

Grade 6-8
Short Story
1st Place

Macy V.

Name Rebels

Tears slid down the woman's face. Her eyes were crinkled in emotion. She wasn't necessarily worried or mad or sad. The emotions she was feeling weren't really like that. It was more of her realizing the events that would soon take place. The line was getting shorter. Her heartbeat quickened. The lady in front of her silently crossed a name off of a piece of paper. She hung her head and let the guards take her down the hallway to who knows where. Suddenly, the woman was given a ballpoint pen. The woman looked at the table before her and breathed in and out. Her eyes skimmed the names on the sheet of paper and somehow, the woman knew what name to cross off. She prayed a quick prayer, crossed the name off and felt a pair of firm arms grab her wrists. She was handcuffed and led down the dark hallway, to who knows where. She was taken past a room labeled "nursery". Inside were rows of bassinets that were holding newborn children including her own. The woman only had one hope left. That her daughter would grow up and fight this. That her dear Alessandra would grow up and be the defender of mankind that she was meant to be.

12 years later

"Come on Calista! We are going to be late!" Alessandra yelled from across the school's courtyard.

"I'm coming! Hold on!" Calista responded. Calista was the prettiest 12 year old in all the city. She was dark skinned with curly brown hair that framed her face perfectly. Her eyes were as pale as the morning sky and she had a cute button nose. Her smile could light up a room. She had freckles on her nose. Her height wasn't too tall, or too short. Calista means "most beautiful" and everyone could classify her as that.

"Calista you know that if we get another tardy Ms. Soren will give us a week of detention!" Alessandra was already halfway through the door that would lead them back to the school building.

"I told you Alessandra, I'm coming!" Calista walked through the door and was blasted with fresh air conditioning. It was almost summer, and the weather was scorching hot. Alessandra was sweating, but she had more important things to think about. There had been a lot of things in the news about the "name rebels". The Children Guardians hadn't explained a lot to her, but from what she has heard, they sounded like a group of people who protest. Alessandra was a curious person, and how could you blame her? The whole community didn't know who their parents were and there were some sketchy things happening in the news. Alessandra heard Ms. Soren yelling through the hallways warning the children who weren't in class yet. Alessandra strided into Ms. Soren's room just as the bell rang. Calista was already in her seat next to their friend Ziki.

"Hey Alessandra!" Ziki greeted Alessandra with a smile. She sat down in the middle of them and looked at the piece of paper already laid on her desk. Unlike the worksheets she had received before, this one was blank. The other children in her class were looking at Ms. Soren in confusion, wondering what they had to do.

"Good afternoon class, I know that you are all anxious to leave because it is your last class of the day, but today we have a very important lesson." Ms. Soren's eagle eyes stared holes into each of the child's foreheads. Her eyes were gray and cold. Just looking at them made Alessandra shudder.

"Today we are going to be talking about the "name rebels". I'm sure that many of you have questions about his whole rebellion, and it is my job to answer those questions. Please take out a writing utensil and take notes while you watch the video." Ms. Soren walked over to her computer and pressed a button. The smartboard lit up and a woman's voice played through the speakers.

"A male named Asani is leading this rebellion. He has organized marches and protests that occur about once a week. Please stay aware. They are very dangerous and could cause a lot of harm." Alessandra zoned out for a couple of minutes. She had been thinking a lot lately about one very important question. In her community, when you were named something that is what your destiny would be. There was no discussion or exceptions. The meaning of your name is who you are, and that's that. It made sense, Calista means "most beautiful" and look at her! Ziki means "clever" and he was probably the most clever kid in the school. The thing that Alessandra was thinking about however was her name. Alessandra means "defender of mankind". How was Alessandra a defender of mankind? She wasn't exactly shy or weak. She was actually quite athletic and strong, but that didn't mean she was a defender of mankind. Alessandra was worried. *Maybe I'm messed up. Maybe I did something wrong.* She thought. Alessandra realized that the video was over and she hadn't written anything!

"Ziki!" she whispered "Help! I didn't write anything!" Ziki rolled his eyes and turned his paper so Alessandra could see. She scribbled in notes while Ms. Soren was talking.

"Alessandra! Pencils down! Detention for a week!" Alessandra looked up and made eye contact with Ms. Soren. She dropped her pencil and glared at the ground. Ms. Soren had to be the rudest teacher in the whole school. Soren meant "strict" and "severe".

"Maybe now you will follow the directions." Ms. Soren sneered. Alessandra used all of her self control not to yell. The bell rang signifying the school day to be over.

