

Spilled Ink

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SHA's Creative Writing
Club

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Character Study – an excerpt
By: Therese Pivarunas '20

Innia was seven years old when she first saw them. Old enough to know something of the gravity of the situation, but young enough for her claims to be dismissed as imagination. Soon enough, after so many dismissals, she stopped talking about them.

They never spoke to anyone but her. Whispering questions she'd think about, giving warnings she took care to follow. They loved her, they whispered, that's why they stayed. She'd hold silent conversations with them at night. The ghosts. Some stayed with her for stretches of time.

One was her older brother Innia had never seen, except in pictures. Two were her grandparents, long dead before she was born. They didn't stay for long, eventually, they moved on and left Innia alone. When she was fourteen, her parents and older sister joined them. Her mother and sister moved on after a time, but her father stayed.

She'd talk with him for hours on end, both of them alone together in the empty house. Fingers, hands flying to speak for each when their voices never could. He'd always understood her.

When she was fifteen, she found another person who understood, who had known about the ghosts. Innia didn't understand how she had known, but she accepted an older sister. Then another person came. He needed a friend, she needed a brother. They complimented one another quite well. Her father passed on after that.

Some things Innia understood, and some things she didn't. She never understood how she could see the ghosts. But she understood that she had a family, one that would protect her and one that she would protect.

Innia was always silent, and some took that to mean she didn't understand anything. But she understood many things. And she always understood that she was loved.

Untitled
By: Katie Mills '18

You feel it rising;
The ripple on the periphery-
Growing,
Building,
Gaining power.

You feel it surging;
The wave on the horizon-
Swelling,
Advancing,
Feeding off your fear.

You ignore, repress the whisper of its return to the beaches.

The tsunami tides in the shallows-
Waiting,
Churning,
On the brink of breaking;
The imminent power of the crash haunts the air.

Yet you refuse to listen, to feel the tension of the impending break that lingers in the atmosphere.

My dear,
Don't you know the waves never cease?

And ignoring the ripple,
That brings the tsunami.

Untitled

By: Katie Mills '18

There is an innate serenity that surrounds the
variegated greens of the wood.
They fill the space, streaking left and right, above
and below, a multitude of shades that should create
chaos, but instead feel perfectly in place.
There is an indescribable order to the arbitrary
collection of leaves, mosses, and ferns that scatter
the hilly, earthen terrain.
They suffocate the space, leaving the air heavy and
wet.
Yet the air is sweet and clean, breathing it is
drinking in vitality.
The heart settles here, deep in the chest;
You are at peace now.
You are free here.

Untitled

By: Anonymous

They say
That growing older is necessary
But growing up is optional
Why is that
Maybe it's because they don't like the thoughts of
Gray hair
Wrinkles
Relying on others for help
Or
Maybe it's because they're worried
Worried that their partner is falling out of love with
them as they change
Worried that they're dying day by day
Worried that someday they'll be gone and no one
will know
No one will realize that they were ever there
They'll never have made an impact on the world
Then one day they'll wake up and say that they're
going to be the one to
End poverty
End sexism against men and against women
They're going to think that one day they'll be the
ones that changed the world

They're going to be the important person of this
horrific generation
Everyone says that this generation is going nowhere
We're all stupid and annoying
We're never going to amount to anything important
But maybe one of us will
We call adults grown ups because they have grown
up to become
Important people
Some of which we read and learn about in school
Some of which are invisible and are still trying to
change the world
What if I want to be that person
What if I want to be the one to change the world
What if I want to be the one kids of the next
generation read and learn about
I can be that person
I can be the next Malala
I can be the next female Presidential candidate
I can be what ever I want to be
Anything I want
So I can grow up to become that person
But in my mind...I'll never grow up
I'll grow older and get married and have children
someday
Maybe I'll have a nice career and make lots of
money and
Be the change I want to see in the world
But I can do all of that without growing up because
every single one
Of the adults you know has a little kid left inside
them
A little part of them never grew up
And I guarantee you that inside me...when I'm old
and full of long gray hair
And wrinkles
And I'm sitting next to the love of my life I'll still be
a kid at heart
And I am going to have changed some part of the
world.

