

HUTCHINSON PUBLIC LIBRARY | DECEMBER 2023



# *Young Adult*

CREATIVITY CONTEST  
NEWSLETTER



**HUTCHINSON  
PUBLIC LIBRARY**

Winners for the Fall 2023 Creativity Contest are posted below, and winning entries are featured in this newsletter.

54 teens were represented by 82 entries received.

We thank everyone who took the time to participate.

If you're eligible to enter again in future years, please do so!

**ART – Grades 6-8**

1st – Aaralyn Smith (Hutchinson Middle School, 7th)

2nd – Kierstyn Pontius (Reno Valley Middle School, 8th)

3rd – Zade Kelley (Prairie Hills Middle School, 7th)

**ART – Grades 9-12**

1st – Addison Unruh (Hutchinson High School, 11th)

2nd – Kaia Smith (Hutchinson High School, 11th)

3rd – Jonas Fisher (Homeschool, 9th)



**PHOTOGRAPHY – Grades 6-8**

1st – Chloe Hindman (Prairie Hills Middle School, 7th)

2nd – Jaycie Ohnmacht (Reno Valley Middle School, 8th)

3rd – Emily Link (Homeschool, 8th)

**PHOTOGRAPHY – Grades 9-12**

1st – Heavyn Nelson (Hutchinson High School, 10th)

2nd – Chesny Black (Inman High School, 10th)

3rd – Sachin Sachin Amet (Inman High School, 10th)



**POETRY – Grades 6-8**

1st – Stryker Avery (Prairie Hills Middle School, 7th)

2nd – Karina Flores-Galindo (Hutchinson Middle School, 8th)

3rd – Josie Cummins (Prairie Hills Middle School, 8th)

**POETRY – Grades 9-12**

1st – Anonymous (11th)

2nd – Malachi Ward (Midtown, 9th)

3rd – Gabby Wintamyte (Midtown, 11th)



**SHORT STORIES – Grades 6-8**

1st – Adelynn Johnston (Central Christian, 7th)

2nd – Kai Vergara (Prairie Hills Middle School, 8th)

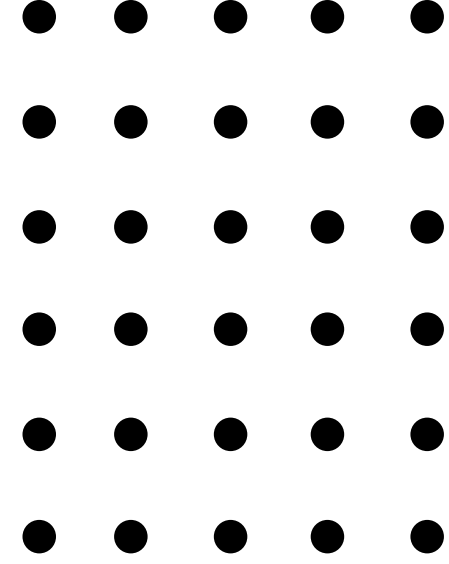
**SHORT STORIES – Grades 9 - 12**

1st – Hannah Khan (Buhler High School, 10th)

2nd – Kyleigh (Lennox) Martin (Hutchinson High School, 10th)

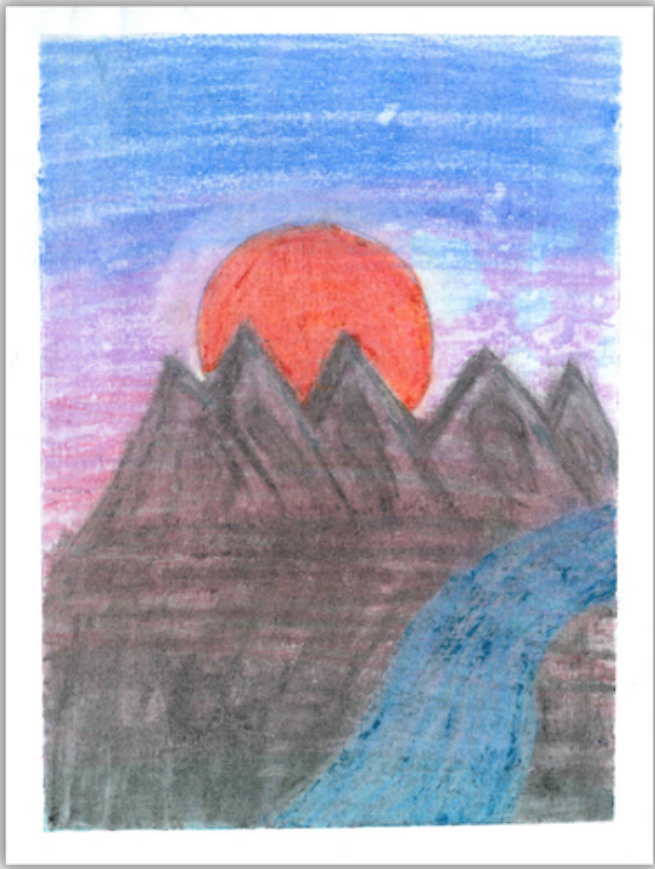
3rd – Harmony (Mo) Parkhurst (Hutchinson High School, 12th)





