward at the end of the stem like a frozen waterfall. The flower defied gravity, as if the weight of its secrets was unbearable, and held delicate purple petals that gently parted to reveal their golden treasures.

"They'll be completely gone by April," said the scoutmaster.

Tom leaned down to the flower and ran his finger over the blossom. He traced a thin line around the stem until his fingers found where it poked up through the soil. "I'm going to take it back to my father. He's in a hospital and sent me tromping through this stupid forest to find this stupid plant. I'm taking one so he'll shut up about this flower."

"If you take it, it will die," said the scout master.

Tom gripped it tighter, refusing to part with his prize. "You don't understand, I'm just taking this one. My father wanted one before he dies."

Tom's phone buzzed. His father's face blinked up at him. Tom released the flower and reluctantly answered his phone.

"Did you find the flower?" his father asked.

"Yeah. It took all day, but yeah. Now some Boy Scouts won't let me bring it to you."

Tom looked at the scouts, their eyes wide in fearful stares. A wave of shame and regret washed over him and he searched their faces for any sign of understanding, forgiveness, or pity.

"You're not supposed to bring it home, Tom," his father said. "I just wanted you to find it. Don't you remember our camping trips, our little quests?"

Tom's memories of camping were filled with frustration. Each trip had pitted his father's love of nature against Tom's love of books, including Tom's ever-present notebook, and his father's regular pot-shot about Tom's ill-fated attempt at a novel.

His father coughed, caught his breath, and continued. "They were never about the woods. They were about being together and sharing the world around us, sharing life as a family."

Tom felt his anger growing and turned away from the scouts. "I hated the woods and I hated camping. Just like you hated my music and my computers. You never respected me or what I loved. Even now, when I should be with you, I'm out in the woods looking for a flower."

“The Trout Lily only gets two weeks of each year. That’s what makes it special. The trips were rough sometimes. We fought too much and smiled too little. But I loved every minute with my son. Now that my time is almost up, I wanted one more special adventure, one more walk in the woods, a chance to appreciate the woods I loved. You did that for me, Tom. One more hunt, and one more quest with my boy. Those moments are what family is about.”

“But what about this flower.”

“Leave it be. Memories for all of us, including the Scouts. That way it can come back next year and make more memories.”

~END~

## SHORT WORK - P. MCCULLY - 2ND PLACE

### Two By Two

Logline: A mouse with an eye for ship building finds himself minus one for Noah's Ark when his wife decides to leave him. Disguising his his brother as his wife, he makes it on board, but learns that he must choose between his dress-wearing brother and the estranged wife who wants him back.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: In the 600th year of Noah's life, on the 17 day of the second month--on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And rain fell on the earth 40 days and 40 nights. Genesis 7: 11-12

INT. NOAH'S ARK - BOTTOM DECK

Smooth planks line the wall and ceiling. Thick timbers frame the stalls on both sides of the ship. In the dark corridor, wood creaks and water drips irregularly from leaks in the ceiling. We hear tiny paws SKITTERING over wood.

CUBIT (V.O.)

Everyone else wanted the rain to stop.  
We were preparing for what happened  
next.

From inches above the deck, we dart through tufts of straw, between the HOOVES of giraffes, elephants and exotic beasts. A rhinoceros hoof STOMPS in front of us. To the left, a GOAT sits, shivering and curled up in the corner of a dark, gloomy stall.

GOAT

What if Noah was wrong? This ship can't  
keep out the rain, how can it  
withstand a flood?

A drop of water falls on the goat's horns and he screams. We resume our path, DARTING in and out of the menagerie.

CUBIT (V.O.) I can't say

I didn't have my doubts. My job  
is precision, down to the smallest  
degree. This ship was built miles  
from water, using instructions  
from God that Noah didn't even  
undertand.

CUBIT, a tiny brown door mouse, navigates the menagerie of animals. He climbs up to perch on a wooden plank sticking out from the wall. He inspects a JOINT between a crossbeam

and the wall, running the tip of his tail on the wood and frowning at the still dry fur.