An Excerpt from a Larger Work **By: Katie Mills '18**

Alexei

Alexei Ivanovich Petrov blinked the disastrous nightmare from his dark brown eyes, reminding himself that his father's hands were not in fact reaching angrily at him from the dark corner of his room. First came the confusion -he had not suffered a nightmare in weeks, why now?- then followed an internal struggle for control. Desperately attempting to control his breathing and calm his mind, he heard his protector, Adam, begin to talk to him from the recesses of the bright room in his head. "Don't worry, you're safe here with me." The second protector, Jonas, joined in more aggressively with his husky voice. Adam had been with Alexei since his second birthday, when his father, Ivan, had returned to wreak havoc on his life. Jonas' voice chimed in when he was five- the physical abuse had gone on for three months before he broke through to protect Alexei's body rather than his psyche. Feeling his chest tighten, Alexei focused on slowing his inhalation and extending his exhalation; letting the breath push away painful memories.

It was always easier for him to prevent Jonas from taking control when he focused on the scientific timeline of his condition. Focusing on those periods for too long did more harm than good, however. Obviously, he knew it was "an unhealthy and damaging habit to continue to view the other personalities as separate persons, which will ultimately deter recovery," as his therapist so clinically reminded him. For Alexei, however, visualizing his MPD timeline in moments like this helped him look at it objectively, as if it was not happening to him. He pushed away the clinical analysis of his condition for a moment and lay still on his navy blue sheets. He closed his eyes, quieted his mind, and allowed himself to be present as Alexei- not Alexei with Adam's whispers or Alexei battling Jonas' need to protect.

After three minutes of this bliss, his alarm clock blared and he sat up wearily. Of course he had a nightmare last night- today was his first day at _____ High. He passed a pale hand through his

mousy brown hair, huffing as he heard Melissa's chipper voice from the kitchen, "Alexei! I made your favorite breakfast, hurry!" She added a singsong drawl to the "i" in his name and the "a" in "favorite", just as she did every morning. The familiarity and routine of her morning message caused a ghost of a smile to flicker across Alexei's thin, defined lips. Her constant, positive presence in his life meant more to him than anything; knowing he had a protector in his aunt, not just within his subconscious, made the nightmare drift away. He threw off his large, plaid bedspread and tugged on a pair of dark jeans, a plain t-shirt, and a worn-in flannel. Catching a glimpse of his hair in the mirror above his dresser, Alexei decided to tame it a bit with his fingers to save Melissa the half-hearted reprimand. A quick glance around the room reminded him to tidy up his room later today, as piles of clothes, scraps of receipts, and diagram sketches littered the floor, covering the polished oak planks. A few old diagrams of a robot he was attempting to build were tacked to the dark blue walls above his desk in the corner. The desk itself was barely visible, obstructed by scraps of paper and a parrot deconstructed hairdryer- the receipt for which was most likely strewn about the floor somewhere. He sighed and turned to the hallway that lead downstairs.

Melissa was pouring the last of the pancake batter into a steaming frying pan when Alexei swooped into the bright kitchen nonchalantly. She pushed her strawberry blonde hair to the side with her forearm and turned to look at him. He grabbed a glass of orange juice and sat at the small counter, keeping his head down slightly and refusing to look her in the eye- she could always tell when he had a nightmare by looking straight into his eyes, so he attempted to act natural while avoiding her harsh gaze. Of course, his act was transparent, and Melissa pulled his chin up as she set a pile of pancakes in front of him. "Morning sweetie," she intoned as her hazel eyes searched his deep brown ones. Giving Alexei a knowing look, she turned to flip a few cakes, "Another nightmare?" She kept her voice casual, but allowed a bit of concern to seep through, eying the frying pan. Alexei shoveled food into his mouth, collecting his thoughts for a moment- the issue of Jonas attempting to take

control hovered in the air between them. Melissa knew how embarrassed he got when reliving a nightmare and the mental battle that followed it, so she chattered on, much to Alexei's relief. "Well, I see you managed to get through it as Alexei, and I'm proud of you." She sounded calm and casual, but she always felt rather awkward discussing his mental health; she was his aunt, not his mother or therapist, and never quite understood the right thing to say. From the moment she won custody of Alexei, she had been wrestling with the balance between concerned mother-figure, loving aunt, and full-on psychologist. It was difficult to be the guardian he needed.

