

- # Grade 6-8 Short Story 1st Place

- ## Ana B.

The Solo

Nadia made it to the orchestra room just in time. Any later and she wouldn't have had enough time to take her violin out of its case, and Ms. Harper, the orchestra director and conductor, did not take too kindly to tardiness.

Orchestra was her favorite class of the day. She had taken it in her freshman year, and it was so fun that she decided to take it again this year as a sophomore.

After tightening her bow and putting rosin on it, she took her seat—first chair in first violin, the best of the best. Everyone knew how hard she had practiced for this chair; there was no doubt she didn't deserve it.

Sitting next to her in second chair was Sherry. She and Nadia had come to be friends after sitting next to each other for so long. She asked, "Hey, what do you think the new song is going to be?"

Oh, yeah! Nadia had forgotten—today Ms. Harper was going to announce what their selections were for the fall concert. Nadia couldn't wait to see what Ms. Harper had chosen.

"I have no idea, but I hope there's a solo," she responded.

"You only say that because you'll be the one playing it."

If there was a violin solo, Nadia would get it because she was first chair.

"Duh! This'll be my chance in the spotlight." She put her hand to her heart with a theatrical flair, and Sherry playfully rolled her eyes.

Ms. Harper stepped up onto her platform and clapped her hands—her way of telling us to be quiet. "Alright, settle down, everyone," she said. "Our first announcement, as I'm sure you've all been waiting for, is about our selections for the fall concert. I wanted to give you a challenge, so our first piece is Vivaldi's *Autumn*. I know it'll be tough to play all the movements, but I trust you can do it.

I'm not a complete monster though, so I'll give you a quick pause to rest between each movement.

“Our second piece is more fun. I’ve chosen *Rosin Eating Zombies From Outer Space*. I figured you guys would enjoy it, and it’ll make an exciting finale to our concert.”

The room was in a stir again as Ms. Harper passed out the sheet music. Nadia was ecstatic. To her delight, there was a solo in *Autumn*. The solo wasn’t completely all hers because she’d be playing with the first chair in the viola section, but she was as happy as if it were. She couldn’t wait to get home and practice.

After weeks of everyone practicing at home and with the rest of the orchestra, Ms. Harper decided now was time to rehearse the piece all the way through. Nadia couldn’t be more excited; this was her chance to show off her skills with the solo.

After tuning, the orchestra got their sheet music ready. Sherry, as usual, had forgotten to bring hers, so Nadia offered to share her stand with her. Sherry said she didn’t need to because she already had it memorized. It was ironic how Sherry always forgot her school supplies but only took a month to memorize an entire piece.

They went from rest position to playing position with the conductor’s cues and then began playing. For the most part, it seemed to go well. Then, finally, it came time for Nadia’s solo.

It started off great—Nadia played her part then the viola would come in and play theirs. But it was now the last part of the solo, and for some reason, Nadia’s palms were becoming sweaty. Why was she starting to feel nervous? She knew she could play this flawlessly, just like she had at home in practice.

But the nerves got the best of her, and the sweat from her palms caused her finger to slip and play the next note out of tune. The mistake had shaken her up so bad that she played all of the other notes out of tune and off tempo. Heat rose to Nadia’s cheeks, and she felt like crying; but she knew if she cried, the embarrassment would only be amplified.

The solo came to an end and the rest of the orchestra finished the rest of the piece. Nadia couldn't bring herself to play along; she just pretended to move her bow. This was supposed to be her chance in the spotlight, and she had failed.

After what felt like an agonizing forever, the class came to an end and people packed up their instruments in their cases. As Nadia loosened her bow, Sherry said to her, "Don't worry too much about it, everyone makes mistakes."

"I'm not everyone," she said as she walked out the door and to her next class.

That evening, Nadia couldn't bring herself to pick up her violin. She just stared at its case.

If I can't even play the solo right in just the rehearsal, how am I supposed to do it in front of an entire crowd? she thought. *I...I can't do it. I'll...give up my solo.*

The next day, Nadia pretended to be sick right before orchestra class so she wouldn't have to play her solo during rehearsal again. Then after school, she went back up to the orchestra room, preparing herself mentally to give up her solo.

Ms. Harper was gathering some papers together when Nadia came in.

"Ms. Harper?" Nadia said to get her attention.

Ms. Harper spun around and said, "Nadia, what a surprise! What are you doing here? I thought you were sick."