Cubit jumps from his perch, sliding down the neck of an ostrich, using the curve of its back like a ramp to launch him up onto the shoulders of an elephant. He scampers past two flapping ears until he is standing on the forehead of the beast, staring down into two black eyes.

CUBIT

Coated with pitch! This isn't even  
sprinkled with pitch.

The elephant's brow crinkles. Its eyes bore in on Cubit. An enormous TRUNK rises beneath Cubit, who scampers away, just as a the trunk slaps a BRUSH against the wall, squishing sticky BLACK GOO into the crevice beside the crossbeam.

Cubit leaps over and under horns, antlers, and tails until he finds an opening at the end of the deck. He turns back toward the crowded room.

CUBIT

C'mon people, we are building an  
ark, not a gazebo. Seal it up  
tight!

A harbor seal in the corner raises a flipper in protest.

CUBIT

We don't have much time.

EXT. ARK- TOP DECK

Cubit crawls from a tiny drainage gap between two planks. He scampers past five humans dressed in robes, including one in a white beard staring into the distance. He climbs up to the beam in front of the man, following his gaze.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - ARK CONSTRUCTION GROUNDS

The ark is held upright by wooden braces and a series of guide ropes. Animals surround the ship. Some work on the boat, others wait impatiently. Beyond the ark, storm clouds are forming in all directions, swirling and dark. Fires rage in distant buildings, sending black plumes to the sky.

EXT. ARK- TOP DECK

Noah turns to the men standing beside him.

NOAH

It is time. Call for the animals.

Noah enters the ship with the men, leaving Cubit alone.

FUT (O.S.)

Cubit? You up there?

Cubit looks over the edge of the bow. At the bottom of the support rope his brother, FUT, struggles to climb the rope up to the bow. Fut is a pudgy door mouse with a limp tail and fur that spans the rainbow from brown to white.

CUBIT

I told you to stay hidden inside.

FUT

They are locking everything up and beginning to call the animals. I didn't want you to miss it.

Behind them, an elephant, a gorilla, and a hippo lift a large wooden door into place, sealing the ship.

FUT

See. I told you.

CUBIT

But you're out here now and I still need to get my wife.

Fut leans on the railing, like a passenger on a cruise enjoying the view.

FUT

Ok. I'll just wait here then.

INT. CUBIT'S HOME.

Cubit's house is a quaint burrow beneath a tree, with handcrafted furniture and beautiful flowers painted on the walls.



Cubit's darts inside, out of breath. He tosses a SCROLL onto a tiny table in the center of the room. It unfurls, revealing Noah's invitation for Cubit and his wife.

Cubit's wife, MEH, stands at the doorway to the bedroom. Her face is lost in a sea of makeup. A red dress is stretched tight over her rotund frame.

CUBIT

Noah says it's time to go. Why aren't you packed?

MEH

I'm not going to live in a stinky, leaky boat with all sorts of foul creatures, many of which want to eat me.

Meh points toward a scale model of the ark in the corner, just large enough for two mice.

MEH

And this box may not even float.

CUBIT

We've already gone over this. It's God's design. Given to Noah. It's my job to make sure it floats.

MEH

God's design? If you're so trusting, why did you need to test it?

CUBIT

It's only a prototype. I wanted to be prepared.

MEH

You and your Doomsday prepper friends have been saying the same things for years. 'The end is nigh'. Well, i say nay. I've had enough. I want a divorce

She pulls a tiny scroll from rear purse and sets it on the table, unfurling it atop the invitation from Noah.

CUBIT

A divorce?

MEH

This isn't a family. I can't live like this anymore.

CUBIT

Um...none of us can. There's a flood coming.

Cubit grabs their bags. She pulls hers away.

MEH

You never think about me. You only think about yourself. Did you even think about what would happen to me on a boat like that? My sister has a place in the mountains. That's better than 40 days in a boat.

A pair of giraffes stretch their necks through a window into the house.

