

Our Wor(1)ds

A collection of works by students in the
Creative Writing program at Meyerland

Loneliness

Loneliness is an empty brain
It has long hair so it can hide itself

With its grey heart caged up never to be needed again
Having lungs that were barely able to breath

Tiny little sticks that are called arms hang from the side
Weak legs support him from falling into darkness

-Nathan Lopez

Flamingo Monologue

In the warm afternoon, I spread my rose-colored wings,
fluttering my feathers to let the sun blaze among their edges.
The shallow waters caress against my fragile legs,
gently, I dig my beak into the mud.
With my hundreds of siblings, cousins, and family members,
we glide against the tiny waves and the wind brushes through our flushed feathers.
A perfectly balanced essence of us,
we blow slightly in the breeze that carries a thousand breaths.
Our clouded waters, still running,
our waters run further and further into the bright horizon line where
our eyes are forbidden to look upon,
I stretch my neck, to glare at the water's edge where
the sun dips down out of our sight.
it waves goodbye with a last kiss on our foreheads,
in which the clouds wither away in their last minutes of dusk.
The sky fades into darkness,
our millions of calls drift into the sky.
we shuffle along the shoreline with our webbed boots
and curl away when the sun ceases visibility.
eventually the last cries of our kind vanish away, to be heard never again.

-Jaylynn Fraga

Happiness

Happiness has hair like strands of shiny gold
A face with a gleam brighter than the sun
Happiness has eyes as clear as crystal
And a mouth like a river that leads to destinations
Happiness has the ears of a bat that is always prepared
And the nose of a detective following all the leads
Happiness has the arms like a mountain reaching high
And the feet like a warrior fighting for glory
Happiness has the body of a flag standing tall with pride

-Melissa Huerta-Villanueva

Sadness

Sadness has eyes of a grey, cloudy day
where the sun cannot be found
Its skin feels cold
like the surface of the moon
and its lips have been kissed
by the dark night sky
Sadness has their hair
like a spider's thin, white thread
and its arms are like closed curtains
not letting the smallest ray of light in

-Katherine Lopez

Loneliness's Image

Loneliness has the hands of an empty field that's overgrown with people's lost hope.
Loneliness has the mouth of grief's reflection.
Through the field, loneliness reaches out for joy's flower
to plant.

Loneliness has the arms of the night sky with only one lit star.
Its arms can only hold one star as it lets go of so many others.

Loneliness dresses with the clothes
that the lonely rat gave to him.

Loneliness combs its hair, only to let
strands dance a farewell to the ground.

Loneliness smells of the disappearing
memories at the park where
the girl and boy broke up.

Loneliness has the legs of the kid's toys
that were thrown away.

Loneliness has the memories of all the broken ones.
He smells the dirt from the funeral,
he hears the parent's arguing,
he feels the bare ground as a dog runs away from a burden home,
he tastes someone's last meal.

Loneliness has the happiness that
drips out of his eyes every day ...
becoming invisible by the day.

-Mariela McCombs

Conversation between Happiness and Sadness

happiness- Sadness, why are you so sad all the time?

sadness- How are you happy all the time, life is just so sad all the time.

happiness- You know life isn't always sad, I flew to Hawaii yesterday; it was really fun!!

sadness- My mom died in a plane crash

happiness- Oh, I'm sorry. Well I got a cat yesterday!!

sadness- My dog ran away a week ago and hasn't come back

happiness- Oh, I'm sure he'll come back. My sister gave me a new sweater for my birthday yesterday!!

sadness- My favorite sweater got torn yesterday

happiness- Oh, your life really is sad

sadness- I told you life is sad, really, really, really sad

happiness- I really don't mean to be rude, but I believe your life is sad, mine is pretty happy; I am happy. We should hang out sometime!!

sadness- Ok, I guess.

happiness- Let's hang out this Wednesday!!

sadness- I have to go to my uncle's funeral on Wednesday.

happiness- Uhm, how about Thursday!!

sadness- I'm going to my sister's funeral on Thursday

happiness- HOW MANY FUNERALS ARE YOU GOING TO!?!?!?!

sadness- Many.

happiness- Ok, when are you free?

sadness— Uhm, I think the 3rd Friday of next month.

happiness- Seriously?

sadness- If it really bothers you, we might as well cancel it.

happiness- No, no. It's ok!! See you later!!