"About that... I lied, I wasn't actually sick. Which brings me to why I came here. C-can you give my solo to Sherry? I think she would be a better choice."

Ms. Harper looked perplexed at first, but then her face softened. She took a seat and gestured toward the seat right next to her. "Come sit down, let's talk."

Confused, Nadia sat down.

“Is this about what happened yesterday?” Ms. Harper said. “You know, you remind me of myself; I was always too hard on myself. One time, I had a solo concert in front of hundreds of people. I had the whole piece memorized, but when it was my time to play, I was so nervous that I forgot everything.”

“No way!” Nadia couldn’t imagine how embarrassing that had to have been.

“Yup, I was so embarrassed that I ran off the stage and walked all the way home. My nerves were so overwhelming; it felt like there were butterflies, no, *hummingbirds* in my stomach.”

“That’s exactly it!”

Ms. Harper smiled. “But I found a way to manage my hummingbirds. I would breathe in, then exhale really hard, imagining I was blowing the hummingbirds out of my stomach. Try it with me. Let those pesky hummingbirds escape through your nose.”

They breathed in at the same time, and then exhaled. It did make Nadia feel better.

“Now, do you still want to give your solo up?”

A rush of renewed confidence came over Nadia. “No, I’ll try again! Thank you for the advice!” Nadia said as she rushed out the door. She couldn’t wait to get home and practice her solo again.

It was the day of the concert, and the orchestra was playing *Autumn*. Nadia’s solo was inching closer and closer. Nadia took a deep breath in, and then out. She felt the hummingbirds circling around in her stomach start to disappear.

Her solo came, and she closed her eyes and imagined she was at home in her bedroom, just practicing as usual. She played perfectly, and when it was over, she let out a sigh of relief.

At the end of the concert when they were back in the orchestra room putting their instruments back in their cases, Ms. Harper came over and said, “See? I knew you could do it.”

Nadia smiled brightly. Deep down, she knew she could, too.

- Grade 6-8
Short Story
2nd Place

- Shrigauri H.

Leaf

I started as a tiny bud.

And then I grew into a bigger bud.

And then I unfolded into a tiny leaf.

And then I grew some more.

Come summer, I was full and green and healthy. My Tree was giving me the nutrients I needed. My siblings were friendly and everyone was always laughing and smiling and telling jokes. My Tree, she would tell us stories sometimes. Like when she started out as a tiny seed, a lot like how we started out as tiny buds. She told us about her growing up and her first leaf and even the first birds that nested in her branches.

I loved her stories.

When a human came and sat under my Tree, I would try and *stretch* out as far as I could. I wanted my Tree to know I had done my part to keep the human shaded and cool.

I didn't always understand it, but my Tree told us that we needed to respect the humans. I thought they hardly noticed us and all the hard work we did. Well, sometimes they noticed. My favorite human was the one riding the big two-wheeled contraption that humans called a bicycle. When that human would pass under my Tree's branches, she would lift one hand off the handlebars and brush the leaves overhead.

My Tree was kind and caring to all species, even the squirrels. One time a squirrel ran up her trunk, and she laughed like it was tickling her. And then the squirrel ran down a branch and reached right over me and—

Pulled off one of the acorns!

The squirrel yanked it right off my Tree's branches! And then he chattered noisily and scurried back down to the ground. Later, I asked my Tree why she let the squirrel just rip off a part of her like that. She smiled and said,

They need it to survive, little leaf. It is their food. One day, you will be torn off my branches, too.

She was silent for a moment, then asked if I wanted to hear a story. I agreed, of course, and the other leaves went silent to hear our Tree's tale.

Did you know why squirrels take so many acorns this time of year? They are preparing for hibernation. Hibernation is when animals go into a long, long sleep for the winter, so they can store energy until springtime.

Squirrels take many acorns because they store them underground for when they wake up if they are unable to find food. Do you see that tree over there, across the road?

I looked up at the young tree, who seemed to wave one of its branches.

When I was perhaps in my first year as a full tree, our Tree continued, a squirrel took one of my acorns and buried it there. I watched that spot, waiting for the squirrel to return and dig up the nut; but it never returned. Soon after, the little acorn became a sapling, and that little sapling grew and grew and became a tree. So, in a way, that tree is also one of my children, just as all you leaves are.

My Tree pulled her branches together as if trying to drag us into a hug, and all the leaves laughed again.

Not long after this, the beautiful rich green color that I had sustained all summer began to lighten into a vibrant yellow. And then, a week later, orange. By now all the leaves on my Tree were chattering with excitement about the changing colors.

