

Teen Short Story

1st Place

Lillian M.

Flower

I wonder what it's like, to grow up as a plant in the cracks of the sidewalk—to be born in a place you could have never imagined yet be taught by the sun that you are green, and alive, and beautiful. Only then do you realize that you are sandwiched between two blocks of concrete which are neither alive nor beautiful. Surely plants, which have existed since way back when the world was still learning its own heartbeat have deeper roots than concrete, do they not? Surely such recent inventions as *concrete blocks* pose no threat of death to the flower between them? But somedays you wonder if maybe whatever concrete has in place of roots is stronger.

The birds do say you have one advantage. You're always changing, while the concrete never does, and everyone always says that change always wins. But now you're not so sure. You wonder if your little changing is enough to overcome your concrete neighbors' *great unchangingness*, or if your little changing is just too slow for theirs. You wonder if their unchanging will smother out your changing before it has a chance to win, like everyone said it always would. You wonder, *really* wonder, on those nights when the sky is clear and the world big around you, and you sit there seeing so much beauty and feeling so much life, all the while the concrete sits next to you and feels nothing—on those nights you wonder if you even have a chance. You wonder if you could ever win. You don't know, not really, whether or not the concrete could smother you, squish out your life someday in one final gasp, but you have a feeling it could. You desperately want to ask someone just how strong plants really are, just so you could know for sure, but since there aren't any other plants in sight, you don't have anyone to ask, and besides, you realize you don't know what makes a plant strong in the first place.

Then, one day, someone comes. A person. They stoop down. The wind blows their hair. They stare at you for a long while, eyes soft and full of something you don't recognize. Finally, they run a gentle finger down your stem and pick you up. As they walk away with you clutched in their hand, the world whirs by in a blur. Your home is gone. Your concrete neighbors are gone. A thousand thoughts flurry through your core in waves of panicking butterflies. Of all the ways you expected it to end, this had never been one of them. But then the walking stops, and you are passed to someone new, someone with a smile you can feel in their hands as they pick you up and gently cradle you in their arms. Their fingertips go from cold to warm. Their eyes go from sad to happy. The world shines around them in a glowing halo of something you've never seen before, not on the ground in the cracks of the sidewalk, but you think you know what it is. This is joy. You always wondered what it was that flowers are best at—maybe this is it.

The game is over. You thought, once, that it would be a battle of strength, fought out between you and the sidewalk, but now, for the first time you think that maybe strength isn't what you thought it was. You thought, at first, either you or the concrete would win, and by that you meant most likely the concrete. How on earth could a flower win against concrete? But now, as you watch a person smile for the first time in your little floral existence, you think that maybe winning wasn't what you thought it was, either.

Teen Short Story

2nd Place

Mae A.

The yellow glow of the spotlight shines down upon my face as the curtain begins to fall to the sound of applause. Sweat drips down my forehead and I begin to move slowly. Feeling the soreness that will only grow worse by tomorrow. But that's what happens when you deliver a performance with the perfection that a student of the Baldwin Dance Academy must have. Mrs. Baldwin, the owner, and instructor of the academy claps politely from the wings. "Wonderful just, Wonderful" whispers Mrs. Baldwin as she ushers us off stage "Your movements were perfectly timed and full of grace, but don't let your facials slip." Mrs. Baldwin is old with weathered gray hair and wrinkles that give her a perpetual smile. "Sure" mutters Chloe Davis, a blond and petite girl, a ballerina in every way "I've never given a worse performance in my life." Chloe's always been like this even though she's the only one of us who stands a chance of going professional. Chloe is playing the lead of course while I'm just happy to be in the ensemble. We were close when we were young but after what happened freshman year all we do is argue. "Hey you did great, Abigail," says Julia Hays, my closest and truest friend. "I can't wait for the banquet, it'll be fun" She exclaims grinning. I nod quickly in agreement. It's always a highlight because it's a reward for our hard work. But it makes me wonder how to tell her that I won't be returning next year.

My father was fired from his job a few months ago and hasn't had any luck finding a new one. My mother's salary as a teacher is just barely enough for us to get by. Unfortunately, we can't afford for me to continue within the Baldwin Dance Academy. No more dance classes mean no dance future and dance has always been the one consistent factor in my life. Who will I be without it? Dance is what keeps me moving, dance is why I get up in the morning and why I have to keep living.