-Lidia Morales

Conversation between Love and Hate

Love: Hate, you are so angry and fired up. Why must you hold grudges against the ones who barely do damage to your heart? Why must you always be angry at the world or what it brings you? You're so dumb for gripping on to things in the past and holding on to it. It's so dumb of you to scream mean things to the ones you dislike. Just let go of it already.

Hate: Love, you're so ignorant. You can't just spread your love and affection to anyone, especially the ones who turn on you. You have to hold a grudge once in a while. It's so foolish of you to try to be nice and love everyone when you know you are hurting. You know that you **hate** some people once in a while. People could push you down the stairs and spit on you and you'll still **love** them. So childish, so dumb.

Love: I treat people how they want to be treated, which is something you DON'T do. No matter how bad they hurt me, I won't hold grudges like you do, Hate. All you do is inflict pain on others.

Hate: And all you do is smother people, so annoying.

Love: You don't know what people are going through. YOU are the reason bullying exists. I try to show everyone love and kindness because you don't know what happens behind closed doors.

Hate: How do you know that I physically show hate? AND you love too much. It's annoying and you're pestering everyone.

Love: It's obvious when you hate someone. It's the way you act around the person you hate.

Hate: That's the point.

Love: Well, I try to make people happy, no matter what. What do YOU do, hate?

Hate: I don't know...

Love: Exactly. You are pointless.

-Bella Bradley

Justice and Injustice

Injustice: What have you been doing all day?

Justice: Making sure everyone has equal rights.

Injustice: But why? It doesn't even matter.

Justice: Wow, plenty of people aren't treated fairly, so it does matter. It's very serious actually.

Injustice: Hmm, give me an example.

Justice: Let's see; I have a lot to go over. People are treated differently because of their race/skin color, their gender, or because of their own opinions. That's just to name a few.

Injustice: I still think all of that is completely irrelevant and doesn't matter.

Justice: Well maybe you should be more educated on some things.

Injustice: Yeah, I don't think so.

Justice: Why should people be treated with injustice? I mean I am asking the person of injustice here.

Injustice: Wow, I actually haven't thought about that.

Justice: Yeah, maybe you should do that next time; think about why people treat others that way.

Injustice: Yeah, I should. That was wrong of me. I was being insensitive to how others feel.

Justice: Yeah, it's nice to know that you get it and that I taught you something.

Injustice: Thank you for that. I was being completely ignorant.

Justice: No problem--maybe you can tell other people about it.

Injustice: Yeah, I certainly will be.

-Aryanna Kelley

I AM NOT I

I am the sun rising to say hello to a new day.

The clock that goes back in time.

I'm the flower who asked the clouds to give me water.

I am the blind animal that follows the light I see.

The crayon without any color.

The ocean that was only sand.

I'm the bear that was tame and walked on the streets as a person.

I am anger's enemy who is filled with pleasure.

I'm the birds singing a lullaby to the moon.

I'm the happy shadow with a lonely body that drags along everywhere waiting for the light to reflect me again.

-Madison Dedman

AS I WATCH FOR BIRDS

Crinkled leaves are falling from the trees
As I watch for birds
The pigeons with their suits and ties
Watch me suspiciously,
Large spherical heads, twisting
To look me with their orange eyes.

As I watch for birds
The ducks march in line
In their military uniforms
Squawking orders and chanting.

I found the little dove
Astray beside my ornate iron bench
I can almost pick it up in my hand
Like a feathery tuft of sugar.

-Marcel Gonzalez

In the Middle of a Forest

The ground is covered in an ever-growing layer of thick
soft
cold
and freezing snow
it covers everything from the paths made in the mountains far away
to the barren branches of the trees
off about a mile away
there is a cave where a bear is sleeping
and around the edge of the forest surrounding the cave
a fox is wandering
waiting for its next meal
the birds have all left to the south
and the trees have all withered
all except for the tallest tree in the forest
a massive evergreen that has grown tall enough
to be seen from miles away

-Ryan Eakins

Purple

Purple, how I love you purple.
The purple rivers flow of youth,
the healing hands of which purple
calms, and concedes in purple bliss.
Oh, purple, your loving touch,
the purple shadows,
and purple stars,
drift in a purple dreamland,
sailing into the purple skies.
My dear purple, you
caress our vanquished purple bodies,
pitying our purple demise,
laying us softly in the purple clouds we dream on.
Our perpetual tranquility lies in the hands of purple,
our gateway to misery, but also our door to cloud 9.
We rest peaceably above the prosper of our purple gardens,
flourished with purple spring above and blight below.
The heads of many rest upon the purple soil which grants us privilege.
Oh purple, our shield from low spirits,
but our window to gaze to the purple, woken reality ahead.