Alexei smiled slightly into his pancakes, glad Melissa skated over the issue and gave him the choice to explain further or change the subject. He chose to bring up school, "yeah, uh, I read online that ___ High has a robotics club. I might join, I guess." It was the perfect topic to sway her attention, as she was constantly prodding him to get involved in "social activities outside a small conversation at the checkout of the hardware store." She perked up a bit and turned around, depositing another pancake on his plate. "You absolutely will. It'll be fun!" Alexei imperturbably rolled his eyes and downed the rest of his orange juice. "It's 6:45, Melissa. Weren't we supposed to leave early to do the new kid thing?"

Her eyes widened and she spun on her heel to look at the clock on the microwave. She let out a small squeal and ran into the living room to grab his backpack and her purse. "Why didn't you remind me earlier?" She gasped dramatically. "Alexei Petrov, get your shoes on... now!" She hissed as he ducked upstairs to pull on worn, army green converse. He smiled to himself while getting into the old car- Melissa never used his patronymic name.

Angelo

"Curiosity killed the cat, but satisfaction brought it back." Was the quote, dated as far back as the early 1900s, or so he had read in a book one time. So commonly people would use the first piece of the quote to make a statement, and not the latter, his mother was one of them. Staring at the tiny splotches of red that bled through his bandage

during the night, Angelo smirked a little. "But satisfaction brought it back." He felt the words run delicately over his tongue, before carefully sitting up in his small bed, the sun just beginning to pour through curtained windows, reflecting on his shiny head of long, black hair. His mother had warned him about the rosebushes, let's be real, he wasn't a kid and could've been more careful. This one in particular was a beauty no photo could capture perfectly, its hips curvy and flowers in full bloom, although it was selfish to rob the beauty of the rose by cutting its life so short, Angelo just couldn't help himself. So curious to see how the rose would look in a vase by his sunlit window he went to retrieve it himself, all he needed was to reach down far enough and snap the delicate stem. Unfortunately, he was too hasty, and before he could retrieve his prize a thicket of thorns caught his right hand, tearing at flesh.

It still stung to the touch and bled, but damn, waking up to see that rose by the windowsill, in his eyes, was worth it. His alarm clock had not rung just yet, but smelling the strong coffee downstairs prompted him to get up a few minutes early, not that it mattered. Slowly, he washed himself (carefully replacing the bandages on his hand) and brushed his teeth, before taking his time with his hair, meticulously styling it just right. All while doing so, Angelo stared at himself in the mirror. Mama always said he took after his father, deep hazel eyes and warm skin that was just a bit lighter, and like always, those comments aggravated him. Of all the people he could have been compared to, it was that scumbag.

"Angelo Baptiste!" Downstairs he could hear the shuffling of feet as Mama hummed loudly to old Chita Rivera tunes, "Pick up the pace, mijo! Do you want to be late for your first day?". In all honesty, yes, hell, he wouldn't mind not going at all really. With a sigh, Angelo got dressed in the outfit he had chosen the night before. White collared shirt with a blue fitted blazer, a nice pair of pants, a matching tie, and a watch for good measure. He recalled Mama snickering as she watched him pull out these things, leaning against his the frame of his bedroom door, "Mijo, it's school, not a fashion show." She said with her usual, tired smile. "The kids will think you're stuffy."

“Let them.” In his eyes, first impressions were very important. Let them think he was some stuffed-up asshole who got off to telling the world random historical facts, at least they would assume he was rich too. Once dressed, Angelo sprayed on just a little bit of cologne before throwing on his knapsack and hurrying downstairs, much to his mother's dismay, he opted out of eating breakfast and grabbed only his tumbler of coffee and a handful of sugar packets, racing for the car. “A stick! My boys going to be stick by Christmas break!” She fussed as they drove off, rambling aimlessly about how important it was he keep in shape. Eventually, he tuned her out, staring at the passing sights of his neighborhood with his forehead against the cool glass, so much life these streets, so much history. He took a small sip of his coffee and leaned back with a sigh, the heat of the mug warming his seemingly always cold hands.