ART  
—  
GRADES 6 - 8



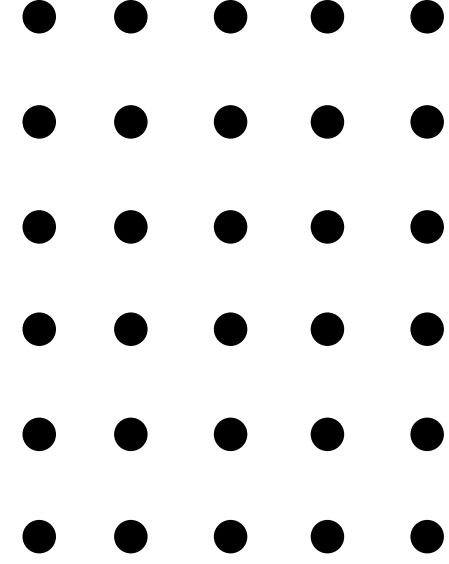


**1st – Aaralyn Smith  
(Hutchinson Middle  
School, 7th)**

**2nd – Kierstyn  
Pontius (Reno Valley  
Middle School, 7th)**



**3rd – Zade Kelley (Prairie Hills  
Middle School, 7th)**



ART

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GRADES 9-12



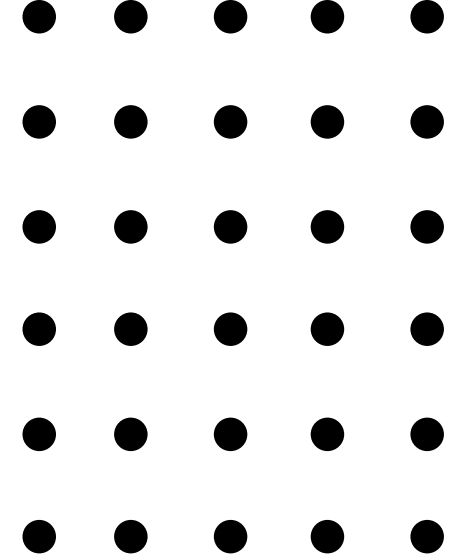
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(Hutchinson High  
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**3rd – Jonas Fisher  
(Homeschool, 9th)**



PHOTOGRAPHY

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GRADES 6 - 8





**1st – Chloe Hindman  
(Prairie Hills Middle  
School, 7th)**

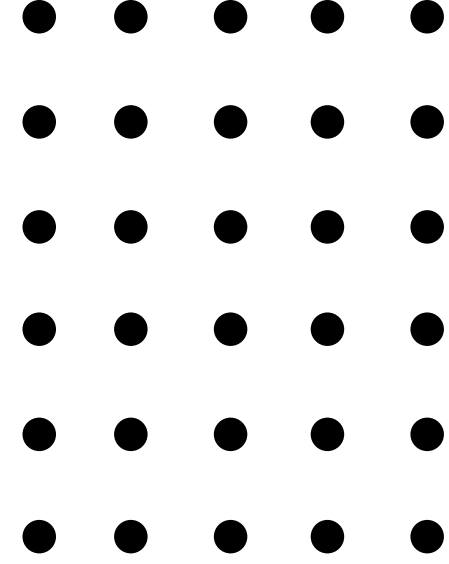


**2nd– Jaycie Ohnmacht  
(Reno Valley Middle  
School, 8th)**



**3rd– Emily Link  
(Homeschool, 8th)**





PHOTOGRAPHY

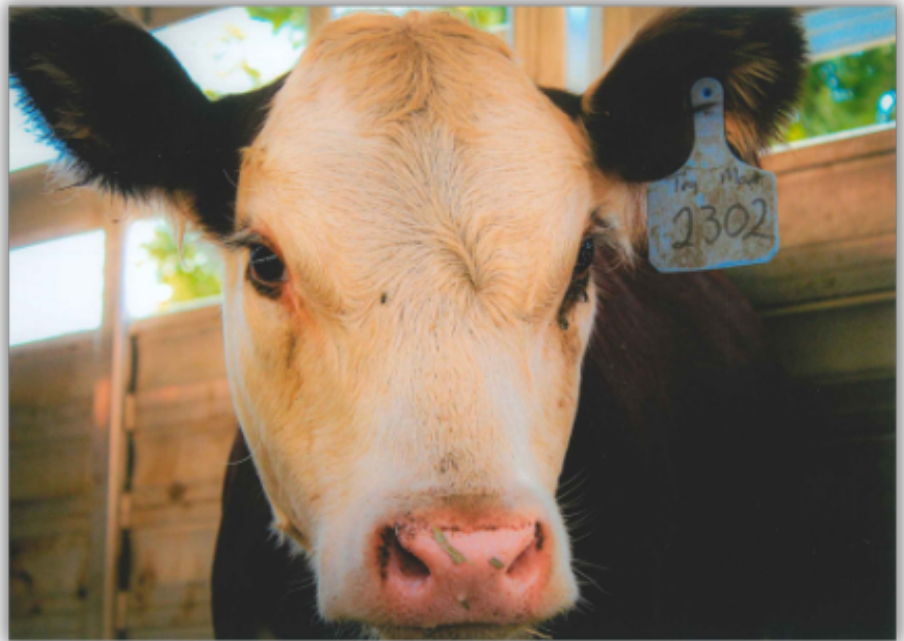
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GRADES 9-12





**1st – Heavyn  
Nelson (Hutchinson  
High School, 10th)**



**2nd – Chesny Black  
(Inman High School,  
10th)**



**3rd – Sachin Sachin  
Amet (Inman High  
School, 10th)**



# POETRY



## GRADES 6 - 8

**1st – Stryker Avery (Prairie Hills  
Middle School, 7th)**

**2nd – Karina Flores-Galindo  
(Hutchinson Middle School, 8th)**

**3rd – Josie Cummins (Prairie  
Hills Middle School, 8th)**



# The Sunflower

He's Hiding in the hallow  
With a mad stalker sure to follow  
A mission with suspicion  
That could end in submission  
Just make sure not to wallow

Although it may be trouble  
Boss wants it completed on the double  
To find a yellow flower  
That's said to bring power  
To be completed he must stay humble

Swiftly arriving at a Tavern  
Hoping to see a yellow pattern  
Getting to a yellow shine  
See the stalker right behind  
Just know that he now shall learn

The attacker starts his chase  
Luckily he has a small can of mace  
One spray to release his knife  
Then slowly stomp out his life  
Make sure not to leave a trace

Grab the flower and start to retreat  
The quest he is now able to complete  
On the way to Dakota  
Relieved he met his quota  
Although the boss left him to the heat