Do you remember, my Tree said in her low, calm voice, when you were big and bright and green in the summer?

There was a whispering agreement among the leaves.

I was giving nutrients to you, to keep you healthy and strong, my Tree explained. And now the summer is ending and the sunlight is fading. Now, I need those nutrients to survive the winter ahead. Your changing colors will go from yellow to orange to red... to dry, brittle brown.

What happens when we're brown? the leaves clamored.

My Tree hesitated. *You fall to the dry, brittle, brown ground.*

We leaves exploded into disbelieving exclamations. *I don't want to leave you;* I whisper to my Tree, brushing my now-orange tips against her bark.

You won't truly leave me, she promised. Come spring, you will turn into the soil that helps plants grow. You may even be helping me grow, after the snow.

FOUR WEEKS LATER...

Many of us leaves were gone now, swept away by the wind, sometimes even though they hadn't yet become the dry, brown shriveled husks I had seen some of my siblings become. Our impending fate, being torn from the branches of our protector, our Tree, loomed ominously ahead of us. And even though our Tree whispered encouragement and consolation about the Falling...

I was scared.

I stared, growing more and more terrified each day as my siblings dried and curled up and were finally ripped away from my Tree by the wind. I knew it would be my time soon, too. I knew that at any moment, a single breath of wind could pull me away from my tree into who-knows-where. I knew I couldn't hold onto my tree forever. But I so wanted to.

I remember the day I was taken from my Tree. It was a beautiful, warm day and many humans were coming out for maybe one last time this season. But the wind was

vicious. I remember trying to hold onto my Tree, perhaps knowing that it would be the day that I had to leave my Tree, just like my sibling leaves that did before me.

When I was pulled away, the wind carried me out far away from my Tree. I tumbled to the dry, brittle, brown ground. And there I lay.

I don't know how long I stayed there, but the wind kept blowing me around. One time, just as I dropped to the ground, I saw the sky above turn white and start to fall.

Over the next few months, I lay there, stepped on, snowed on, rained on, iced over until I was barely myself anymore.

Come spring. The grass turns green again. The animals are out of their hibernation. And I am not a leaf. I am the fresh brown dirt that a bird has just dropped a seed in.

Soon, a small sapling is sprouting. And then a bud. And then a beautiful, yellow flower, my Daffodil. My Daffodil is bright and happy and cheerful. And one day, a day with a gentle breeze that goads my beautiful Daffodil into a dance, I hear a low, calm voice whisper,

Hello, there, little leaf. I see you have grown.

I look up, surprised.

And I see my Tree.

- Grade 6-8
Short Story
3rd Place

- Mannat K.

The only interesting thing about Astrid was her name. It was a Viking name, and since her parents were Norse scholars, they thought it would be fitting.

“She’ll be a bold adventurer!” her mother had crowed, cradling the baby Astrid in her arms.

“A tribute to her name!” her father cheered as Astrid vomited in her sleep.

But Astrid was neither. She was a perfectly ordinary twelve year old of an average height, hair colour, and grades. Nothing truly exciting ever happened - no miraculous escapes where her nose nearly scraped against the brink of death, no journeys back in time or to the Amazon Rainforest, not even a boxing match with her teacher! At least, none *until* her parents took her on one of their excavations during spring break. They were riding on a train to Scotland (where rumours hinted at a buried Viking settlement) when she went to ask for a snack. A ticket collector gave her a pack of jelly babies (yuck), but she thanked him anyway and started her way back to her parents, counting the doors as she went. One compartment, two compartment, th- when *WHOOSH!* Six small hands whipped out of a door and yanked her inside so hard she tripped and banged her head on the window.

“Ow!” she cried, then remembered that it was not usual for people to be forced into train compartments.

“Who are you?” she demanded, whipping her hands away from the tiny grasps and stashing them behind her back. She was facing three extremely tiny men all as skinny as sticks. They each sported a different coloured beard, one green, one purple, and the last one fluorescent yellow. All three of them were wearing posh suits and glaring at her as if she was the one who had dyed their beards so uglily.

“We are here to avenge... *the Wizard Bagtoth.*” the purple bearded one growled, enunciating the name as if it should’ve meant something to Astrid. It didn’t. *They must be those mad kidnappers on TV, she thought, that get put in asylums. Oh, cinnamon frogs, I’ve gotta escape!*

“Ah,” she said out loud, pretending to be thoughtful, “what a... noble quest. I wish you luck, gentlemen.” Then she marched out and slammed the door behind her.