GIRAFFE COUPLE

There's new oceanfront property at the edge of town. We're having a luau in our back yard.

MEH

That sounds more fun than a boat.

Cubit grabs the divorce papers from the table and his invitation to the ark.

EXT. ARK - ENTRANCE RAMP

A long line of animals stretches from the ark into the countryside. A huge gorilla with thick glasses checks the invitations of each animal. Behind him, a rhino and a long-haired buffalo stand guard. Cubit is next in line.

GORILLA

Next two!

Cubit hands the gorilla his ticket. He looks around but Cubit is alone. The gorilla steps back, thumping his chest and screeching.

GORILLA

Two by two!

The horns of the buffalo and the rhino cross in front of Cubit. Cubit is pulled to the side of the line by the horns. He disappears behind a wall of animals being ushered into the ark.

INT. CUBIT'S HOME

Rain batters the outside of the home. Cubit sits alone on the couch, holding his invitation and his divorce papers in each hand.

A KNOCK at the door. Cubit races to it, tearing the door open.

CUBIT

Meh? Did you come home?

FUT

Hiya. Want to watch a game?

CUBIT

Watch a game? It's the end of the world.

FUT

Then why aren't you on your boat?

CUBIT

Meh left me. I can't get on by myself.

Cubit slumps back on the couch. Fut turns to a hat rack beside the door.

FUT

She left you, huh? Does that mean she left these hats, too?

Fut grabs a hat from a coat rack and puts it on. He dances around, spinning, while a red streamer flaps behind him.

CUBIT

Say, remember when you said you'd do anything to get on the ark?

EXT. ARK - ENTRANCE RAMP

A pair of antelope step past the gorilla and onto the ramp.

GORILLA

Next!

The gorilla looks around, squinting through his glasses before finally looking down.

GORILLA

I thought you were alone.

At the gorilla's feet, Cubit is holding a suitcase. Beside him, Fut balances warily on red high heels. He is wrapped in a red dress so tight, he looks like a sausage about to burst. Fut's head is covered with a mop, with threads draped over his forehead and the handle stuffed down the back of the dress.

FUT

Hiya, handsome.

GORILLA

You are his wife?

The gorilla leans down closer, sniffing Fut. Fut totters, stumbling forward. He regains his balance, but the stitch on a button gives way, flying up into the gorilla's eye.

The gorilla howls in pain. He looks down in a rage. Fut's dress falls open down the front. Fut covers his chest.

FUT

Are you getting fresh?

Cubit wraps his arms around Fut's waist.

CUBIT

She's all mine, sir. We're family.

EXT. ARK- TOP DECK - STERN

The ark is adrift, fully surrounded by water. Cubit and Fut are at the stern standing on the top railing.

CUBIT

She said she was going to her sister's house in the mountains.

FUT

You mean those mountains?

Fut points toward a tiny outcropping just as it disappears beneath the waves.

MEH (O.S.)

Hello? Has anyone seen my husband?

Cubit and Fut race to the edge of the boat. Cubit's PROTOTYPE ARK bobs in the roiling surf. Meh stands atop it.

MEH

Your prototype. It works!

Fut throws a rope to Meh who ties off the tiny ark. Cubit and Fut begin pulling her boat closer. Behind them, the gorilla stands with arms crossed.

GORILLA

Two by two!

FUT

But we have three mice.

EXT. PROTOTYPE ARK.

Cubit unlashes the rope and waves goodbye to his brother. He wraps his arms around Meh.

EXT. ARK- TOP DECK

Fut wipes off his lipstick and turns around to the others waving goodbye to the architect of the ark.

The gorilla steps behind him, looking through his glasses at the now single mouse.

GORILLA

Where is your husband going?

FUT

I guess I'm divorced. Woo hoo, I'm single and on the prowl.

Behind him, a dozen male mammals step forward. Fut realizes he is still wearing the dress and covers himself with his paws.