## **My Brother**

*You were my motivation my strength*

*The reason I'm awake*

*I wait as if you would walk through our white door*

*But the moon switches with the sun*

*And the stars start to fade*

*And you still do not lie awake*

*Who will I tell my thoughts to when my days become hard*

*And my eyes become red*

*And my shirt becomes wet*

*I remember being in my own head*

### **Disbelief**

*Your eyes were closed and your body was left cold*

*I blame myself because*

*It was gonna be you or me*

*And God chose you*

*You always fought for me even when*

*We would sit on the floor*

*Watching the new Teen Titans Go*

*When I saw you like that my heart dropped*

*But yet no one had any more bandages*

*I want you to come home*

*But your new home is with the man up above*

*My love for you is strong I wear every*

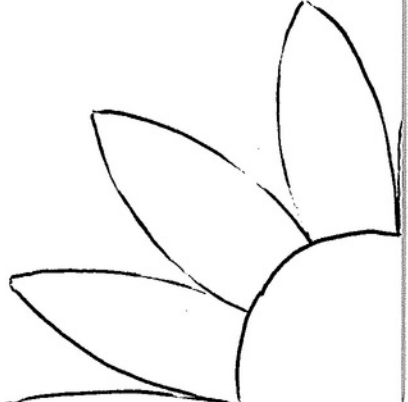
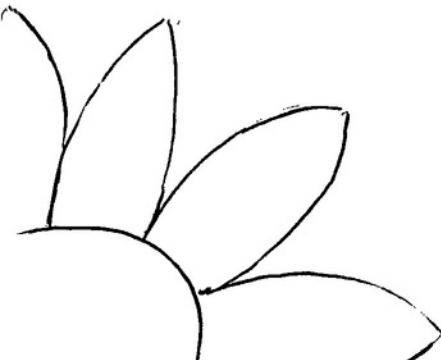
*Shirt pants and headbands with passion*

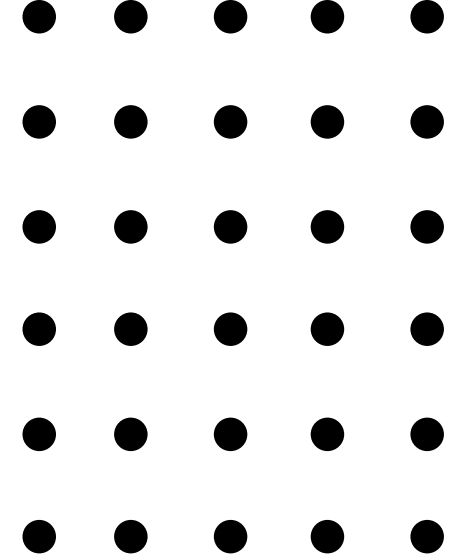
*Always and forever Javi's lil sister*



# Music

A song cannot be glimpsed,  
But it's music is heeded and heard.  
It can create a difference,  
Even without a word.  
It can make you joyful,  
It can make you dream.  
Music beautiful and true,  
I hold especially near.





# POETRY



## GRADES 9-12

**1st - Anonymous  
(Hutchinson High School, 11th)**

**2nd- Malachi Ward (Midtown, 9th)**

**3rd - Gabby Wintamye (Midtown, 11th)**



I never understood the term  
'cried myself to sleep'  
until I was all alone  
in the dark  
in a quiet house.

With only my thoughts inside me  
and the emptiness beside me.

The thoughts in my head  
swirl around like a tornado.

Circling so loud  
I can't hear the soft cry  
escaping from my mouth.

Then slowly,  
I do have company,  
the tears that  
roll down my cheek  
as I cry myself to sleep



In A world of warmth her love does bloom  
My grandma's loving embrace, a comforting cocoon

Alongside of stories shared with love and laughter

Her Love like a melody

In wrinkled hands every wrinkle tells a tale a cherished  
trace

Her Eyes reflect the wisdom gained

A love unspoken, yet always sustained

Through seasons passed

She stands so strong

A lighthouse of love.

When I belong in the garden of memories, we stroll, her  
love is perennial, touching my soul.

Grandma's Hugs, like a quilt so snug, Wrap Me in love, a  
cherished drug. In the tapestry of life, her threads  
entwine, A love so pure, enduring and divine.

## Blooming Love

Malachi Ward

# Sweet Berry

## Sour Berry

love is the little things in life  
like a berry

It can be sour or sweet  
picking through the sour cons  
to finally get a bite  
of sweet sweet love