Or so she tried. But the men grabbed her again and forced her onto the seat.

“The thing is,” Green beard said, “we’ve found the murderer. Well, failed murderer.” Astrid looked at him, praying Green beard wasn’t thinking what she thought he was thinking.

“You did?” she asked tentatively.

Green beard nodded and smirked, “You.”

With that yellow beard muttered something under his breath, and a doorway made of light replaced the window. Screaming and protesting, Astrid was dragged through this portal. Three seconds later she arrived in a courtroom full of odd-looking folks. A grim, wig-wearing hippopotamus was glaring at her from the judge’s chair.

To learn why Astrid was here, we have to travel about seven centuries into the past where the magical realm was just as, maybe even more, prominent than the mortal lands. Wizards, witches, goblins, and everything else roamed the streets just as we do now. Among these was the Wizard Bagtoth who was a great leader and revolutionary, fighting against the taxes on potion ingredients imposed by King Edward II. The arrogant king did not appreciate all the uprising and sent his slyest, evilest child, Joan of the Tower, to kill the Wizard Bagtoth. That’s just how the kings of the past used to take care of their problems - not a highly recommended strategy. Joan stabbed Bagtoth in the back and disappeared into the night. Luckily his three gnome assistants

managed to transport their master through time (it is a little known fact that time travel removes all injuries or wounds.) The gnomes then contacted the magical court and tracked down Joan of the Tower. Or rather, they tracked down her doppelgänger, better known to you as Astrid Smith.

Let us return to the story.

“What?!” Astrid protested, “I don’t even *know* Wizard B-B-whatshisname!”

The gnomes only glared at her.

“Silence in the court!” the hippo-judge hollered, “Bring the accused to the stand.” The gnomes shoved her into the little box adjacent to the hippo’s stand.

“Mam-” Astrid pleaded, but the Hippo silenced her with a sharp rap on the head with his gravel.

“I,” it said, “am a sir, you idiot.”

Astrid turned red and did not answer. The hippo explained the rules of the trial, and they were *very* different from mortal trials. Instead of a battle to prove who was right or wrong, it was a test of strength, bravery, and wits. Astrid would be faced against the gnomes. If she lost, she would be incinerated. If the gnomes lost, she would be sent back onto the train automatically. Yes, I know, it was hardly fair, three against one. But such are the rules of magic.

The Hippo whistled and two rhinos strode into the courtroom through the same portal that Astrid had come through. They were carrying hundreds, nearly thousands, of minuscule pebbles, and buckling under the weight. Astrid gulped; if rhinos could hardly carry them, she knew *she* definitely couldn’t. Rhino Number One (which was his name) flung the pebbles by Astrid, and Rhino Number Two dropped his pile by the gnomes. The Hippo cleared his throat and shouted,

“Pick up as many pebbles as you can and do not drop any of them. At the end of thirty twinkles, we will see who has the most. Three, six, five hundred forty-two...BEGIN!”

Astrid desperately started shovelling the pebbles into her arms, but they slipped out of her hands like wet bars of soap coated in warm butter. She peeked at the gnomes and gasped. All of their pebbles were coated in a silvery light that was lifting them up. The light was coming from an old man in the witness stand - the Wizard Bagtoth! He was using magic to help them win!

“They’re cheating!” Astrid shouted, furiously.

Collective gasps and rapid muttering broke out among the crowd. The hippo tried desperately to restore order.

“Because the human has violated the no-snitching rule,” he said, “the gnomes get to choose a new game for the trial. Gnomes, please come up here and whisper your game.”

They did so, smirking at a perplexed and steaming Astrid. A no *SNITCHING* rule! Honestly?

The gnomes, naturally, picked an awful contest. Astrid would have to show them something they could not name. She had one chance. And the gnomes had practically seen everything since 99 B.C. *It’s impossible!* Astrid moaned, clutching her head frustratedly – and heard a crinkle from her pocket! The jelly babies! Carefully, as to ensure no one couldn’t see the logo, Astrid opened the package and plucked out one of the little gummies.

“What,” she asked, “is *this?*”

The gnomes inspected it carefully, sniffing it, licking it, and even stepping on it. As seconds ticked their faces turned red to purple and steam practically danced out of their ears.

“Thirty twinkles,” the hippo warned, biting its nails from the suspense. The crowd shifted and murmured worriedly - none of them wanted a *mortal* to win.