FADE TO BLACK

**SHORT STORY - CAITLYN M. - 2ND PLACE - CANE'S COMBO CARDS**

**The Power Within You...**

**Division: Youth**

**Category: Youth Short Story**

Have you ever just looked at your hand and thought about what more things it can do? How our brains process the things we can and can't do. If there is power hidden beneath our very own skin? A power that could scare you and everyone around you?

In a small town, a little girl named Eli thought that very same thing. In her town, everything was normal, still, and quiet. One day she was striving to know if she was the only person who thought those thoughts. She wanted to talk to her family about it. She thought it would be easy, that they would understand, but she was wrong. When she talked to them, her family thought she was crazy; thought she was out of her mind, even out of this world. Eli was so upset that she felt like something was going to erupt from her skin.

She cried. She cried, not from the pain, but because her own family was not understanding. They never saw the power, but thought she was crazy. Her family stayed away from her and eventually took her to a mental institute. Her power was rising, and she could feel it seeping through her skin. At times, it felt like a tickle or an itch. Other times, it felt like she was burning or would explode.

She was alone, scared and angry. Family was supposed to care of each other, but hers had left her behind. The thought of family mortified her. Family is supposed to stay together. Family is supposed to love one another, but her family didn't. And she didn't know why.

Her powers kept growing and one day a coffee cup exploded in her hand. As she stared at her hand and the broken cup at her feet, she became angry. Thinking about how she ruined everything by asking such a simple question. Thinking about how she ruined love by asking such a simple question. Have you ever just looked at your hand and thought about what more things it can do? The answer to that question had cost her so much. The hand that could have gripped her mother's arm or wrapped around her father's neck had become something so terrible.



Another coffee cup shattered in her hand. Then a dinner tray. Then the caved in the door to her room. She left a trail of ash where she walked. She was trying to keep a hold of the power, but it was growing too quickly. If she didn't the whole world would become dust.

How could one question blow up the world? She still loved her family, but they never came around. They were as afraid of her as she was of herself. Eli thought they didn't love her.

Then one day, her family returned. They asked to see her, to talk to her, to give her a hug. She looked down at her hands and asked the question again. This time, she wondered what would happen when she touched them? What if she hugged them or grabbed their hand? Would she destroy them?

When she saw them, she was angry. She felt the power seeping through her, waiting to explode from her hands. Her parents reached out to her, and she reached out to them. She saw the worried look on their faces, the fear that they were fighting, and knew they needed her as much as she needed her family. The first touch was scary, one arm wrapped around her mother and another around her father, waiting for the power to release. But nothing happened. No power, no energy, just a warmth between them. They gripped tighter and pulled her closer. She closed her eyes and felt something hit her cheeks. She looked at her mother and saw tears coming down her face. More tears fell and mixed with her own, until they were streaming down Eli's face. She looked over their shoulders and saw her own hands gripping the backs of her parents. As she looked at her hands, she could feel that the power was still there. It had scared her and her family, but she knew that together, they had locked the opened door of her destruction.

~END~

# SHORT STORY - SHAYNEL G. - 1ST PL - WHATABURGER FOR A YEAR

## FAMILY IS "DIFFERENT FOR EVERYONE"

Family is different for everyone. The simple idea of it could be dreadful to some and to others, just as beautiful as nature when it is calm. But what is family to me? My mind just simply can't put together an answer for what family is to me. One day, family could be the best thing I have, the next day it is like being on a ship in stormy seas. There could be tension as if we are in court waiting to be deemed guilty or innocent. At other times there is laughter and joy in every persons heart. Some of us just can't wait to leave the nest and stretch our wings. We never realize how much we need family until we leave the nest and get bombarded with the things of this world. Family is the one that we run back to when the world is too hurtful or too overwhelming to deal with. Family is a voice, a friend, a gift from the One who sculpted us. Though at times family can be divided by the things of this world and the things not of this world, family is still loving. Family is the fuel that can start the fire of emotion without even realizing it. Family is a reason why we tend to gain things and lose things. I catch myself comparing family to the human heart. You trust your heart to pump blood to your body, knowing that it could fail at anytime. That fact doesn't affect you until it actually happens or shows signs of happening. Just like with family, you know you can trust family with your life, never thinking of it failing you. But when family lets you down, the truth of reality comes falling so hard that it could practically knock you off your feet.