like a berry  
love blooms  
as a flower

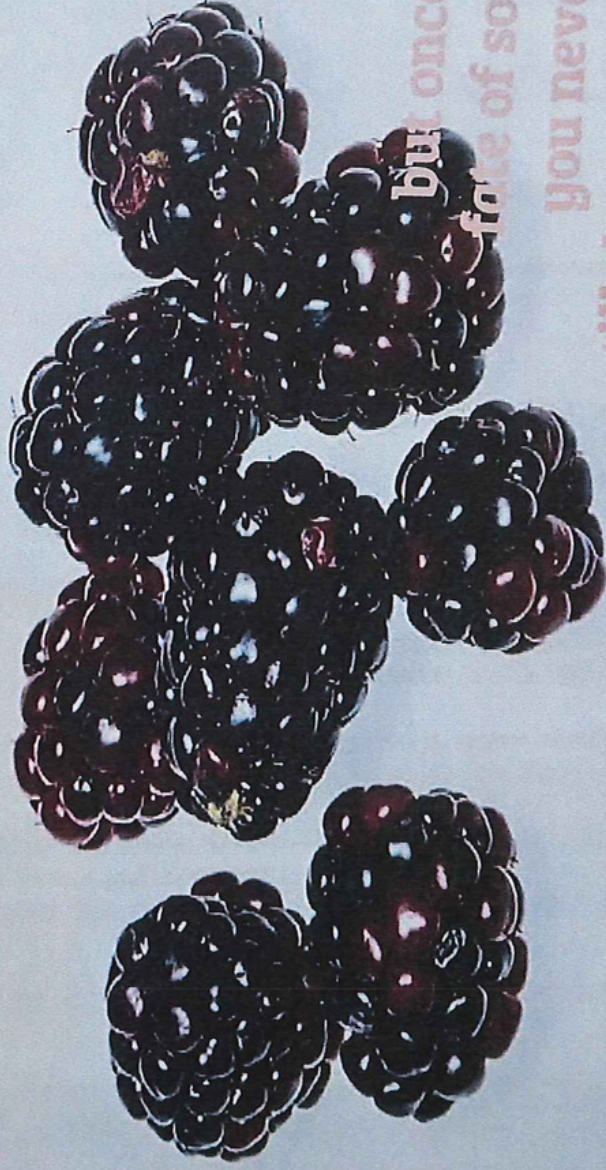
at first

but once picked and harvested

fate of sour or sweet is revealed

you never know what you'll get

till the berry has already been bitten





# SHORT STORY

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# GRADES 6 - 8

**1st – Adelynn Johnston  
(Central Christian, 7th)**

**2nd – Kai Vergara (Prairie Hills  
Middle School, 8th)**



# The Kinderwoods

By

**Adelynn Johnston**

MY HEART WAS POUNDING IN MY CHEST.

My leg was dripping blood and my whole body was screaming at me to stop running. But I knew I had to keep running because if not, it would get me.

I scanned the muddy forest for any sign of shelter in hopes of getting away from my pursuer.

Then I found it.

About one hundred yards away from me stood a large rock wall with a small opening. With renewed strength I ran to the rocks as fast as I could. My heart thudded against my ribcage, filling me with adrenaline. I momentarily forgot about my wounded leg. With one final bound I finally made it to the mossy rock wall. I climbed through the opening.

I scanned the cave to see if it was safe. Figuring out that it was, I heaved a sigh of exhaustion and sat down on the cold, hard cave floor.

Now that the adrenaline had worn off, I found my leg in pain. It was cut open by my pursuer. I shivered in the cold of the cave.

I had no idea how long it would be until my pursuer left. It could be hours, days, or even weeks.

The opening that I had climbed through revealed the last rays of light before the night that followed.

I have been told all my life that nighttime in this forest, the Forest of Sorrows, was very dangerous.

I decided that my cave was safe enough to sleep in. I started to get comfortable on the cold ground. I listened to the drip, drip, drips that echoed through the whole cave. I hoped that it would be like a steady drip, drip, drip of rain, but it was more scattered as it bounced off the walls of the cave.

I was about to doze off when I heard a startling voice from behind me "Who are you and what are you doing here?" the voice asked sternly.

I practically jumped out my skin...

Dear reader, you're probably wondering who I am and what I am doing in a forest. So let me back up to yesterday...

First off, my name is Ashlyn Kinderwood. I live in a small, forgotten town called Allendale, Illinois. Most days my dark brown shoulder length hair is combed, my white and green striped crop top isn't wrinkled, my jeans only have holes for fashion purposes, and my shoes are the shade of white they are supposed to be. But today is a bit different. But on the day the wild chase ensued, my hair was tangled, my shirt was wrinkled and filthy, my jeans were ripped nearly to shreds, and my shoes looked more brown than white.

Since both of my parents died in a tragic fire (I won't tell you about it though. Way too sad.) I live with my uncle Jim. He and I are close, and he's loved telling me stories since I was little. He tells me stories about anything and everything. So here I am, the day before the most terrifying day of my life, listening to Uncle Jim preparing to tell me this crazy (but true) story.

"It happened when I was about fourteen. So, about your age, I guess." Uncle Jim began as I sat down next to him on our soft, tan couch. "I was a daring boy, but your father was not as daring as me. Whenever I had a chance, I would run headfirst into the forest with almost no thought."

When my uncle talked, his deep hazel eyes reflected the light, causing him to appear younger than he really was. He pretty much always wore the same red and black plaid vest over his favorite red t-shirt. The jeans that followed were old and loved, along with his brown boots that he's worn for as long as I have known him. His Chicago cubs cap hid his short, brown hair, and his face was wise underneath his stubble.

“Every time I walked into the forest, I always found something new to do.” Uncle Jim continued, giving additional gestures here and there.

“This day was different though. You see, Ash, I don’t normally get lost because I seem to have an – “

“Inner compass.” I interrupted.

“Precisely.”

I smiled and leaned onto his shoulder. Breathing in his warm, hazelnut smell.

“Go on.” I wanted him to continue.

Uncle Jim smiled. “But this day was different. You see, your father told me not to wander into the forest on that day because there was a terrible storm awaiting us.” Uncle Jim reminisced as he stared out the window.

A short time later, he seemed to come back to his surroundings. He shook his head and looked at me.

“But I was a foolish boy and I wandered into the forest anyway.”

In the distance thunder rumbled, making both of us jump.

My uncle stared me straight in the eyes. “That storm was much like this one.” He said darkly. “I should know because I got caught in one. And worse yet, it was acid rain. So, the rain burned and stung as I tried to make it back home. I finally came to a small cave where I waited the storm out. But when I came out...” Uncle Jim paused dramatically. “A huge creature with wicked eyes began chasing me. I had to climb up a tree to avoid it.” Uncle Jim shuttered. “Its eyes still haunt me to this day.”

I looked up at him in shock. That had not been the story I was expecting this late at night. The thunder rumbled and the rain poured down as I got ready for bed.

About an hour later I was laying in my bed and listening to the steady drip, drip, drip of the rain. It was soothing and gentle. And apart from the thunder, it was a peaceful night.

The next morning, I woke up and walked downstairs to say 'good morning' to my uncle before I left to explore the woods.

Did I mention that I sometimes go explore the woods about a quarter mile away from here? Well, I do. And it's lots of fun.

But instead of finding my uncle cheerfully making breakfast, I found him lying on the couch.

"Uncle J?" I asked, walking over. "Are you okay?"

He was muttering something to himself.