-Jaylynn Fraga

In the Graveyard

In the graveyard, I see helpless
souls,

darkness

shining our
way

wonder,

why does this place have to be so full of sorrow, why did that piece of me
have to fly away, out into the huge sky full of
opportunities
way to the sky, so close it can touch the
clouds,

we shouldn't have to have a feeling of grief, but we have no control over what happens,
Still, after weeks, the grass hasn't
grown,

of guilt and
regret.

I see the flowers decaying in the

the moon must not be on our side, there's no light

while we mourn over our dead loved ones, we start to

the grass is brown, almost dead, almost on its

the graveyard is exactly the same as it was, still full

-Aryanna Kelley

Ode to Cups

Cups are ingenious
You can use them for many things
Like measuring an amount of something
To drink out of
To experiment with
To store a beverage
To plant seeds
For some cups,
You store food
Without cups I'm sure
That we would all go mad
We would drink like cave men
We wouldn't be able
To enjoy our drinks
We wouldn't be able to
Hold our drinks in our hand
Or be able to enjoy with friends
We would all be fighting
Just to get a drink
So in its own special way
Cups save us
From going crazy
From being mad
From wasting time
So I am eternally grateful
So I swore
To raise awareness about cups
About how much they save us from
Until the day I go into the grave
And with me I shall take
A cup.

-Victor Henriquez Nunez

This is Just to Say

This is just to say
I have eaten your chocolate cake
That was on the kitchen table

And which
you needed for your sister's birthday party

Forgive me
It was just so smooth
So covered in chocolate pudding and
Just so out the oven.

-Valeria Lopez Calderon

Good Morning
after Mary Oliver

Good Morning light that gives a dose of wakefulness when people smell flowers
Flowers that give a universal scent all around, awakening earth to a sunny galaxy
Light gives joy to babies who wake up from a hibernation-felt nap
It enlightens the personalities of hearts into a blooming sharp-flower

Good Morning light that gives an animal roots for its veggies and fruits to grow
You let go of surroundings and become the friend of wind not knowing you stop it
Light coming from the ocean, passing over the waves of glory onto whales and fish
Schools being filled with light that makes the leftover days more thrilling to watch

Look how I start my day,
in brightness.

-

Ghebreyesus

h

Angst

Angst has arms like a beast or a titan
Angst is heavy handed and hits harder than a wound-up rubber band
Angst isn't afraid to lose anything it doesn't rely or care about who you are
Angst's feet are so big that an elephant can take a ride on its single toe
Its hands are elegant and clean so that the next victim can die peacefully
Its legs are skinny and scrawny, yet they weigh 500 tons each
Angst has no regrets it will break you into pieces at any minute
Angst's head towers over his body like the Eiffel Tower
filled with thoughts of anxiety
Angst's voice is like the billion blood curdling screams of its victims
It walks tall and scared like an ostrich
Angst jumps to conclusions quick and fast like it's a lion pouncing at dinner
Angst's elbows are big and strong so he can crush happy people's dreams silently
Angst has ears like airplane wings so it can hear the slightest things
He can hear the grass growing and the trees dying
Angst has eyes grey like big ponds of polluted water
Angst has LOONNNGGGG tangled hair filled with knots like a knitting kit
Angst relies on you as prey so watch out

-Kendall Murray

Ellis and Callahan

Ellis ran as fast as he could to the lake, his mind abuzz with worry. He felt the trees and blackthorn bushes scrape his skin as he took a shortcut off the nature trail, but he didn't care. When he finally got out of the bushes and vines, he could count five bruises along his legs and started feeling the side effects of getting poked with a hundred thorns.

He looked to the side, and there he saw him. A young red-headed boy sitting on a bench, looking out over the lake. Ellis started to cry and staggered towards him, his best friend.

"D-Did your mom tell you?" Callahan, the boy on the bench, stammered. Ellis wiped the tears from his face and sat down on the bench as well, his face red with embarrassment and anger.

"Why didn't you tell me you were moving to Italy before?" Ellis said, trying to keep calm and cover up his anxiousness.

"Why didn't you tell me you were leaving tomorrow? You could've told me at school!" Callahan looked at his friend and could clearly see tears running down his face, even though he was trying to hide it.

"I didn't want you to get angry or sad," Callahan admitted, realizing he had made the situation worse than it could've been. Ellis didn't respond. The boys looked onto the lake for a good two minutes, admiring the glistening water.