Mrs. Baldwin lets us change after a passionate pep talk. She says she needs to leave to take care of her dog before the snow hits. We all shuffle back to the dressing rooms to change and chat as is routine. Chloe is rushing to leave, which is reasonable considering the amount of snow predicted to arrive. Julia and I prefer to take it slow and catch up with each other. "Who do you think will win the scholarship?" asks Julia softly, eyeing the other dancers in the room. It has always been a tradition for the best performer to win a scholarship at the end-of-year banquet. "I mean Chloe is the obvious choice, but still," Julia adds. "I'm not sure" I mumble, not giving it much thought "maybe Amy or Chris." My eyes glaze over from the sheer exhaustion of the day. "I suppose," remarks Julia, sensing my disinterest. She seems as if she has something more to say but quickly covers it with a bright smile. "God it's so cold in December" she exclaims, changing the direction of the conversation and burying herself beneath layers of warm clothing. The bang of the door to the street makes me jump as Chloe leaves the room. Could she be any more subtle? I roll my eyes in disdain, provoking a smirk from Julia as she turns on some music. I will miss times like these, the mutual exhaustion and happy faces. I haven't told anyone about my situation yet. I don't want them to feel bad, I mean there's nothing they could do anyways. A repeated banging on the door distracts me from these thoughts.

Chris opens the door revealing Chloe. Chloe is covered from head to toe in snow nearly frozen to the bone, a truly terrifying sight. She looks purple and blue like the color of blueberries and it seems as if frost is forming over her body. Behind her snow falls from the sky with a frantic fervor it's completely up to her thighs. "All the trains and buses have been stopped because of all this snow" complains Chloe stumbling in from the cold "what do we do? Mrs. Baldwin and the other adults are long gone by now."

Each girl and boy spontaneously erupt into the same face of worry. How will we get home? Even more so the school is incredibly old, they've been trying to renovate it for years but never had the funds. Additionally, the heating system is broken throughout the building. With -30 degree weather outside and the snow pounding down with no intention of stopping, I truly realize the gravity of our situation. Elijah, the eldest boy of our group, has the sense to care for Chloe covering her in whatever warm fabrics he finds. The rest of us frantically try to message our parents but alas the wifi is out. "Well, what now?" stammers a small young girl nervously twirling her hair in her hands. I think her name is Bonnie. She joined pretty late this year. Her terrified face makes me feel all soft inside. "How about we look for some blankets and snacks, maybe try to find cell reception, and then meet up back here in 20 minutes?" I state. Julia chimes in with "I guess that's better than nothing." And that was all it took for everyone to spring into action, happy to feel like there was something they could do to make our situation better. Chloe stands up from the corner while Elijah tries to pull her back. "What should I do?" questions Chloe. "You need to rest and warm up," argues Elijah. Turning his attention to me he says "I think I remember something about a space heater in the lighting booth. Would you stay with her?" I do not get a chance to reply as he runs from the room

The moment Elijah leaves the room and it is just the two of us we fall into an awkward silence. I distract myself by cozying up in the chair next to Chloe blowing on my hands to stay warm. It feels as if with every second that ticks by the air gets colder and the snow harsher. Ever since what happened me and Chloe haven't talked normally. We were so close when we were little. My mother used to always say that it's as if we were twins separated at birth like two peas and a pod. We played together, we learned together and we danced together. Then one awful day sent that right down the drain. Freshman year is supposed to be exciting and full of new

experiences. I made a lot of friends. But for reasons I don't understand, Chole taunted them. Regardless, I ignored her behavior. I just thought she was trying to adjust to having a few more people around but then she started the letters. She put them in lockers and backpacks and lunchboxes anywhere that I wouldn't see them. Of course, my friends told me but I just never imagined that she would do something like that. But she couldn't hide it forever. At lunch one day I caught her when the cards fell out of her backpack. She told me they weren't hers but I knew better. I couldn't believe that she would treat others this way and she couldn't believe that I didn't support her. She thought she was saving our friendship. All she did was hit the iceberg that sunk it. I still haven't forgiven her and she has never apologized.

The second hand on my watch seems to move with agonizing slowness. I don't see why I have to be here. Chloe isn't getting any worse, just more impatient. She stares at me like she wants to say something to break the silence. "Interesting weather today isn't it?" Chloe throws out. "Yeah it sure is something" is all I can think to reply with. "Are you looking forward to the banquet?" she counters, pushing for some sort of conversation. "There's not much to look forward to is there?" I say trying to show how uninterested I am in this entire situation. I trusted her and she stabbed me in the back. After this year I won't have to speak to her again so I suppose that's the only upside to leaving. "Do you hate me Abigail?" inquires Chloe. "What?" I respond. "For what I did, do you hate me?" She asked again. I consider my response carefully "I don't necessarily hate you, but I certainly don't forgive you either. What you did was mean and harmful. I trusted you because you were my friend and you betrayed me." Chloe looked away from me; it seemed as if she didn't know what to say next. A few moments later she finally says "I didn't mean to hurt them, I didn't mean to hurt you. You were leaving me behind and I didn't want to lose you so I did what I felt I had to." I open my mouth to respond but she quickly

interrupts me "I know it was wrong but you were the only friend I had. When you started being friends with them you never had any more time for me. Ever since then, I've been alone." When she turns to look at me again I see that she is crying but the tears keep getting stuck to her face.