"Uncle J?" I repeated.

"I ... I'm ... just... peachy..." Uncle Jim muttered.

I sat down on the couch next to his head and felt his forehead. I was shocked by how hot it felt.

"Uncle J!" I worriedly exclaimed. "You're burning up!"

Uncle Jim just muttered in response.

Knowing that this wasn't like him, I got scared and sprinted to the freezer to grab an ice pack and some orange juice. I ran back and applied the ice pack to his forehead, trying to bring his temperature down.

"What do I do, Uncle J?" I asked, handing him the orange juice.

"You... need... to... go... into ... the woods... and get..." Uncle Jim paused and took a few sips of orange juice. "The flower... of... wellness." He finished.



I held his hand in between my own and looked him in the eyes like he had done to me the night before.

“Uncle J.” I spoke. “I won’t fail you.”

I headed upstairs to gather my things. In my backpack I packed snacks, bottled water, and my black sweatshirt. I kissed him goodbye and walked out the door.

What am I doing? I left the house about seven hours ago and have been searching ever since. I am cold, I am tired, and I have no idea where the Flower of Wellness is. I also have no idea where I am.

The clouds rolled in, blocking out the light of the sun, and it started to rain. Suddenly all of Uncle Jim’s stories came flooding back into my mind, like a dam of water breaking. Remembering his most recent story, I rushed for shelter.

Then I heard it. First a low growling sound resounded from behind a tree.

Then I saw it. Its eyes were staring evilly at me. At first, I couldn’t figure out what it was, but then I remembered it from Uncle Jim’s story, it was a wolf! Realizing this, I ran as fast as my legs could carry me. I was barely fast enough. He reached out his claws and they grazed my leg, drawing blood. I was suddenly the most terrified I had ever been in my life.

That, dear reader, is how I ended up here from the start of our story. Now, as you probably remember, we left off with me almost jumping out of my skin because of the stranger standing behind me in the cave.

“Who are you and what are you doing here?” the voice asked sternly.

I practically jumped out my skin! With my back to the stranger, I said quietly "I don't know where I am, and I am trying to find the Flower of Wellness for my sick uncle. And I don't know where I am, and I am terrified." I blurted as I trembled.

"Don't worry, I can help you." The stranger said with their voice softening.

I met the stranger's eyes.

He was a boy about a year older than me. He had a soft smile and deep hazel eyes. His sky-blue t-shirt had the word 'Illinois' written in a cursive font. His dirty shorts and shoes told me that he had been out here for a while. One strand of his brown hair kept falling into his face. He blew at it several times, but just gave up and let it rest there. Lastly, his round, black glasses were crooked and wet.

I wondered if he got caught in the storm too.

"Sorry for scaring you." He said, helping me up. "Name's Grayson Binsneaker."

"Ashlyn Kinderwood." I spoke.

"What are you doing out here during the storm?" Grayson asked.

I told him about the Flower of Wellness and how Uncle Jim needed it while he cleaned and bandaged my leg. "Do you know anyone who might know where to find it?" I asked.

"I do know someone." Grayson said. "My Grandpa might know. I mean, he has found it before."

I felt a spark of hope. "Can we go talk to him?" I asked.

Grayson shrugged. "Why not?"

As we walked, Grayson explained how he ran away from home to spend more time with his grandpa. His new stepdad is rough around the edges, and since his grandpa lives near the Forest of Sorrows, he was

out wandering in the fresh air. The storm had blinded his view and he sought shelter in the cave, just like I had.

About five miles later, we were at his grandpa's doorstep. I was hesitant to step inside.

"It's okay." Grayson reassured me. "He's a nice guy."

"Hello?" Said a big, gruff sounding man. He had a white T-shirt that was well-worn, with deep blue, ragged jeans. His hair was silver and short with a silver handlebar mustache right under his large, crooked nose. He smelled like wood and sand, making me wonder if he was a carpenter.

"Hi, Grandpa!" Grayson said cheerfully.

"Oh! You're back!" Grandpa said, surprised. "Have a seat."

We all sat down on the living room furniture.

"Wait." Grandpa said, with his pale blue eyes narrowing at me. "Who is this?"

"That's Ashlyn Kinderwood." Grayson explained. "I met her in a ca-."

"I don't want to know where she came from." Grandpa interrupted; his bushy eyebrows crawled up his face as he realized something. "By golly! You're one of the Kinderwoods!"

"Uh, yeah?" I said, confused.

"Well, you must know that your family is legendary, right?" Grandpa asked.

I stared at him blankly.

"Is something wrong with your Uncle Jim Kinderwood?" Grandpa asked.

"Yes." I said, surprised. "How did you know?"

“Me and your uncle go way back.” Grandpa answered.

I told him that I was looking for the Flower of Wellness to heal Uncle Jim. When I finished my explanation, Grandpa got up and walked into the other room. About five minutes later he was back clutching a piece of paper in his hand. He silently handed it to me and waited as I unrolled it.

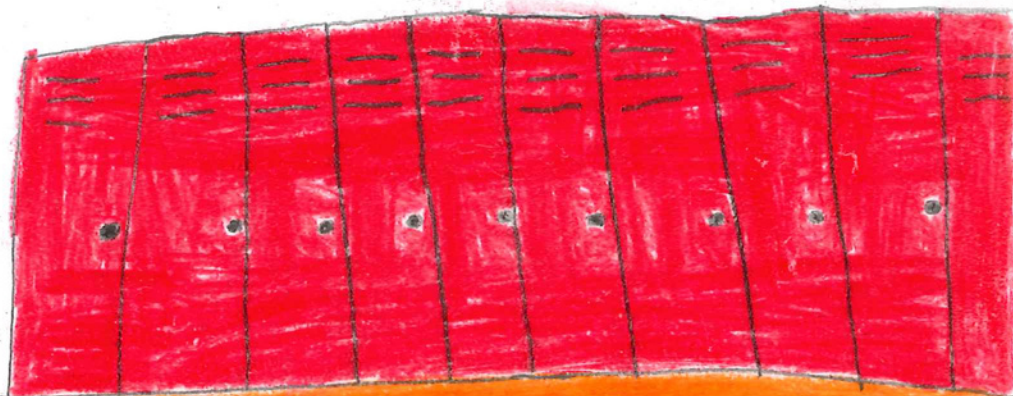
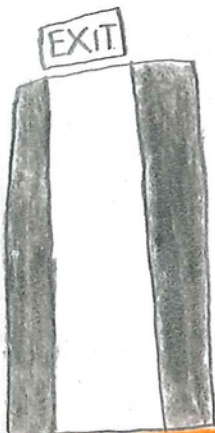
I gasped as I realized what it was! Grayson, who was looking over my shoulder, gasped too! We both looked at each other with surprised expressions.