Come on, come on! Astrid prayed. The gnomes started turning white as bleached snow.

But then, at the two-second mark, a yellow beard yelled, “It’s a piece of orange jam!”

“Wrong,” Astrid smiled and disappeared in a puff of smoke back to the train. She’d won.

- Grade 6-8

Short Story

Honorable

- Mention

Keira D.

-

My Choice

Hello my name is Isabella, I am part of the LGBTQ+ community. I've been hiding this from my family for a long time now because I'm Bisexual. My parents will freak out if they find out that I'm dating my best friend Isa. My parents are catholic so they believe in Jesus and you should be with a guy. I don't believe that you have to marry a guy you can be with anyone. I go to Warren public high school.

Isa is 18, and Isabella is 19.

Monday morning

In the morning my alarm clock goes off at 6am *Beep Beep Beep*.

Get up honey. Said mom.

Ok mom I'm awake now. I say.

So I got dressed. I'm wearing a white crop top, with some black leggings, and wearing my Converse, with my black checkered backpack. For breakfast I had some pancakes with bacon.

I told my parents. Bye mom, I'm heading to school.

She says bye.

You're waiting at the bus stop, so you grab your phone and make a TikTok while you wait.

When the bus comes I get on and see my girlfriend, so I sit with her on the bus. I say good morning and you give you Isa a passionate kiss on the lips, then you say I love you.

Isa asked if you've told your parents that your Bisexual.

I say, No, you know what would happen if I told them I would be kicked out of the house.

Isa says, Well if you get kicked out you can live with me at my house and we can do whatever we want.

Isabella, I know I can come live with you but I would miss my family that's not my parents. But I will tell them when I get home.

After school

Isabella, Well it is now after school time to head home and tell my parents but Isa is coming with me.

Isa, I know I will come with you to help you tell your parents.

At home

Isabella, Mom Dad I have something important to tell you!

Isabella's mom, Yes, honey. Oh and I see you brought Isa to the house.

Isabella, Yes mom I brought Isa, but where is dad this is important for both of you.

Isabella's Dad, I'm right here sweetheart what's wrong?

Isabella, well Mom Dad what I'm going to tell you is quite shocking, So I have been hiding this from you guys for a while but haven't gotten the courage to. So...I'm Bisexual!

Isa, Also your daughter is dating me, so that makes me her girlfriend.

Isabella's parents are in shock, so they start whispering to each other and they have decided something.

Isabella's parents both say, How such a disgrace to the family. We are not sorry for this but we are kicking you out of the house and out of the family.

Isabella, I knew this would happen so I'm going to my room and packing everything with me and I'm living with Isa, my girlfriend.

Isabella and Isa go to her room and pack all her clothes, money, shoes, and etc. So then they both leave the house together and go to Isa's house and live with her.

3 years later

Isa and Isabella are still together

Isa is planning on taking Isabella to a dinner for their anniversary, so Isa is planning on proposing to Isabella.

The Night of the Date

Isa wears a tight black dress that has black glitter on it, with some black high heels, Isabella is wearing a white tight dress with white sparkles on it, and white heels.

Isa, You look beautiful baby.

Isabella, Aww thanks babe you look amazing.

After Dinner

Isa, Hey babe, let's go. I have a place for us to go.

Isabella, Baby where are we going?

Isa, You'll see!

Isa blindfolds Isabella and drives them to the beach, with a cute love picnic on the beach. A big red blanket on the sand, with some wine and champagne, and lots of pillows, and some sweets for them to eat.

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Isa, We are here now!

Isa took Isabella's blind fold off and showed her the beautiful set up for their date.

1 hour later

Isa, Hey babe I got one more surprise for you.

Isabella, What is the surprise?

Isa, Well close your eyes and when I say open you will open your eyes and turn around.

Isabella, ok!

Isabella closes her eyes and Isa goes behind her and gets down on one knee and pulls out the wedding ring.

Isa, Ok babe you can open your eyes now.

Isabella opens her eyes and turns around.

Isa, Isabella will you be my wife?

Isabella, Aww babe of course I will!

Isabella and Isa then live a happy life together.

2 years later

Isa and Isabella have 2 kids, 1 girl and 1 boy, they're names are Ellie and Cole.

They all live happily ever after!

- Grade 6-8
Short Story
Honorable
Mention

Isabella Eliana A.