“Te amo, mijo, sé bueno.” Mari Baptiste kissed her son's temple, a firm look of pride in those dark brown eyes of hers. Shrugging her off, Angelo gave a small grunt of acknowledgement before getting out and closing the door. Upon her zooming away, he turned around to survey the steady stream of students beginning to occupy the space of the front entrance. Each had a name, a history. Angelo immediately felt a wave of uneasiness in the pit of his stomach, and in reaction slowly ran his thumb over the ridges of his house keys. Day 1 of _____ High hasn't even begun yet, and he was already on the verge of tapping out.

Alexei

During the long car ride, Alexei attempted to clear his mind and retain control. The angry personality was beginning to join in the chattered was accustomed to in the back of his mind. It didn't have a name, but he called it Ivan, as its voice was deep, dangerous, and heavily accented when it managed to speak English. It tended to add aggressively to the voices and take control swiftly, without giving Alexei a chance to push it back down. Of course, his therapist's voice incessantly reminded him that “suppressing the personalities is easier, but you will eventually have to accept that they are a part of you. They are the parts of your whole personality that have split because you've

pushed them away, or weren't able accept the fact that you could protect yourself.” Unfortunately, Alexei knew today was going to be tough where the mental illness concerned- change always seemed to trigger more activity- so he was content with taking the easy way out where the angry personality was involved.

It grew louder and more irritated, attacking Alexei as he desperately calmed his breathing and centered his focus. “почему, черт возьми, мы это делаем? никто не любит вас в любой школе, что заставляет вас думать это будет по-другому? вы не заслуживаете Melissa или эту новую школу. новый старт? пожалуйста, вы винт его снова...”. Annoyed and slipping out of control with the insults, Alexei snuck a quick glance at Melissa. She took a sharp turn and sped up to miss a red light, exhaling a breath she had been holding since the last turn; attempting to keep control of the vehicle while driving haphazardly was consuming her attention. Thankful, Alexei breathed, “заставить замолчать!” He sighed and continued to fight the angry personality for control- today was going to be rough.

Despite her reckless driving, Melissa had kept an eye on her nephew. She knew how difficult change was for him, and was sure he was battling his least favorite personality- the one he called Ivan, after his abuser. She had refused to call him Alexei's father the moment she walked in on a family argument in which the monster threw his three-year-old against the wall, a sadistic smile on his face. When Melissa's sister, Andrea, had explained that her son's middle name, Ivanovich, was a Russian custom- a patronymic name that was based on the child's father's name- Melissa refused to use it and begged her sister to change the boy's name legally. She did not want him to be constantly reminded of Ivan's abuse every time he wrote his full name. The angry personality was clearly yelling at him and attempting to take control. Passing through the orange light at high speed had diverted her attention, but she still heard his whisper under his breath, “shut up!” It was the only Russian she knew, as it was the only piece of the language Alexei would speak aloud.

She sighed slightly, frustrated that she could not help him and missing her sister the more

she looked at Alexei. He had the same chocolate eyes as Andrea, but they were subtly shadowed by his prominent brow bone and slimmer, resembling Ivan. The delicate highlights, visible in his ash brown hair when the light hit, were the exact honey blonde as her sister's locks. He had her single dimple on the left side and the same faint furrow in his brow when he was concentrating. He had the high cheekbones of Ivan, but they fell a bit lower as they neared his lips, which were thin like Ivan's and met a sharp cupid's bow. Andrea's freckles dotted Ivan's long, classic Russian nose. The eccentric mixture of features gave him an odd, yet attractively foreign appearance that strangely reminded her of Andrea. He sat like her sister too, a bit reserved and curled into himself, but with a peculiar air of confidence from the way he held his head straight. They had the same interest in the mechanics of everything, including humans- it was how Alexei became so invested in robotics, as he wanted to recreate the intricate mechanics that made someone frown or smile. She grinned, remembering the glimmer in Andrea's eye when she ran into Melissa's room after discovering the secret to a radio or flat iron- she same rare shine that Alexei showed.