I shudder a breath and grab the tissues from the desk to pass them to her. "I know that and I miss you too but that doesn't make what you did ok," I tell her. "I know," she says, "I just wish you would give me another chance." I feel in some part that I am obligated to tell her that her apology is a bit too late so I say "I'm not coming back next year." "Why? Did I do this?" she stammers, grabbing my hands. "It's not your fault we just can't afford it anymore since my dad lost his job" I correct. "Oh I see that's unfortunate," says Chloe disappointedly. "I know but it's whatever" I trail off sighing "maybe if you wanted we could start over at school." The opening of the door catches my attention. It is Julia and she looks sad "you're leaving." She asks, "Why didn't you tell me?" "Why didn't you tell us?" adds Elijah. "There wasn't anything you could do," I say standing to face them. I am met by exasperated faces "But we could have" says Chloe behind me. "She's right," says Julia, "and maybe we still can." She looks expectantly at the others who return blank stares. "The scholarship" she explains "the rest of us can afford classes, what if whoever wins gives it to you." "Would you do that for me?" I ask a slight pressure building up behind my eyes. "Of course" responds Chloe with haste "because you're a good friend and you deserve it. Being a part of this group is more than just how well you perform but how well you can support others. you took initiative today, to me that makes you pretty spectacular." She embraces me in a hug, shocking me and slowly I return it melting into the warmth of her body. Slowly I feel others piling in, warming me to the core. Although our limbs are cold and frozen it feels as if our hearts are just beginning to thaw.

Teen Short Story

3rd Place

Chanel P.

Walking Soul

A couple years ago the Beckett's daughter; Viola went missing on a family trip and hasn't been seen ever since. Her adopted younger sister; Violet fell into a deep depression and soon started failing school. The mother and father quit their job to help Violet but nothing helped. The sister's were close and were inseparable, they did everything together. But this made Violet more recluse; she lost all her friends, college offers stopped and family stopped coming around because of how cold she was. Violet didn't realize how important her sister was to her until she lost her. *A goodbye is painful when you can't say goodbye.*

"What did you feel, when you found out your sister went missing? The therapist asked, looking up at Violet.

Violet fiddled with the rings on her finger as a lump formed in her throat causing her to hesitate her answer, "I-I felt like I lost a part of me, I didn't cry right away when I found out. I just sat in my room staring at the wall"

"Do you remember the night before she went missing, if so what was it like?" the therapist said, writing down previous answers.

"W-we were at the cabin upstairs in her room, she was telling me she found something... she looked scared, i've never seen her react in such a way." Violet said, looking at her hands.

"Violet what did you do?" the therapist replied, sitting his notepad down.

"I-i didn't listen, because I thought she was trying to play some joke like she always does" Violet said.

"And after that she went missing, hmm did you ever want to be the only kid in the house?" the therapist asked.

"What! No?!" Violet shouted.

The parents rushed in after hearing Violet shout, "You should be ashamed of yourself Dr. Arden! Your boss will be hearing about this." Dad complained, comforting Violet as she cried.

"My Apologies Violet and her parents, I overstepped my boundary it will not happen again" the therapist apologized, grabbing his belongings and proceeding out the house. Mom and Dad comforted Violet as she cried in their arms, "why do I have to go through so much pain!," Violet sighed, pausing to wipe the tears from her cheeks. "I wish it was a bad dream"

They stood there comforting each other before heading downstairs to eat dinner. Violet had finally calmed down but her throat was still constricting making her gasp for air every other second.

"Do you think we should tell her?" dad asked, looking at mom.

"Umm yes! Violet, we are going to go back to the cabin" mom said, as her smile faded. Violet dropped her fork, "I don't want to go back mom! It's just going to bring back memories"

"Honey, it's an opportunity for you to revisit a place where you and your sister used to have fun! It's not meant to hurt you, it's only for you to confront your past, dad reassured.

"How about we go tomorrow for at least a week and then we'll never go again" mom said.

"And friday will be your last day " dad said, looking at mom then to Violet.

Violet sulked into her seat, just thinking about going back to the place that her sister went missing made her uncomfortable.

Monday Morning, the family packed all their belongings and told aunt beck that the dogs will need to be fed and washed tonight.

"Viktoria, do you think it's a good idea to take Violet to the place her sister went missing?" aunt beck whispered, looking around to make sure Violet wasn't around.

"Beck, please give me a break! It's only to help her with her past" mom exhaled, turning to aunt beck.

"Besides Violet, why do you want to go so bad? Your daughter was probably abducted and you still want to go!" aunt beck replied

"Are you serious?! Beck I called you to do a favor for me not lecture me, I can call somebody else to take care of the dogs." Mom said.