-

The Pen

I wish I could draw. That has been my dream since... forever. I live in Switzerland, so inspiration is everywhere—in the snow-capped mountains, the pine trees and huge shimmering lakes. That's what I want to draw. And I've always failed to do so.

I just don't have enough talent, I think, as I get up from bed.

A look in the mirror reflects my face. My name, Akane, is Japanese for “deep red.” My name really suits me, though one wouldn't think so right away, with my short black hair, pale skin, and perfect height. Then you see my red eyes. They're not scary-looking, I hope, but my eyes have always been like that. They startle people at first glance, but I'm used to them. I guess my red eyes are rare because I've never seen anybody else with eyes like mine.

I get dressed then walk downstairs to the table where sheets of paper lay by the wilting flower I've been attempting to draw. I've been practicing a lot, but as soon as my pen touches the paper it becomes a mess. It's funny how much I love art when I can't draw the simplest thing.

I stack the papers on the table and leave for breakfast. I live by myself in this house, which sounds kind of lonely, but it's not that bad. The Japanese word *boketto* defines how I spend much of my time: gazing vacantly into the distance without a thought. I love doing that.

As I leave the house to meet my best friend at the cafe, I see this silver pen on the sidewalk. I pick it up, rubbing off dirt. It's engraved with Edelweiss, a tiny, snowflake-looking flower that's pretty common here. Walking inside, I grab a scrap piece of paper to see if the pen works. It's pretty, but I don't like to keep useless things. I attempt to draw the flower one last time. Now, what happens next is a little hard to explain, but the ink spreads across the paper and

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perfectly replicates the flower I was thinking of. But not so much that it's like a photograph. It looks like a rough sketch, like what I imagined. Amazed, I want to try drawing myself. Then a buzz from my phone reminds me of my friend.

"Akane, where are you?" my best friend Bay texts. I reply saying I'm busy and I'll see her later. She insists on coming to bring me food. Bay's a great friend. She's also great at baking—the treats she makes are ooey-gooey delicious. It seems like everyone is great at something except me. But maybe with this pen, things will change.

Bay bursts through the door.

"Hey, did you draw that? No way!" she says, pointing at my flower, her blue eyes shimmering with excitement. Aside from being a good baker, she's the world's greatest cheerleader.

"I'm not sure," I say carefully. "I just thought of that flower, and I drew it."

"It's lovely!" Bay smiles. "I'm proud you're getting better."

"That's just it, Bay. I didn't draw it. The ink just spread everywhere from this crazy pen." In response, I get a head tilt.

"Are you sure you didn't draw that?" Bay is obviously confused. As am I. My dreams are coming true, but is it really me drawing? I quickly push the thought away. My chance is here, and I'm not going to lose it.

"I must've drawn it," I reply, "because how else could the flower have appeared on paper? Magic?" I don't explain, though, that it was probably magic; how else could I draw

something so beautiful after failing for years? I try again. Once the pen touches paper, the ink spreads into whatever I'm thinking. It's breathtaking.

And that was the start of my art fame. Bay excitedly told everyone about my new artistic skill. I created many gorgeous art pieces. Until one day, almost two years later, when my pen ran out of ink. There was nothing I could do. It ran out of that beautiful, magical ink and nothing could replace it. I was so scared to try drawing again, terrified that my art would go back to being messy and horrible. I didn't touch a pen for weeks.

"Akane? You home?" I recognize Bay's voice. "You haven't been answering my calls!" she says, bursting through the door. I sit on the couch, warming my hands with a cup of tea. "Can you draw me? And my dog? And the lake I live by? And also, hey what's wrong? Something's going on, right?" I cut her off.

"Bay, I can't draw! What I told you before was true. It's not me drawing! Just that pen and it's out of ink! My art will never be perfect!"

Not accepting this, Bay grabs my arm and sits me down at the table, pulling out a sheet of paper and a normal pen.

"Sketch this Edelweiss!" she says. I do, cringing at my mistakes. "Have you ever thought of it this way, Akane? Who told you that art is perfect?"

"That's what I told myself," I reply, quietly.

"Have you ever thought of your art as a different style?" she asks. "Art doesn't have to be perfect; it just has to make you happy. What you call mistakes on paper look beautiful! It's something different, which is okay."

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I guess I've been comparing myself to others too much.

"Thanks, Bay. Really."

Thanks to that pen, I've learned to draw thoughts. My thoughts aren't perfect. They're messy and full of mistakes. But sometimes, mistakes can be perfect.