A melancholy air cut through her grin as she turned onto Gregor St., a corner away from _____ High. "Mel, you're staring again." Huffed a clearly tired Alexei. He had just managed to calm the chatter in his head and realized she was staring at him and smiling sadly, obviously remembering his mom. A red tone crept up her neck; she was always embarrassed and concerned for him when his mom came up. "I... sorry, sweetie... it's that... you're so..." Knowing the end of her sentence, he sighed, "I know, I miss her too, Mel." It was difficult to combat the personalities and comfort Melissa at the same time, so he ducked out of the car and shuffled inside the prison-like building. Melissa whispered a "bye! I love you!" Which he returned with an annoyed wave; fighting with 'himself' was absolutely exhausting. As the chatter began to drown out his own voice, he took one last cleansing breath and took a step into Hell.

Angelo

"403...403....", with a soft sigh and a scowl, Angelo made his way down the hallway of this new setting, staring intensely at the small piece of paper in his hand. Every step he took felt wrong, and it seemed as though every time he looked around, he was on an entirely different floor. Too embarrassed to ask for help, he finally finished his coffee and begrudgingly carried on, avoiding eye contact of any student he passed but being sure to walk with a feigned aura of confidence, his shoulders back, jaw set. Maybe this place could be the start of something new, maybe he could finally belong, and be content where he was.

With some luck, Angelo finally finds the locker his number belonged to, a shabby looking one with a banged up lock that was squashed tightly between 402 and 404. Clucking his tongue, he determined right away that he was going to avoid using it like the plague, no point in stressing over not being able to reach it because some jerk was blocking the way. To fill up some of the space, he shoves a few spare notebooks inside when some girl a few lockers down squeals, dramatically embracing a friend she most likely saw two days ago, but needed to make a scene over anyway. The squeal pierced his ears, and with a snarl he squeezed his eyes shut, fighting the urge to yell "Shut up!", and glare her down. 3,2...1, he counted down silently, before slowly opening them again.

Sorry, Mama, I really am. But if you think for a second I'm going to be in a great mood today and attempt to make friends, you are terribly mistaken.

Unfortunately in his case, the situation wasn't going to get any better. Just as he was pulling away to shut his locker, he felt himself suddenly bump right into someone's backpack, hard. Unable to steady himself in that moment, he felt his bag slip from his hand, then his coffee cup, the sharp sound of plastic chipping and papers spilling echoing in the large halls. To make matters worst, it seemed as though the entire school, or rather the world, had stopped to stare, and it took just one small chuckle to set him off completely.

Quickly picking up his things, Angelo whipped around and grabbed the poor kid by the collar, his eyes seeming to boil as he yanked the stranger close enough where they were inches

apart. "Watch where the hell you're going, gringo!" He snaps, ignoring the eyes of surprised students watching them. There was that world-renowned temper of his, Angelo never failed to impress.

Alexei

Alexei was waiting behind the boy that was standing such that his arm and foot blocked locker 402- the one designated for the new kid. He turned to glare at the squealing girls down the hall when the boy bumped into him, causing Alexei to spin around defensively. He was swiftly pulled by the collar of his flannel until he was mere inches from the tan-skinned boy. His deep brown eyes widened as he looked into the boy's eyes, which flashed an icy blue like Ivan's before fading to their real hazel. It was enough for Jonas to instinctively jump in control. He pushed the boy off him gruffly and jerked open his locker, holding a defensive stance and keeping an eye on the edge of his blazer. "You shouldn't have done that" Jonas whispered dangerously. The boy pulled himself up and attempted to slam the locker and hit Jonas, but he deftly side-stepped and stopped the boy's fist with such force that he tipped towards the ground again. Alexei was desperately attempting to regain control- he did not want to hurt the boy- but Jonas acted on impulse, constantly focused on an offensive approach.

Stumbling some, Angelo snarled at the shorter, pale kid before him, just what he needed to start the day. "You're dead." He took a another step toward him, before a gruff hand clasped his shoulder and pulled him back abruptly. A teacher stood in between them, one hand firmly holding the pale boy back as well. Gritting his teeth, Angelo never took his eyes off the boy, giving him a menacing glare before shrugging off the teacher's hand.