It was a map showing us the way to the Flower of Wellness.

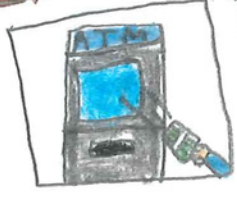
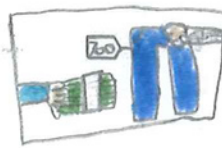
It turns out our quest wasn't completely hopeless after all...

**TO BE CONTINUED**

# How BENTZ BECAME THE COOL KID













STARTS  
HIS OWN  
YOUTUBE  
CHANNEL

GETS 1K  
SUBSCRIBERS

MADE MORE  
VIDS AND GOT  
1M SUBSCRIBERS



EVERY  
STUDENT  
LIKES  
HIM



BECAME  
SKILLED  
AT  
SPORTS!



The end...  
BUT There's  
STILL MORE to Bentz's  
backstory!



# SHORT STORY

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## GRADES 9-12

**1st – Hannah Kahn  
(Buhler High School, 10th)**

**2nd – Kyleigh (Lennox) Martin  
(Hutchinson High School, 10th)**

**3rd – Harmony (Mo) Parkhurst  
(Hutchinson High School, 12th)**



## The Good and Bad

"Shakespeare once wrote, 'There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.' But had Shakespeare ever once seen tragedy in front of his own two oblivious eyes? How can you call the mass killings of fellow men 'neither good nor bad?' Anybody with a brain would tell you it's bad, worse than bad even."

"Well, that's definitely a start to your essay. You do realize it's due in two days though, right?"

"Yes, but I'm stumped. I think I just need to wait until 11 p.m. the night before; that's when my best writing comes to me."

"Okay, Layla, whatever floats your boat."

The bell rang shortly afterward. My head started to ache. *Could I come up with the rest of this 5-page essay in two days?* In the list of requirements, it stated that I must have a primary source to counter my statement. *How the crap was I supposed to find somebody who had witnessed mass murder and condoned it!?* Mr. Gerry always assigned the hardest papers; I'm not sure how I even managed to get a B+ in that class. I had hoped Carrie would have given me advice during our peer critique time, but all she did was remind me of my faults. Perhaps she was just helping me face the harsh reality. I mean that was a part of her duty as my best friend. I figured I'd use Carrie's comment as motivation and try to come up with something that evening.

\* \* \*

I couldn't stop thinking about that stupid essay. I'd screwed myself over *again*. I already had a B in the class and my parents would've *killed* me if it got any lower. I pondered all night about ways I could even go about finding this information, but all of my ideas were dead ends. After resisting the urge, I decided to put my trust in Google. Initially, nothing had come up, but after scrolling for what felt like decades, I had finally found something that caught my eye. There was a chat thread on a website I had never heard of before called "discussanddisgust.com."

They had been talking about the matter of large-scale killings. Specifically, the sanity and morality of the perpetrators. One quote that stood out to me was from an anonymous user who said,

"I haven't seen a mass murder, but my sister was killed in one. This may be bold of me to say, but I don't blame the shooter at all. Regardless of his sanity, I think it was a morally just action. He had probably been treated poorly by the world or had just been upset that day. Murdering innocent people may sound wrong, but it's a great way to put out your misery with a 'bang' if you will. My sister probably would've agreed with him too."

This guy sounded like an absolute maniac, but it was exactly what I needed. However, since this was an anonymous post and made several years ago, the credibility was awful. But I decided I would ask Mr. Gerry if I could use it anyway. I mean, you miss all the shots you don't take, right? Maybe if I begged and pleaded enough he would let me use it. I made sure to save the link so I could bring it up in class the next day.

\* \* \*

"Hello Mr. Gerry, I've got a question about the paper."

"Hey Layla, of course. I do hope you're almost done though; it's due tomorrow."

"Yeah, I know. Well anyway, I've been struggling to find a primary source, and I finally found one last night, but it was an anonymous post made years ago. Can I still use it?"

I then tried to find the link on my phone, but it had vanished. I frantically scrolled through my Google search but nothing came up.

"Well since you can't find it, unfortunately, I'm going to have to say no. However, I will give you a three-day extension. Surely you can come up with something by then."

I felt like my head was about to explode. *Why would my link just magically disappear?* So many emotions rushed through my body. I kept scrolling and scrolling to find even just the slightest bit of information that I could work with, but there was absolutely nothing.

Now this is the point where I began to slowly, but surely, lose it. I was spiraling rapidly. Just thinking about this paper made me want to puke like I had drank from a poisoned cup. There was no rational thought going on in my head anymore. I'm not quite sure why, but this feeling of failure was just gruesome to me. Maybe it was because I was mad at myself for putting this off, or maybe I was just simply mad in general. I had thought up every way I could find a source, even if it was extremely unrealistic, just so I could have the slightest grasp on this paper.

I was just about to give up on thinking and call it a night, but then it came to me. *Why don't I just create the primary source myself?* I felt like a genius. I could hire a hitman to have a spree at the local supermarket while I watch and take my own account as my source. I wouldn't use my name though, I would find the name of an employee or civilian and use it. It's not like Mr. Gerry would know the difference anyway.