"Turn in your notes on my desk on your way out children! You may head to the courtyard before dinner." That was another really weird thing about this community. Nobody had family or even knew who they were, so they lived at the school. There were cabins next to the building for children to sleep in. Alessandra stood up and followed Calista and Ziki out of the building.

"Secret meeting!" Ziki announced once they got into the courtyard. Alessandra and Calista looked at each other weirdly and headed over to the old oak tree. The friends rarely had secret meetings, only on very special occasions. This must be important. Once they were in the shade that the tree provided, The sat down.

"Does anyone else think something wasn't right in class?" Zion spoke.

"Yes! Ms. Soren started scolding Alessandra when I was doing the same thing as Alessandra!" Calista responded.

"No! Well, yes, but no! It was something bigger than that!" Zion was standing now.

"Did it have to do with that video?" Alessandra looked at Ziki.

"Exactly! There was something off about all those news reporters. I think there is something serious going on about the "name rebels". Remember how the ringleader was named Asani? I looked up his name, and it means "rebellious". I don't think this is just some group of people protesting. This is supposed to happen. This is destined." Ziki looked serious.

"Do you mean... that you think that these "name rebels" are good?" Calista's face was twisted in confusion. Alessandra nodded.

"I think you are right, Ziki. I think that these reporters are hiding something big!" Alessandra looked off into the distance. The sun was starting to set, it was about time for dinner.

"I know that it is time for dinner guys, but I have something I need to tell you," Zion looked guilty. "I know where to find these "name rebels". Alessandra and Calista stared at Zion.

"Why would we want to know where they are?" Alessandra asked Zion as she started to stand up. Calista agreed with Alessandra.

"Two reasons actually," Zion was more serious than he had ever been. "One: Alessandra is meant to be a part of the "name rebels" This is her chance to be a "defender of mankind". Two: This is the first step we need to take to find our parents!" Then the bell rang signifying dinnertime. The trio silently walked into the cafeteria, prepared for their destiny.

Grade 6-8
Short Story
2nd Place

Shrigauri H.

12/25/2023

Merry Christmas! This year, for Christmas, I'm treating myself to this journal—I swear I'll actually fill it out this time!—aaaaand a five-day solo hike in Voyageur's National Park. Nothing but snow, trees, and sky. I'll keep an account of the whole thing via photos and diary entries, so I can remember it forever. I cannot wait.

12/26/2023 – Day one (!!!)

I've set up a sort of camp in the clearing and I'm writing this at night by flashlight in my tent. Overall a pretty good start to the trip. Haven't seen many animals, but I saw some odd-looking tracks a little ways off the trail. I went to check them out because they didn't seem like anything I'd seen before. They were massive, like three feet long. Maybe a person on skis or dragging their feet while they walked? I don't know, I haven't seen any other signs of people so far, but I think there's some kind of a rest stop somewhere near here so maybe that's it.

Anyway, the sky is gorgeous—I don't think I've seen this many stars in my life. And it's *freezing*, but hey—all part of the fun, right? I'll update more tomorrow, I think my fingers are going numb.

12/27/2023 – Day two

Today was kind of weird. I could have sworn I heard a person calling for help a few hours ago. I tried to listen for it again to see where it was coming from, but it only happened the one time. I called out a little bit, to see if anyone would respond, but I heard nothing else. Maybe I should have called 911 or something. Although I don't think

I have any signal. Maybe I'll just report it when I get to the visitors center at the end of my hike.

12/28/2023 – Day three

I woke up this morning and there was just this *horrible* stench, like something rotting. Maybe I set up camp near an animal carcass and didn't notice it, but the smell sort of *lingered* in the worst way. It faded away around noon I think, but I still have no idea what it was. I saw marks on trees, like slashes carved into the bark. I thought maybe they were just some kind of trail markers, but there are official national park trail markers, too, so I don't know why someone would carve into trees for no reason. I might have heard someone calling out for help again, but I think I just imagined it this time.

12/28/2023 – Day three (middle of the night)

I tried to sleep but I got woken up about an hour or so ago by a loud screeching noise. It was probably some kind of hurt animal, but I just feel really uneasy about it. I keep getting sudden chills, even though I'm in my tent with a heated blanket. I don't know, but I'm about ready for this hike to be over. It's not as fun as I thought it would be. Just one more night, thankfully.

12/29/2023 – Day four

I swear something has been watching me. All day I keep feeling like there are eyes on me. I don't *think* there are any large predators in this area, but I keep seeing something out of the corner of my eye. Like a really tall figure with claws. Seriously

freaking me out. Plus the rotting smell is back. This will probably be the last solo hike I take, at least for a while. I'll probably reach the end of the trail by tomorrow afternoon, if I move fast. At least it'll be over soon.