In the split second that Alexei was in control with the teacher's hand on him, he threw himself down the hall into the bathroom and locked himself in a stall. He sat for ten minutes, fighting Jonas, the angry personality, and Lauren, a maternal personality that manifested in fourth grade after his mother... He pushed the thought aside and focused on his breathing. Today was off to a great start. He suddenly remembered that he left Melissa in the

parking lot, despite the fact that she had to meet with the principal and guidance counselor this morning. His breathing became labored as he worried that she saw the incident with the boy. Wearily getting to his feet, he stalked out of the bathroom towards the principal's office he had recently entered to receive his locker number and homeroom.

As he suspected, Melissa was sitting in the small chair across from Mr. Carlson, with another woman, presumably the guidance counselor, standing behind him. "Alexei, I told you last night that I could handle all this-" she began with a worried look, but he cut her off, dragging a chair to the desk "Mel, I need to know what happens in this conversation, it's my brain." Melissa sighed- she wanted to at least explain Alexei's situation in person first so that the principal and guidance counselor did not make the usual 'poor thing' comments or ignorant questions that made Alexei uncomfortable. There was already so much of it from her phone conversation with Mr. Carlson that she was not sure what to expect during this meeting. She opened her mouth to break the tension in the room and get the worst over, but the guidance counselor, Miss Stephens, beat her to it. "Alexei, I understand you suffer from MPD. As the guidance counselor, I want you to know that I am here to discuss any issues that may arise during your transition." Melissa smirked, awaiting Alexei's response, which would undoubtedly be sarcastic. "Um, Miss Stephens, I already have a therapist, but thank you so much for your concern and offer." He looked sincere, but Melissa could tell from the subtle inflection in his voice that he was mocking her; he hated school counselors, as they attempted to understand a deeply complex mental disorder with a basic degree and no experience with MPD. They wanted him to discuss his feelings, but flat-out told him this, rather than calmly speak to him until he felt comfortable enough to freely talk. Of course he had endured his fair share of tacky and useless therapists as well, but he had yet to find a school counselor he liked. Melissa took control of the conversation and explained Alexei's situation as he spaced out, dreading the day ahead.

Don't Believe What You See

By: Anonymous

She'd whisper to him at night, purr comforting words in his ear after his nightmares were over. Don't believe what you see, it's just your eyes playing tricks on you, she'd say as she ran her fingers through his hair. He held onto her words every night as she lay beside him. She was an angel to him, beautiful and glowing, but he'd see her turn into an eldritch demon in his dreams. Don't believe what you see, he'd whisper to himself every night. Sometimes she'd smile in her sleep after he would say it. In the day, her eyes were bright galaxies, but at night, the stars would abandon them, leaving them dark and lifeless.

His nightmares made their way to the day and he had no way of knowing what was real or a dream anymore. Don't believe what you see, she'd say while he'd see her laughing with monsters. He slowly became more and more exhausted as his nights filled themselves with dark dreams and sleepless terror. Don't believe what you see, he'd chant quietly, alone in the dark as she slept beside him. The nightmares came more frequently in the rare nights he slept. She'd wonder why his eyes were half-closed, why he was avoiding her, and tear him to pieces in the next breath. Don't believe what you see, she'd beg as her monstrous form would attack him for writing to a friend. Don't believe what you see, he'd gasp as he lay in pain, wondering if the cuts and bruises he constantly saw were real or just more hallucinations.

A dark-eyed being lunged at him one moment and she lay dead and bleeding on the floor the next. Don't believe what you see, he whispered, backing away from her prone form. It was all a dream, wasn't it, it couldn't have been real, he silently begged. The figure didn't stir from the floor, and he collapsed into an exhausted sleep. When he woke up, she was walking, the floor was a spotless white, and he didn't know what to believe.

The nightmares had mixed with reality, and nothing made sense anymore. Don't believe what

you see, a demon with empty eyes would purr in his ear again and again. And he believed her, repeating her words as she tore him apart inside and out. Don't believe what you see. Don't believe what you see.