# POETRY - HARPER H. - 1ST PL - RAISING CANE'S GIFT BASKET

## Fresh as a Daisy

She doesn't understand why they say it,  
"fresh as a daisy" that is.  
Why do they say it,  
say something that feels so incredibly false?  
They use it in a way that means full of health and energy,  
but she hadn't felt that way in a while.

Maybe it's the bees that constantly drain her pollen.  
Maybe it's how many times she cried when human hands pulled her from the earth.  
Or maybe it was how many times she had been re-planted,  
far away from the home she had known before.  
Fresh starts are only fresh starts if you get to remain there,  
and she never stayed for very long.

But this time was different.  
No human hands pulled her roots from the earth,  
and yet,  
she rose.

She lifted and she twirled in the air,  
knowing she was bound to leave sooner or later,  
but her imagination could not fathom this.  
The breeze had lifted her,  
like a breath of fresh air.  
She suddenly said her farewells,  
to those who she felt so much love for,  
but with a smile this time.  
She knew this time was different.  
She knew she would see them again.

She soared through the air,  
the powerful gust of wind guiding her.  
She felt free,  
truly and wonderfully free.  
She danced through the bright blue sky,  
and whisked past towns,  
mountains,  
restaurants,  
freeways,  
gas stations,  
and railroads.  
She's seen them all before,

of course,  
many times.  
This time was different.

Alas, the wind had softened,  
and the clouds began to weep.  
The aroma of familiarity besieged her with emotions.  
The blinding sky she had soared through,  
was now an admirable painting of oranges and pinks.  
The artist being the sun,  
as it sank closer and closer to the ground,  
as did the daisy.

Landing upon the earth,  
she struggled to stand,  
for this was the first time her roots were free from the ground.  
And then she realized.  
Not only did she realize where she was,  
but also why she was here.

She was home.  
She *is* home.

She's where she has and always will,  
*belong*.  
Where seed became seedling,  
and where seedling became flower.  
Where she met her best friend,  
the love of her life.  
Where she discovered who she is.  
Where she decided what she wanted to accomplish.

The beginning to every beginning she would ever have,  
happened there.

And yes:  
the memories of --  
the bees who constantly took her pollen,  
the hands that ripped her from her home for their own desire,  
and the temporary relocations every few years,  
would never fade.  
But they made her the strong,  
loving,  
witty,

kind-hearted,  
compassionate,  
inspiring,  
brilliant flower that she is.

You're the daisy, Mom.  
And even though you don't feel fresh as one,  
you will soon.  
With time, we'll make this home,  
*your* home,  
feel special again.

## POETRY - S. EL-WAKIL - 2ND PL - CANE'S COMBO GIFT CARDS

A plant can survive a short time without water and completely without soil. However, it can only last a few hours without the nutrients the Sun provides.

A sapling in a plot of soil  
Can only survive so long without sunlight  
The warmth from the sun  
Spurs its little body on  
To grow and be the best tree it can be

When the sapling is feeling down  
It knows who to turn to  
Flowers come and go  
But the sun stays forever  
Forever nurturing the little sapling  
Even after it grows its first branch  
Or bears its first fruit

When the sapling undergoes lifes' milestones  
It knows who to turn to  
After sprouting its first branch  
Some flowers may send the sapling their happiest regards  
Some trees may look at the sapling with with bitterness in their heart  
But the sun and its warmth  
Will never stop shining on that sapling  
Even if successes are sparse and setbacks are several  
The sun will continue to shine

The rings on its trunk can tell how many years a tree has lived  
But nothing can tell of its life as well as the sun  
They've been through floods and droughts  
Through heat waves and solar eclipses  
Through snow storms and tsunamis  
The sun and the sapling  
Have been through their years together  
In a way that no outside plantae could ever understand