MISSING PERSONS REPORT (CASE UPDATE)

Case filed: January 2, 2024

Description of missing person: Caucasian male, brown eyes, brown hair

Height: 5'11"

Weight: approx. 179 lbs.

Last seen: December 26, 2023

Last known location: Voyageur's National Park Visitor Center

Last seen wearing: red puffer jacket, black pants, green hiking backpack

Case updated: January 4, 2024

Body matching case description found at [location confidential].

Description: Person appears to have passed away 3-4 days ago. Body was found with claw-like tears in skin and clothing. Three-foot-long footprints found in snow near body.

Trees in surrounding area marked with slash-like gouges. Smaller trees and bushes trampled by large animal. Notebook found with account of December 25th through December 29th, 2023. Notebook filed as evidence.

Grade 6-8
Short Story
3rd Place

Emilia M.

The Mission

Anna slipped in the front door of her apartment and grabbed her computer. After she signed in, she frantically scanned her inbox searching for a certain email. She finally located it at the very bottom of her inbox. She clicked on the link and used it to hack into a special file. She slid a key card into the computer and once it was loaded she dashed up to her bedroom and opened her closet door, smoothing her chestnut hair. She stepped into her closet, which turned out to be an elevator, and began shooting downwards.

She landed and arrived in a meeting hall with a large table in the center surrounded by many elegant looking people .

"Mr. Spencer, I have excellent news," Anna said to a tall thin man with a long nose and a dignified expression. "Princess Julia will be making a visit to Newbridge Castle for the new year."

"That is all well and good, but I don't see what's so important about it," piped up an elegant lady with thick gold hair and starry blue eyes.

"That's not all, Miss Ashton," Anna replied, looking slightly harassed. "She will be taking Richard Dredmor as her personal assistant!"

"Dredmor, that scoundrel!" interrupted a short, bald man with an immense red mustache at the very bottom of the table.

"I hacked into Dredmor's files and discovered a confidential document of Dredmor's plans." Anna continued, undisturbed by his ridiculous facial hair. "Princess Julia's chief advisor, Rogerick von Hisimo III, has gone over to Dredmor's side and they are planning to kidnap Princess Julia!" At once the hall erupted with murmuring and everyone was talking at once.

"I have an idea!" exclaimed an elderly woman who had just arrived in the hall.

"What is your idea, Mrs. Rachel?" inquired Mr. Spencer, leaning forward in his chair with interest.

"I propose that we send Agent Anna since she has proven to be a resourceful young lady and is an excellent spy. We shall install her as a maid in the service of Princess Julia." She said this all in one breath and by the time she finished she was gasping. All of the people in the hall had a thoughtful look on their faces, and Mr. Spencer said, "Go on, Mrs. Rachel."

"Well," she responded, "Miss Anna will lure Dredmor out onto the moor and then we can send out police to intercept him!"

"Brilliant!" exclaimed Mr. Delaware, who was the roly-poly president of Spies International and had a thick Scottish accent and a giant fedora. "We lure him into our trap, and then boom, we've got him!"

"I'll leave right away," said Anna, confidently, jumping up and grabbing her notebook.

"Our hopes go with you, Miss Anna," said Mr. Spencer, banging his fist on the table. "Good luck."

"Thank you, sir," she responded, and then she dashed out of the room and into the elevator. While the elevator shot upward she began planning for the mission ahead. When she reached the top she noticed that her computer was making a high pitched beeping noise, the exact noise it made when she received a message. She immediately sat down at her desk and punched in the code to open her email. Then she saw it- there right in front of her was an email from Mrs. Rachel stating every last detail of her mission. She greedily clicked on the email and read it.

Agent Anna:

At precisely 9 pm a taxi will arrive to take you to Newbridge Castle. Shortly beforehand, a package will arrive containing the uniform of one of the maids in the service of Princess Julia. Your secret identity will be that of Miss Luciana Bell. We have informed the true Miss Bell and she is allowing you to assume her identity. Once you have arrived you will be assigned to the chambers of Mr. Dredmor. Place the enclosed letter on his bedside table. If the letter fails, then here is plan B: On the 31st of December there will be a party. Mr. Dredmor will be planning to kidnap her that night. You will inform Mr. Dredmor that a man in the gardens would like to speak to him. We will be waiting for him. Good luck.