"Ok.. ok... change of subject, I heard from mom that Violet's real parents want to see her and maybe try to get her back...." Aunt Beck said.

"I'm not sure, I haven't seen them," Mom shrugged, ending the conversation and exiting to the living room.

The drive to the cabin was far out of town. If any of them were to go missing it would take at least a week to find the exact way towards the cabin. Violet was in and out of sleeping while dad and mom switched every hour to drive.

When they made it to the cabin Violet's stomach turned in disgust, dad and mom entered the building smiling while Violet stayed in the car avoiding going in.

"Come on Violet! I'll walk you in," mom said, knocking on the car window. Violet rolled her eyes in annoyance grabbing her belongings from next to her.

Mom grabbed Violet by the arm and led her into the house. Violet looked around and it was all the same as they left it but cleaner. She walked upstairs into the room and Viola stayed in to see their teddy bears sitting next to each other. She plopped down on the bed and sat there as she did when she found out Viola went missing.

"Violet! Can you come down here for a second" mom yelled

Violet walked downstairs to her parents to see them sitting at the dining table, "we really hope you're not mad at us" mom said.

Violet chewed on her lower lip, "I'm not mad it's just.... It's just I wasn't ready to come here yet."

"You know if you're hurting you could tell us, mom sighed.

"Mom, I'm just tired!" Violet exhaled, trailing up the stairs.

"Violet, you can not continue to hide your feelings from us!" mom yelled, as she stood up from the table.

Violet slammed the door to her room and laid down on the bed as her thoughts spiraled as soon she drifted off to sleep.

Tuesday Morning, Violet jumped out of her sleep from a bad nightmare. It was about 9am and her parents were still asleep. She slipped some shoes on and headed outside to get some fresh air. Violet made sure to stay close to the house but far enough to see the waterfall that splashed down drastically. She walked closer to the waterfall and sat down near the rocks.

Watching as the sun peeked over the water, scooting closer to the waterfall she noticed a cover covering something. Having a hard time standing she snatched off the cover to see a skeleton. Jumping back in fear, Violet fell into the waterfall, struggling to stay above the water. A blurry figure pulled her out of the water by her arms. The figure wiped Violet's face so she could get a better look of who it could be. Looking at the figure in horror Violet jolts back

"Violet don't scream!" the figure said, covering her mouth.

The figure kept their hand onto violet's mouth for a few seconds then removed it, "You better not scream."

"This is not real! V-viola I thought you were dead!" Violet said, standing up.

"I am dead! But you're going to be dead soon if you don't leave this place!" Viola said, with the same look on her face she gave Violet the day she went missing.

Violet walked back and forth thinking she was going crazy... but she wasn't her sister that went missing years ago standing in front of her but as a spirit as they stood next to her skeleton that laid in peace.

"Violet, you need to listen to me, where's mom and dad?" Viola asked, looking around, scoping around them.

"They're in the cabin sleeping, come with me so they can see what I'm seeing" Violet replied, grabbing Viola by the arm.

"No! They are the ones that did this to me!" Viola exclaimed, snatching her arm back.

"Viola, stop with the bullcrap!" Violet said, turning towards Viola.

"No! Listen to me that night before I went missing I found your parents dead in the basement. I went upstairs to try to show you and Violet you didn't believe me and when I went downstairs" Viola paused.

"Come on, let's go see!" Violet said, trudging towards the cabin.

When she entered the door she saw mom and dad sitting at the dining table eating breakfast.

"Honey, are you ok? You look sick" mom said, getting up, touching Violet's forehead.

"WHAT'S IN THE BASEMENT?!" Violet yelled, slapping mom's hand off her forehead.

"Alright, calm down Violet, are you having an episode?" dad asked, standing up.

"YOUR HIDING SOMETHING IN THAT BASEMENT AREN'T YOU! Violet yelled, going to the basement door and opening it aggressively.

Violet crept down the stairs and flicked the light on to see nothing but couches sitting there. She looked confused putting her hands on her head. Viola stood beside her, "I swear to God Violet their bodies we laid right here!"

Mom and dad came down the steps, looking at their daughter in fear. "Violet..."

"Viola said that you killed my real parents! Don't you see that she's standing right here!" Violet trembled, pointing at Viola.

The crazy thing about this whole situation is that the parents couldn't see anything, only Violet, dad rushed to Violet, sticking a needle in her throat.

"Patient 459 has returned to the clinic, she was released last week but her parents claimed that her dead sister was insinuating the parents had killed her." Man said, typing information into the computer log.

"Yeah... isn't she the crazy girl who killed her sister on their family vacation?" A woman replied, grabbing folders near the man.

"Yup..."