"I'm sorry," Callahan croaked. "I didn't mean for you to figure out this way." Ellis stopped crying; he didn't want Callahan to feel guilty. He knew that Callahan was trying to help by not telling him, so he might as well be as friendly as possible while he was still here.

"I'm not angry at you. I just wish you had told me sooner," Ellis quavered, getting up from the bench.

“It’s...I’m not sad about leaving...I’m worried about how we’re going to be able to communicate.” Ellis seemed like he was just hit by a truck. If they weren’t in such a serious situation, Callahan would’ve laughed at the look on his face.

“How are we going to communicate?” Ellis yelled, throwing his hands in the air. Now Ellis was completely frazzled. His town and the places around him had no post office. There was no way to contact Callahan if he moved. Callahan shuddered; his friend was almost never like this unless he was under extreme pressure. Ellis’ eyes widened, as if he had an idea.

“Here, uh...We- we could get a piece of paper...and a balloon! And then we can send it back and forth to each other...Right?” Ellis obviously knew this wasn’t going to work, but he wasn’t going to give up just now. Callahan looked defeated, staring out at the lake again.

“Ellis...This just isn’t gonna work--” Callahan mumbled, but he was quickly cut off by Ellis.

“No, no, no, this is going to work. I’m going to make it work.” Callahan groaned. Ellis obviously wasn’t going to stop anytime soon.

Out of nowhere, a red-headed lady wearing a crimson coat and a displeased frown appeared behind the two boys.

“Callahan, it’s almost eight! We have to start packing and getting ready.” Ellis turned around, and his face of desperation turned to panic. It was Callahan’s mom. Callahan had no time to react. His mom took him by the hand and started walking away. Callahan turned around as he was being pulled away, a look of hopelessness and despair upon his face.

Ellis was now alone, and it was getting dark. He stayed for ten minutes, staring at the lake, thinking of possible ways that they could contact each other. He thought of training birds to send letters, but the birds probably wouldn’t listen. He thought of calling him on the telephone, but it was way too expensive, and Ellis’ parents didn’t even have one. Ellis sighed. It was going to

be impossible to contact him. He started trudging home, taking his time down the nature trail, trying to clear his thoughts and just forget that this was happening. He couldn't forget.

Callahan was angry. He was angry at his mom for ruining his friendship, angry at Ellis for yelling at him, but mostly he was angry at himself.

He sat on his bedroom floor, carelessly throwing clothes into his bag. His mother was in her room, also folding clothes and making sure that each one fit perfectly.

Part of him wanted to move, see another part of the world, explore, but he didn't want to leave Ellis.

His eyes were getting heavier, he yawned. If he left Ellis, he wouldn't know what to do. He closed his eyes. He would figure out this mess tomorrow; it was too confusing right now. And ever so slowly, he fell asleep, nightmares beginning to creep into his mind. At least it was better than real life.

Ellis couldn't sleep. He was too worried about tomorrow. Sure, there was gonna be a fantastic party, but they all knew what the party was for. It was Callahan's goodbye party. Ellis couldn't believe it, he wouldn't believe it. It had all happened so fast.

First, he remembered Callahan acting strange at lunch. Then his mom told him that she wanted to give him a talk, and next thing you know Ellis was shouting at Callahan at the lake.

What was he supposed to do now? He didn't want to keep being sad. He wanted to be happy for Callahan, but he just...couldn't. It was all so confusing, and Ellis found it difficult to understand.

He needed to do something for Callahan, something that would make up for every mistake he'd ever made. A gift that he could always keep with him. And with that, Ellis got to crafting.

Callahan and Ellis both woke up panicking. Callahan had to pack this, that, and these, otherwise his mom would explode. Ellis had to glue this, that, and these, otherwise his gift would be done for.

Both boys felt a mixture of excitement and fear, happiness and sadness. However, they had both accepted the fact that Callahan was moving and that they might never be able to talk again.

Callahan finally finished packing half an hour later, feeling tired and desolate.

“Come on, the goodbye party’s starting!” his mom yelled, and he got up with a jolt, running into the car. He was thrilled for the party, not for the goodbye.

The drive took about ten minutes and they were finally there. Callahan saw all his friends chattering and laughing as the car pulled into the parking spot.

He spotted Ellis in the sea of people and immediately sped towards him, a sad smile on his face. Just when Callahan thought Ellis was going to cry, he let out a weary laugh. Callahan could tell he had finally accepted the fact that he was leaving.