Unfortunately for me, finding a hitman was harder than I thought. First, I had to access the dark web, which itself is already extremely difficult. And then there was the fact that all of them were located in large cities and cost thousands of dollars that I, a fifteen-year-old girl living in the middle-of-nowhere USA, would not have. My last resort was asking the odd and reserved kid in my class, Josh. He was one of my initial ideas, but I didn't want to get people I know involved. However, I was running out of options. There were already many rumors that he had been in trouble with the law for various reasons anyway, so why would he draw the line here?

\* \* \*

The next day at school I approached Josh in the hallway before class started. He had his hood up, per usual. I tapped his shoulder and once he turned around his pale face with big black eyes greeted me.

"Hey, Josh, I was wondering if you could do a favor for me?"

"Uh, hello? What do you need?"

His voice was hesitant, almost as if he had an idea about what I was going to ask him. That's ridiculous though. How would he even know? Maybe people approach him more than I thought.

"If you're trying to buy drugs, I don't have anything, and whoever told you that I do is a liar."

"Um, that's not quite what I had in mind but I'll keep it noted. Actually, I was wondering if you could do something a little more...dangerous."

"Sorry but I'm not interested, I don't do things for people I barely know."

I continued to try to convince him after that but to no avail. I never told him the details of my plan because I knew if I said too much the whole school would hear about it. Rumors tend to spread like wildfires around here. Yet again another plan backfired on me. Now it came down to me having to take matters into my own hands. I didn't have access to guns or elaborate weapons, so I figured one victim that I'd kill personally would be enough. The only problem was finding a victim. I couldn't just go for a random stranger, I needed someone who trusted me. Somebody I can be near without them thinking anything suspicious. I started to come up with a list of everybody I knew. I had to narrow down the list due to not knowing where they lived, not being close enough to them, or just the overall inconvenience of targeting them. After crossing what felt like a million names, I was left with one, Carrie. This was hard for me to process at first. *Could I kill my best friend?* We've known each other for years. The only way I could rationalize this was by villainizing her in my head. I thought back on every little argument, disagreement, and anything I could think of. Then I remembered our peer critique. At the time I was fine with her lack of criticism, but now I had used this instance to channel my anger. She was no help before, but she could be now. Since we were close I'd have easy access to her. I began feeling so insane that I didn't even care about the fact that this wouldn't give me the primary source I needed. I suddenly felt filled with rage and the need to take revenge on Carrie, even though all she did was give me a gentle reminder to get my work done. My ego was raging like a great fire,



and not even the water of my morality could take it out. I started plotting that night, an intricate plan. I was going to show up at her house, convince her that I needed to stay over, and pull out a knife from my kitchen while she was asleep. I felt inspired by Hamlet because I used a quote from it to start my essay, so it would be almost poetic to have my paper end with a Hamlet-style murder as well. If I wanted to get my assignment done, I needed to act quickly, so I went over that night. I got into my car and sped down the backstreets.

\* \* \*

Soon I arrived and greeted Carrie. She welcomed me with a warm smile, which almost made me regret my decision. But even her bright grin and bubbly personality couldn't stop me.

"Hey Layla, what's up? It's kind of late, what are you doing out here?"

I had to make an excuse on the spot, so I just said, "My parents had to leave urgently, they said my uncle was in the hospital, so they asked if I could stay with a friend for the night. My phone died so I figured I'd just ask in person."

"Oh, that's alright! My parents are asleep but I'll make sure to let them know in the morning that you're staying here."

Little did she know there would be no morning. We went right up the stairs and into her room. Her walls were decorated with lights and photos of her and her friends. I even spotted one of us when we went to a coffee shop together. I could feel my conscience telling me not to proceed with this evil scheme, but I was in too deep now. We talked for a little bit, and then we winded down and got ready for bed. I waited about an hour until I heard her snoring to know she was in a deep sleep. Then, I pulled the small paring knife out of my pocket and began to cut. I started with the stomach. I tried remembering all of the major arteries we learned in biology and decided to go from there. My knife was small so I had to shove it in further and further. I couldn't bring myself to stab her multiple times, I didn't want to see the wound I had just inflicted. I had my hand covering her mouth to ensure she couldn't scream for help. She squirmed around and struggled, but she was too weak. After a while, she finally fainted.

Suddenly I snapped. I had finally realized what I had done. There Carrie was, lying in a pool of her blood. I began to sob uncontrollably. My horrific cries echoed through the house. I took the picture of us together off of the wall and held it close to my heart. Her parents finally awoke and walked into my terror.

They started screaming and crying. Carrie's dad called the police while her mom just stood in the doorway shocked, her shadowy figure illuminated by the hall light. Not many words were exchanged between me and them, I just repeatedly told them, "I'm so sorry" in between my sobs.

I don't remember much after that. All I can recall is the sound of the wailing police cars and the tight cuffs around my wrist. Now I am locked in my jail cell all day awaiting trial. My lawyer says I can get off easy since I'm only fifteen, and there's a strong argument for insanity. However, I don't think I want to be let off easy. I deserve every bit of justice that comes my way.