Mrs. Rachel Conente

Director of information

"9 pm!" Anna exclaimed. She glanced up at the clock on the wall. It read 8:45. That meant that the special package would arrive any minute. She leapt into action and started packing her bags. Five minutes later, she heard the doorbell ring and knew the package had been delivered. She grabbed it off her porch and ripped it open. Inside of it was the gray, scratchy uniform of a royal maid. She jumped into her uniform, itching at the texture before leaping down the stairs. When the taxi pulled up she hopped inside, and the driver sped off toward Newbridge Castle. An hour later, the taxi skidded up to the back entrance and she slipped through the servant door. Cook, a large woman with an even larger apron and a frown, spotted her and, reading Anna's name tag, said sharply,

"Luciana, hurry up to Mr. Dredmor's room before he arrives." She punctuated her sharp words with a swing of her mighty steel ladle and Anna dashed up the stairs. She quickly located Mr. Dredmor's room and placed the letter on his desk. When she heard voices in the hall she grabbed a duster and began dusting the bedside table.

When he entered, Mr. Dredmor noticed her and said, "You, girl. Out."

Anna gave a quick curtsy before backing out of the room and running for the servants' quarters. She collapsed onto an empty bed in a bunk room, and in a minute she was fast asleep. The next morning she woke at the crack of dawn and sleepily rushed to Mr. Dredmor's rooms. But once she got to the room, she realized that he had already left.

"Oh no!" she whispered with a sinking heart. She ripped her radio out of her pocket and ran for Princess Julia's rooms. As she ran through the corridors she hit the On button on her radio and yelled,

"Code red! Repeat- Code Red! Send reinforcements!" She ran past Cook, who was coming from the storerooms.

Cook noticed her and shouted in an angry voice, swinging her ladle once again, "Luciana! Get back here!"

She ignored her and continued running toward Princess Julia's room. When she reached the room, she realized that she was too late. The room had been trashed and it looked like there had been a

fight. She was about to leave when she noticed a single slip of red paper. When she picked it up she noticed the handwriting was that of Princess Julia. The note was written in plain square hand and was clearly written hastily. It said:

5731 Northumberland Rd. hurry

Anna's heart leaped as she phoned in the note. She was transferred to Mrs. Rachel who immediately asked, "Do you have coordinates?"

"Yes!" Anna answered "5731 Northumberland Road."

"Perfect," she answered. "Get there right away." Then she hung up.

Anna dashed to the door of the castle and noticed that a taxi was just departing, having dropped off an immaculately dressed toddler and her nurse. She raised an eyebrow at the curious picture, but banged on the window of the taxi to get the driver's attention, leapt in, and ordered, "Please take me to 5731 Northumberland Road." The taxi sped off and ten minutes later it skidded to a stop at the house, a rustic cottage set back in the woods. At the same time that she arrived, a group of cars from Spies International pulled up, guns loaded.

Somebody tossed Anna a gun and she, along with 15 other guards, charged up to the house and shouted, "Come out with your hands up!"

Dredmor and von Hisimo exited the house with their hands up and were ushered into the waiting police car and driven away. Anna and three other agents entered the house and searched it from top to bottom until they located Princess Julia, a tall and thin 15-year-old girl with mussed black hair and crystal blue eyes. She was in the cellar, where she had been tied to a rusty hook on the ceiling.

They immediately freed her and she profusely exclaimed, "Thank you!" several times as they lead her out of the house.

Then they helped the princess into a limousine that had arrived while Anna responded,

"You're welcome, Your Highness."

Once the Princess left, Anna hopped into a taxi to her house. As soon as she got home, she took a nice long nap to recover from her mission.

Grade 6-8
Short Story
Honorable
Mention
Hannah W.

The dark and rusting gates of Windlethrop Manor loomed before the crew of the hit paranormal show, Getting With the Ghosties. The somewhat laughable name of the show reflected the tone of it, as viewers mostly tuned in not for solid paranormal evidence, but for the witty commentary provided by one of the "investigators", Will Turner. Will smirked at the iron gates barring the way to an antiquated mansion.

Turning towards the camera operated by permanently amused camerawoman and sound person, Liliana Green, he offered his feedback on the current subject of the show's critique, "Haunted Mansion got QUITE the downgrade, now didn't it?"

Liliana smiled behind the camera and switched the focus to Will's somewhat distressed-looking costar, April Johnson. April twisted her fingers together, ever the image of the terrified believer next to the courageous and skeptical Will. April didn't address the comment, instead opting to open the gates while giving the viewers the needed background on the dilapidated house.

"Windlethrop Manor is arguably one of the most haunted spots in the world, remarkably from only one apparition. Multiple investigators, much like ourselves, have entered this mansion and come out traumatized, or not at all. Now, at first I was hesitant to sign the waiver for the house with one of the highest death tolls from the paranormal, but hey, whatever the producer wants, the producer gets, right?" The bitterness was unmistakable in April's tone and Liliana frowned, frustrated at having to edit something out so early. April made no attempt to follow up on the comment, and wandered beyond the gates towards the house.