Before they could try and talk, a bunch of kids interrupted and asked if they could play soccer. They accepted and had the most fun in their lives, laughing, yelling, and making jokes.

Eventually the fun died down as everyone got more exhausted, so they decided it was time for the food. They all chuckled, talking to one another, some of the parents even wanting to play soccer.

The rest of the kids had left him alone. Finally Callahan could talk to Ellis one last time.

“Hi Ellis...” Callahan still seemed anxious even though they had just laughing and having fun.

“Hey...look, I wanted to make it up to you-” Ellis started saying, but he was interrupted.

“Callahan, come on!” The red-headed lady yelled, taking Callahan by the hand. Ellis blinked and suddenly Callahan was in the car, his mom about to drive away.

“Wait!” Ellis cried, running up to the car. All three people looked tired and confused.

“What is it Ellis? I have to go...” Ellis pulled out something from his pocket, Callahan peeked at it through the window and could see flashes of gold. It was a necklace.

“Here, I wanted you to have this. To make up for all my faults or whatever...” Callahan took it. It was connected to a blue, circle-shaped locket. Callahan laughed.

“What...you don’t like it?” Ellis mumbled, looking extremely tense.

“No, it’s just, you didn’t have to give me a necklace for me to forgive you. I already forgave you.” The boys smiled.

“Can you two hurry up?” Callahan’s mom asked impatiently.

“See you!”

“Goodbye!”

Callahan beamed. Ellis watched as the car drove into the sunset, rays of gold and orange engulfing it and, finally, he was happy for him.

-Maya Schwartz

Sister to Brother

Well, brother, I'll tell you
Life for me ain't been no air conditioner on a hot, hot day
It's been beaten up
Covered in dust
And sometimes it just doesn't work
Broken
But every day, I try my best, to fix that air conditioner
And clean off the grime
Sometimes I just get to tired and lazy and sad
To go into the attic and fix it up
But you, keep cleaning that air conditioner
Don't be like me
Go up every day to fix it
Don't let sadness and being lazy take control of you
Don't give up, no matter how cold it is
Keep fixin it
For I'm still cleaning it
I'm still fixing it
And life for me ain't been no air conditioner on a hot hot day.

-Grace Germany

Scary Amusement

My mom shook me awake. “I overslept! We’re late! Hurry!” I opened my eyes. The digital clock on my dresser blinked 7:05. A bolt of panic shot through me. We couldn’t be late! Not today. Today was the most important day of the year: the field trip to Kemah Boardwalk. It was the best field trip in fifth grade, the one everyone had looked forward to since the moment we started Kindergarten. We had raised money for it all year, selling carnations on Valentine’s Day and pumpkin pies on Thanksgiving. Now, finally, the day was here. And I was going to miss it.

I threw off the covers and flung myself out of bed. I flicked on the light switch and pulled on my Travis Elementary school shirt, purple with a snarling yellow and white tiger, and shorts, then slung my bag over my shoulder. I had packed it the night before with everything I needed: sunscreen, bug spray, sunglasses, water bottle, wallet, a book for the bus ride. I raced outside, stopping by the kitchen to grab an apple for the car ride, and climbed inside our silver minivan. My mom jammed the gas pedal and we shot out of the driveway and rocketed down the street.

The drive seemed to stretch into an eternity. Seconds became minutes, minutes lengthened into hours. The thick covering of ash-gray clouds mirrored my anxiety. The trees stood perfectly still, as if holding their breath. The humming of wheels on concrete seemed to whisper, “Hurry, hurry, hurry!” Every time we screeched to a halt in front of a stoplight, my heart beat more wildly. Every time we turned onto another street choked with cars, my breathing became more frantic. What if we didn’t make it? “Can’t we go faster?” I shouted to my mom as we inched sluggishly along, car horns beeping and blaring around us. “Not if you don’t want to

get in an accident!” she called back. But finally, finally, after what felt like forever, we were there! At the sight of the school, which normally filled me with dread, a wave of relief swept over me, washing away the panic. We had made it!