*"Shakespeare once wrote, "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." Now that I have committed a tragedy with my own two hands, I can confidently say that there are things that are certainly good or bad. Carrie was good, she was beautiful, caring, and kind. Her death was indefinitely bad. No way of thinking can take that away, not even mine."*

Tw for mention of suicide,s/a,trauma,and much much more

I'm 16. As I come to realize I'm 16. I'm no longer the 15 year old who was told to kill himself because he spoke the truth. I came to realize that I'm no longer the 15 year old crying in his room because he found out his online best friend ended their life. I came to realize I am no longer the 14 year old who was fearing his dad as he started road rage in the car. I am no longer the 13 year old experiencing his 1st period and wondering why he doesn't feel Like a female or even want to be a female. I come to realize I am no longer the 12 year old going through "her" 1st heartbreak. I notice how I'm no longer the 11 year old who was still grieving a death and wondering why "she" heard voices in "her" head. I am no longer the 10 year old getting woken up in the middle of the night at "her" dad's because he finally got the call saying that he had finally died. I am no longer the little kid learning how to ride a bike or being fat shamed. I'm no longer the little kid who would go running to the ice cream truck.. I am just the 16 year old boy who finally discovered himself. I'm just a 16 year old boy who is now only two years away from being an adult. 5 years away from being able to vote,drink,vape and more without getting in trouble with the law. I'm no longer that 5 year old little "girl" believing in all the things such as fairies,unicorns,magic and Santa. I'm no longer the little kid wondering and questioning his worth. Now I'm just the 16 year old boy, who questions why that one person really loves him. Just the 16 year old boy who is trying to survive just as he was when he was 10. Now I'm just the 16 year old boy who didn't think he'd make it past 12. The 16 year old who might finally get the happy ever after that he wanted when he was 7.. I'm 16.. not 15.. not 14 or 12.. and I'm definitely not the 10 year old who told everyone he wanted to be dead.. not the 10 year old who everyone saw as insane.. I'm just 16.. nothing special, just 16.

It was a quiet day in the middle of nowhere.

The country weather was overcast and cold. The wind bellowed like spirits mourning their own deaths. Everything seemed to conspire with one another to keep her inside her dismal house, trap her in, and drive her mad. The way the shutters slammed against the windows, the wet snow that melted into puddles on the once clean floor, dinner for one that had to be rationed between three. Her children were still growing, 12 and barely 6. Melorie was luckily still plump with baby fat, chubby fingers and, thankfully, not picky about what she ate. She was perfectly fine in the pervasive cold. Zalea, however, was a gangly thing, with knobby knees and a body too long for his frame. Both the woman and her children sat at a too big table with nothing in front of them. It made her mind race like a wild, starving hare. At this rate her children would never grow right, if they lived past this winter at all.

As the sun went down and took the last bit of warmth with him, she wandered the halls for the third time that night. She'd put out the candles long ago, and put her children to bed even before that. Her footsteps were light as she shambled about in the dark, flittering around from room to room in the dark like a caged bird.

She'd long lost hope for her father and her husband returning back. Her father, a powerful ship captain, was off towards the coast making advancements. Something about strange squids at depths beyond imagining. Men like him barely had to speak

to get someone to bend to them, dark hair and darker eyes that pierced souls with calculated precision. His voice boomed like thunder. He was the true opposite of her husband. Skin that looked to sickly to be draped across his muscles, white as sheets while his hair was greying white like fog. Perhaps that's why her father had married her off to him. Her husband was dim as he was dull. A hulking figure that intimidated not by prowess, but by mass. A lumberer often seen with a stag dragging behind him. He'd swore he'd be a good husband, the only comfort she had after being torn from her mother. Just as he swore he'd only be in the next town over for a month or two at most. For supplies, he had said. For their family, he had said.

After four new moons had passed, it became clear to the woman that her husband could be bright, if only for his own cruel, callous gains. He'd caged and abandoned them, probably finding that starting a new family would prove more efficient than powering through the endless cold with his wife, son and daughter. They were tarnished goods that brought more trouble than they were worth. The snow piled on outside.

No one was coming to save them. Their lips would turn blue and they'd be nothing but faded memories by the time spring thawed their bodies.

The thought sent her into a frenzy.

This couldn't possibly be the fate for her. For her son and daughter. To be pinched out like the flaming wicks of a candle, smoke left to fade out into nothing. She'd be nothing. Gone. Not a single tale or song written about her, no long descriptions of her in an epic hymn or love poem. No one would remember her name.

How could fate be so cruel?

A loud, mournful echo of wind howled outside. This one wasn't a painful howling, or a plea for mercy. It was a beckoning, like a call to come home. She felt her heart race in her wrenching chest that it was dire to answer such a call. She rushed to her children's room and shook the shoulders of her son until his sleepy eyes opened a peep.

"We must leave." She spoke, hushed and urgent, "We must go, spring will be there when we arrive but it will not find us here. Up with you."

"Up." She commanded forcefully when her son merely whined at her shaking, "Put on your warmest clothes and follow, unless you want to be left here."

In such a rush, the old floorboards beneath her creaked. She woke Melorie, wrapped her in her warmest coat, put her into Zalea's arms, and set off into the

night. She felt a pull, a sharp tug of sorts, from the house. If she listened closely enough, she swore she could almost hear it calling to her - in the voice of the husband who'd left her long ago.

"Stay," Though he spoke it in that deep voice of his, it sounded weak and pleading,

"Stay."

She shook her head and turned tail into the snow - never to look back.

The snow was thick, far beyond her knees, dampening her trousers and making the icy wind that much harsher to bear. She had no clue if her children were faring well in the snow. Her son's whines lost to her tunnel vision. She had no care left in her heart. All that remained hammering in her chest was her bitterness, spite, and determination to continue on. So on she trudged. All sounds of crunching snow or cries of her young were lost among the howling wind. Her vision was tunneled to purely continue on and make it wherever her racing feet took her.

Her foot caught over hard snow and when she tripped, everything stilled. The wind ceased its cries, painfully silent. Everything was so, so quiet for such a horrifically long moment.

Sounds slowly started to trickle back into her ears. The song of sparrows calling out to the morning air. The air around her felt a warm, comforting hug - like the break of day. Her eyes slowly opened to the bright meadow around her, squinting against the light. Then a voice broke through the confusing, familiar scene around her.

"My daughter," That motherly voice cracked through the year long fog in her mind.

Spring broke for the first time in over a decade, "Philomena, you're home."

The arms of Philomena's mother wrapped around her like the warmth of a summer's sun basking over her. Soft, gentle hands ran through Philomena's oak brown hair. Tears fell from her eyes in runny droplets down her cheeks, and as color returned to her skin again after years such up in the cold, she clinged to the one person she'd thought she'd lost forever.

Philomena was finally home.