Liliana glared at April's blue-highlighted and swinging ponytail as she switched the focus to Will, who too was heading towards the mansion. Liliana turned off the

camera and hurried after them, panting slightly and cursing her lack of stamina. As the sole director of sound and camera she really should've acted on that gym membership she made months ago as part of yet another new year resolution. And yet it was now in the scorching middle of the summer and she wasn't any more fit than she was five months ago. What a waste of money.

April twisted her fingers as she paused before the threshold of the manor. She really shouldn't have come back here. Not after last time. But she really wasn't in a position to refuse right now, and their producer (who she was fairly sure was the devil) made sure to let her know that. She still couldn't believe that she'd been so *stupid*. Like, it should've been obvious that it was a scam. From the shady nature of the caller, to the peculiar instructions, warning signs were all around her. But she had never really been the smartest in her class. So now all her life savings were in the hands of some scammer and her future was in the hands of her producer. She shook her head to clear out the thoughts and instead focused on the episode. Same drill as usual. She looks for ghosts, none appear, Will laughs at her, the audience laughs at her, heck, even the producers laugh at her. Everybody laughs and the episode is a hit. Her memories claw at her mind, fighting for attention, and she shook her head harder. Will came up behind her and she fought off a scowl.

"If you got lice tell me, before you ruin this perfect hair." Will said, poking her shoulder as he twisted to see if Lilliana caught that. She didn't, and his face sours. Lilliana mouthed a thoroughly unapologetic sorry through pants and started up the camera. Will grinned at the camera, now all sunshine, and swung the doors open.

April gasped at the familiar sight of the interior of the manor, lifting a pale hand to cover her mouth. She remembered everything in perfect detail, the wooden banister, the way the house's black walls seemed to eat up all the light, and the furniture, still in pristine condition though being abandoned for years on end. This house had made her believe in ghosts. No, it wasn't the absence of dust, nor the eerie shadows playing at the edges of her vision, but the events that happened here when she had come here with one of her few friends. She wasn't kidding when she said that some didn't come out. To most people it seemed like a tragic accident, but April knew the truth. Her friend didn't trip, she was pushed.

Will's heart raced as he stepped in after April. Suddenly unable to crack a joke, he could only stand there as Liliana shifted uncomfortably behind him. Though he had dozens of visits to places just like this with no problem, and his entire role in the show was a witty skeptic, he still couldn't suppress a thrill of fear traveling up his spine. He gulped, breaking out in a cold sweat. What was he thinking? He wasn't cut out for this, he never was. Though all the audience saw was courage, Will really was a coward on the inside and he hated it. Liliana cleared her throat, breaking the reverential silence filling up the space. Will swallowed again, still unable to conjure up words. There was something very wrong with this place.

"Alright, I know it's weird that the outside is all old and crusty but the inside is perfect but I really don't think it warrants this reaction." Liliana's brisk voice snapped both Will and April out of their thoughts. "Besides, even if this somehow shocks you beyond reasoning, I have to do both camera *and* sound so you can suck it up and talk for a bit." Liliana grinned at her tone, loving the shocked expressions on the talents'

faces. April lifted a shaky finger at Liliana with a terrified expression. "What? Shocked that I finally found my voice? You know, I should have been talent, not you, I can be entertaining and- -" Liliana's powerful voice was cut off right as it began to rise and she dropped to her knees.

April rushed to Liliana's side, whose mouth foamed as she convulsed on the smooth wooden panels of the floor. "Help me!" April screamed at terrified Will. He stared in shock at them both, then his eyes wandered up and terror overcame his features. Will's eyes rolled up in his head and he collapsed. April whipped her head up to see a ghost.

The apparition was bone white and female. A tattered gray dress floated around her, stained with some kind of silver liquid. There was almost a sense of peace to her if one didn't look at her face. The woman's features were stretched in a horrible scream, and silver liquid poured out of her outstretched mouth onto her dress and the floor. The woman's head snapped to the side and she floated forward, stretching her long fingers out towards April. April tried to run, but found that she was rooted in place. She struggled in vain but slumped over as the woman's finger made contact with her head. Will's breathing stilled as the ghost touched her finger to his forehead too. Liliana stopped thrashing and fell still, at peace. The house became calm, and everything was coated in a deadly silence. The bodies of the crew melted into the floor, their souls ingrained into the fibers of the house they would now never leave. The woman floated above it all, silver liquid still pooling around her.

The woman floated over to the camera and turned it off. She didn't want any more visitors. For now.