As we turned into the parking lot of the school, the sun broke through the clouds. On every other day of the year, the gigantic red brick building loomed above me like a prison. But not today. “Bye, Abby,” my mom told me as I opened the door of the car. “Have fun.” I walked over to where my class was gathered in front of the school, weaving through the crowd of kids until I found my best friends, Sarah Grace and Charlotte. Sarah Grace’s long brown hair was in two braids, and a pair of blue-rimmed sunglasses studded with fake jewels perched on her nose. Charlotte, as always, wore her gleaming silver-sequined fedora, known as Bob. Like me, they both had on school shirts, shorts and sneakers. We were dressed and ready to go. “Hi,” Charlotte called, waving. “Aren’t you excited?” she squealed, bouncing on the balls of her feet. “I can’t wait!” Just then, a dented, yellow school bus roared to a stop at the curb, spilling grimy fumes from its exhaust pipe. It was followed by another, then another, until five buses were lined up in front of the school. My teacher, Ms. Lannan, clapped her hands and herded us onto the first bus.

Sarah Grace, Charlotte and I packed into a seat. As the bus pulled away, it bumped over a pothole, sending a jolt through the entire bus. Someone screamed. We clung to each other to keep from being thrown out of the seat. The bus shuddered and rattled over the uneven street, kids laughing and shrieking with each jerk, as if we were on a wild roller coaster ride. But we weren’t. Not yet. Eventually the road smoothed out. Sarah Grace opened a book and Charlotte leaned over to read over her shoulder. I started out of the window. Mile after mile of peaceful green-tinted trees flew by. I rested my head against the window and let the gentle, rocking rhythm of the bus lull me to sleep.

What must have been hours later, Sarah Grace nudged me. “We’re here!” she gasped excitedly. My eyes snapped open. The whole class whooped and cheered with excitement. We were here.

We all pressed our faces to the windows, straining to catch a glimpse of the Kemah Boardwalk. All I could make out was a blur of color and lights. Then the bus doors swooshed open. Everyone tried to get off the bus at once, and the narrow aisle between the seats quickly became crowded with kids. The teachers managed to funnel everyone out of the doors, and we all stood in the parking lot, blinking in the beaming sunlight, wide-eyed in wonder at the tornado of color, lights, sounds, and scents that was the Kemah Boardwalk.

The carnival rides, painted in brilliant colors, whizzed and whirled and spun in a wild whirlwind. A ferris wheel rotated slowly, multicolored lights flashing out shifting kaleidoscope patterns along the spokes. A massive red water slide coiled around the amusement park like a cobra ready to strike. Clumps of skinny palm trees clustered everywhere. Sounds drifted to us on a slight breeze: talking and laughing and screaming, broken bits of music, clanks, clatters and whirrs. Smells competed for my attention: the heavenly sweet aroma of cotton candy, the salty, buttery scent of popcorn, the greasy smell of things being deep-fried. It was breathtaking. And I hadn’t even seen the roller coaster yet, which would take my breath away, too, in a whole different way.

My class broke away into our groups. Charlotte, Sarah Grace and I were all in one group. Our chaperone, Charlotte’s mom, emerged from the crowd and came over to us, waving. She looked just like her daughter, the same freckled cheeks, the same kind smile. “Hi girls!” she called. She handed us our tickets for the rides, and then we followed the other groups through the gates, gaping at the sheer size of the amusement park. We chose a trail that wove through the

maze of food stalls and game booths and followed it. We passed booths selling popcorn, cotton candy, lemonade and anything that could possibly be deep-fried or covered in chocolate. My mouth watered. I wanted this day to last forever, so I could ride every ride and play every game. I never wanted to leave. I should have noticed the ominous shadow falling on the ground ahead of us, the shrieks piercing the air. But I hadn't.

My excitement was swelling rapidly, like an inflated balloon. I was unaware that I was about to see something that would pop it in an instant. I was with my friends, with a beautiful day of fun stretching ahead of me. And nothing would change that. Or so I thought. "Look!" Charlotte cried. I followed her gaze and gasped.

The roller coaster loomed above us. The rickety wooden structure seemed more like a preschooler's construction project made of popsicle sticks and glue than an amusement park ride. The whole thing groaned and swayed, as if at any moment it might topple over and smash to splinters. I didn't want to go anywhere near that thing, and I opened my mouth to say so, but before I could get out the words, Charlotte was tugging on her mother's arm and pointing to the roller coaster. "Can we ride the roller coaster?" she begged. "Please?" "I don't see why not," said Charlotte's mom. "I don't think..." I began, but Sarah Grace cut me off. "Come on Abby, it'll be fun!" They swept me along with them toward the ticket booth.

The ticket booth was old and dingy, built of splintery wood and covered with peeling patches of dull gray paint. The employee taking tickets was ancient, grim and gray and hunched. Leaned against the side of the ticket booth was a wooden sign, painted with the words, "You must be this tall to ride the roller coaster." I was seized with a sudden, desperate hope. What if I wasn't tall enough to ride the roller coaster? But no. The sign only reached just above my elbow. "Four tickets each," said the man in the ticket booth. We ripped off four tickets from the roll of

tickets we'd been given. I went last, lingering behind the others as I gave the man my tickets. "Is this thing safe?" I asked him, eyeing the shaky wooden support posts and the rusty nails that held the tracks together. "Safe? I don't know about that," he rasped, grinning. His teeth were crooked and stained yellow. "A couple of weeks ago, I seem to recall, there was an accident. The roller coaster got stuck up there," he said, jerking his thumb toward the highest hill of the tracks, "for a long time. Maybe four or five hours." I gulped, swallowing the lump in my throat. "Come on, Abby!" Charlotte called from further ahead. "We need to get in line before it gets too long." I started to follow them, but the man held up a gnarled hand. "Listen to me. You be careful up there." His gaze raked upward from my shoes to catch my eyes, freezing me in place. "You hear me?" I nodded, then turned, and then holding tightly to the railing, I stepped slowly, gingerly, onto the stairs.

The wood felt flimsy and unstable beneath my feet. We stood at the very end of the very long line. The line snaked up the wooden walkway that wrapped around the tracks until it reached the high above platform where people loaded onto the cars and waited to be taken on a wild, death-defying plunge. A ride was just about to start. From where we stood, we would see it whiz along the looping, twisting tangle of tracks. I clapped my hands over my ears to block out the screams and squeezed my eyes tightly shut. What if they plummeted off the tracks and smashed to the ground below? What if the whole thing toppled over, crushing us all? What if the cars swerved off course and crashed through the railing, slamming into us? Hundreds of horrifying possibilities crowded into my head. Finally, I couldn't take it anymore. I opened my eyes, bracing myself for the worst.

But nothing had happened. They had made it safely to the platform again. The line slowly inched forward. Sarah Grace and Charlotte chattered happily away, apparently not concerned

about any impending catastrophe. I caught snippets of conversation, “Last summer I went too...” and, “I remember...” My hands trembled. Frozen sweat slithered down my back and soaked my forehead. My heart was a caged bird, beating its wings and struggling to break free. “What’s wrong, Abby?” Sarah Grace asked, finally noticing how nervous I was. “I’m afraid of heights,” I whispered, embarrassed. “Oh,” she said. “I didn’t realize.” “I don’t think I want to ride the roller coaster,” I said. “Are you sure?” Charlotte asked, sounding disappointed. “We want you to go. It’ll be really fun.” “You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to,” said Charlotte’s mom, laying a hand gently on my arm. I bit my lip and thought. “I’m not sure. I’ll decide when we get up there.” They nodded.

I willed time to flow sluggishly like a slow-moving river. I wanted to avoid doing what I dreaded for as long as possible. But time was not sympathetic. Even though the line moved in fits and starts, and we only took a few steps at a time, the seconds and minutes blurred together and rushed by like the miles falling away outside the window of a car. I focused on the sky, trying to control the sick feeling swirling in my stomach as I watched a towering wall of clouds slowly eat up the blue. Every time the cars whooshed by, my terror ticked up a notch. Then, when the sky was almost completely covered by a thick blanket of clouds that weighed down the air like heavy chains, we reached the top.

The people in front of us filed through the gate. It shut with a clang, and they piled into the cars. We were up next. “What are you going to do?” Sarah Grace asked softly. “We want you to come with us, but it’s okay if you don’t,” Charlotte said, taking my hand and squeezing it. Here, at the top, right before doing what I was so desperately terrified of, my panic level reached full capacity. I wanted to curl up into a ball and cry until I couldn’t anymore. I wanted to lean over

the rail and throw up. I wanted to run, run down the walkway and through the park, run as far away as I could from this thing. But stronger than that was my desire to be brave in front of my friends. I wanted to show them that I wasn't a coward, show them I could be strong. It was a decision between being brave or being afraid, courage or fear, strength or weakness. There was only one choice I could make.

"I'll go," I said, struggling to keep the trembling fear out of my voice and failing. Sarah Grace leaned over and hugged me. "You don't have to go if you're scared," she whispered in my ear. But I did. And I knew it. The group of cars was just returning, clicking back into their places as dazed people stumbled dizzily out of their seats. "Next group" called the smiling employee, her voice cheerful, too cheerful for this job. She unlatched the metal gate and swung it open. The cars were painted bright red with golden lightning bolts slashing down the sides. The metal was battered and scarred, covered in brutal scrapes and gashes and haloes of dents. Where had they come from? I wondered. Were they mementos of old collisions? The only two unoccupied cars were the last ones in the row. Charlotte and her mom piled into the second-to-last one, and Sarah Grace and I climbed into the one at the end. The very last one.

"Charlotte!" Sarah Grace yelled suddenly, grabbing her by the shoulders. "Are you okay?" Charlotte, deathly pale beneath her constellations of freckles, shook her head. "I don't feel good. I think I'm going to be sick," she murmured. Then she lurched out of the car, stumbling and almost falling. Charlotte's mom was out after her, throwing an arm around her daughter to steady her. "Meet us at the bottom of the stairs," she said, helping Charlotte stagger down the stairs. I could have gone with them. I almost did. But as I sat there, my fear battling with my courage, the moment passed. I started to stand up, my decision made, but Sarah Grace stopped

me. “It’s too late!” she shouted. “Hold on!” The cars moved beneath us, click-click-clicking. I just had time to grab the bar before we were off.

There are no words to describe how fast it was. No similes, no metaphors can name that feeling. It was faster than a blazing ribbon of lightning, faster than the crack of a bullet shot from a gun, faster than a meteor lighting the sky on fire.

The whipping wind ripped a scream from my mouth. The world tilted, flipped over, then righted itself again as we plunged down a hill and raced around a corner. Beside me, Sarah Grace had her hands flung into the air, her face glowing with excitement, her mouth wide open in a thrilled shriek. I gripped the bar so hard I thought my hands would shatter into pieces. Tears spilled down my cheeks. The soundtrack of my thoughts played over and over again. We’re going to crash, we’re going to crash, we’re going to crash.

We slowly climbed to the top of the very highest hill. For a moment, we hung suspended at the precipice, the land spreading out around us. Everything was tiny, miniscule. We could have been the only real ones in a doll house world. But I could only see my death, watching it like a movie on a television screen. We careened over the side, plummeting toward the ground. The cars smashed into the concrete, killing us all. I screwed my eyes shut, crouched down low and buried my head in my arms.

Then we were falling, falling, falling. This must be how it feels to go over Niagara Falls in a barrel, I thought. I didn’t move, didn’t breathe, waiting for the impact I knew would come. But I felt nothing. I slowly opened my eyes...and gasped. We were back at the platform. I fumbled with my safety harness, but my hands were shaking too much. The employee leaned down and unstrapped it. “Did you have fun?” Sarah Grace asked. “No,” I said immediately. It

hadn't been fun. It hadn't been anywhere near fun. It had been the opposite of fun. But it had been something I needed to do.

When I stood, the ground pitched beneath my feet like the deck of a ship. I grabbed the railing to steady myself. We made our way down the steps. Waiting for us at the bottom of the stairs were Charlotte and her mom. Charlotte looked much better. "How was it?" Charlotte's mom asked. "Good," I said, and I meant it. The three of us linked arms. We had a whole day of fun at Kemah ahead of us. "I can't believe you did it," Charlotte said. "I couldn't do it. You were really brave."

-Abigail Walmer

The Crow Calls

The crow calls,
When mist seeks its sorrow.
As the moon shines over,
The wind flows through the empty building.

When mist seeks its sorrow,
The wolves pray for their food.
The wind flows through the empty building,
As the vultures fly over the crops.

The wolves pray for their food,
As moon shines over.
As the vultures fly over the crops,
The crow calls.

-Leo Goldberg

Wildfire

Singed tree trunks jut out
at stark angles like splintered bones.
The stars huddle behind charcoal shrouds.
Flakes of ash swirl on the choking wind,
drifting butterflies with tattered wings.
A fawn limps across the blackened ground,
calling for her mother.

But deep in the forest's scorched heart,
bandages of moss wrap the scars of the earth.
Somewhere, a bird sings,
his music like the smile of the stars.
And in the cracked dirt,
wildflowers glow like shattered suns.

-Abigail Walmer

TO DANCE

To dance on the withered bush's coattails
To breathe in the whispers of defeat
And the small croak of a star, waiting
To collapse.

To halt, like a frozen dream,
To plummet past the whistling coroner,
To yearn for the bundle of tattered shoelaces,
and the cascade of fragrant anger.

To watch the gravel dissipate,
a wish, long past,
For a minute is all that is left.
To say goodbye, pause.

-Mirit Wenderfer