This is Overture Literary Magazine, a new pursuit to expand writing, art, and imagination within the Hopkins Junior High School community. Join us as we share the creativity of students by publishing their work in a monthly magazine, distributed to Fremont City constituents.

In musical terms, an overture is an orchestral composition forming the prelude or introduction to a musical piece. Much like an overture in music, this creative writing program will serve as an introduction to the landscapes of creativity, self-expression, and imagination.

Overture strives to inspire imagination, foster literary and artistic talent, and promote creative growth by teaching middle school students how to develop their own creative writing or art styles through mediums not offered at their own schools.

The Fall 2016 theme, “Water,” is a study on fluidity and balance. It is of water, necessary for life. It is on tempered emotions, on words that slide across tongues and slip through the body.

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Hate

I smoothed my dress and closed my eyes. I took a huge deep breath and took a step forward. My eyes slowly opened and I peered out from the balcony, staring at the thousands of colorful dots below me. My people were cheering for me. They weren’t cheering for my husband this time. They were cheering for the person they should have chosen from the start. Me.

I could hear their ecstasy from all the way up here. They were very synchronized in what they were joyfully speaking. My people kept repeating, “All Hail Queen Hatshepsut!” and, “Long Live Queen Hatshepsut!” And I couldn’t help but smile. I was officially their queen and no one could stop me.

Maya looked up at her oh-so-beloved queen. She couldn’t believe that all these people wanted Queen Hatshepsut to be their queen. They wouldn’t realize that they had made a mistake until it was too late. No one would realize her wrath, except for poor victims and slaves like Maya, until there was no turning back.

She remembered the time she was confronted by Hatshepsut’s husband, Thutmose II, who had recently died. Thutmose II was going to grant her eternal freedom, but Hatshepsut decided that she didn’t deserve it, and implored him to force Maya to serve the Royal Family for the rest of her life. Maya hoped that she wouldn’t have to work for the cruel Queen Hatshepsut. It would be better to die than to serve that vicious lady.

After the coronation, the slave handlers whipped Maya and the rest of the slaves, and dragged them to their temporary living space. They then forced the slaves to change into their new clothes, because the royal family wouldn’t want to see their new servants in rags. Maya appreciated these clothes, even though the farmers owned better clothes. She put them on and waited until she was released to lunch.

A slave handler opened the door to her small living space and ordered Maya to follow him. If Maya walked slower than he did, he would pull on her chains so hard that she could see the red marks on her hands. Maya noticed that they walked past the lunch room, but decided not to ask him about that. She didn’t want to get whipped or hurt more than she already was.

After what seemed like hours of walking and staring at the plain, boring ground, the slave handler stopped. Maya looked around. This place seemed very familiar. It took her awhile to realize that it was the royal home. When she was pulled forward, a guard whispered in her ear, “You got lucky today. Slaves like you deserve worse than facing Queen Hatshepsut.” The guard chuckled softly. Maya gulped as she was dragged inside.

She looked up at the beautiful drapes that covered the walls. She recognized this place from a few weeks ago. It was the Royal Court. This was where people went to “seek justice” or get their punishment. However, the court looked slightly different. Instead of seeing the king on the throne, she saw Queen Hatshepsut. The queen’s stern face made a shiver run down Maya’s spine.

She noticed that there were many other slaves there too. She guessed that their fate was the same as hers. Her slave handler pulled her up to the front of the court along with the other slaves. He shoved her downwards and made her bow to the queen.

Suddenly, the queen got out of her seat. She walked toward the slaves, observing each and every one of their faces. When the queen came toward her, Maya looked down, for she didn’t want the queen to recognize her. She stared at the beautiful patterns on the ground, until she suddenly saw a pair of feet.
They were the most gruesome feet she had ever seen. But she didn’t dare look up, because she knew it was the queen’s feet.

The queen just stood there for a couple of minutes. Maya closed her eyes, hoping that when she opened them, the queen’s feet would be gone. But they weren’t. She just sat there waiting for them to disappear from her sight, but they still didn’t.

It felt like forever, but the queen eventually moved. However, she didn’t move away from Maya. The queen’s left foot just twitched a little when she said, “I’ll take this one.”

Maya’s face turned pale. She wasn’t sure about what the queen meant, but she had a strong feeling that the queen had chosen Maya to be her servant. She really hoped that this wasn’t true. She would never want to serve Queen Hatshepsut—no, not even for a second.

A guard snatched her chains and pulled her into an enormous room. Maya stared at the beautifully decorated walls. The Royal colors were scattered across the room, making the room look extravagant. The queen doesn’t deserve such a room, Maya thought.

The guard cleared his throat and said, “This is your new room, Maya.” Maya glanced at the guard, curious. How could this be my room? Maya thought to herself. It is far too beautiful for a mere slave to live in.

Maya smiled at the guard and nodded. The guard nodded back and left the room.

Maya walked farther into her new living quarter. She couldn’t believe this was her room. It was so beautiful, not like her other ones. All her previous rooms were cramped and small. They had had no decorations and had only consisted of a small plain bed and a small shelf to place her clothes in.

Maya leaped onto the bed with joy. She chuckled a little, surprised that this was her own. She closed her eyes and sank in it, loving how cozy it was. She had never known that such a luxurious mattress existed. She had always slept on a cold, hard bed that felt like it was made of stone.

Maya hadn’t realized she had fallen asleep until she woke up and looked out the window. She could tell that it was almost time for dinner. She bounced out of bed and headed for the door. As she was on the way to the door, she saw a shimmering object on the table. Walking slowly toward the table, she wondered what it could be. She realized it was cloth, and very gently lifted it up.

It’s so smooth, Maya thought as she began to unfold it. It was a dress! Maya smiled. She squealed and embraced the dress as she spun in a circle. She immediately put on the dress and looked at herself in the mirror.

Maya stared at her reflection and thought she looked beautiful. She fixed her hair a little and put on some jewelry she saw on the dresser. She continued to stare at her reflection, wondering if she had ever looked this pretty before. Looking at her dress, she traced her hands over the golden embroidery on her deep blue fabric.

It took her awhile to remember that she was a slave. She was curious to why they were doing this to her. It wasn’t that she was complaining, but why? Why would they provide a slave with such luxurious things?

It then occurred to her that they might have given her such privileges just for her to enjoy a little before she died. Maybe they wanted to secretly kill her without her realizing it. Maya was shivering and trembling in fear, hoping that nothing would happen to her. She walked around the room slowly, thinking about any other reason why they would do this. But nothing came to her mind.

Maya jumped when the door opened. She sighed in relief when she saw the guard who had escorted her to her new room earlier that day. “The queen is calling you,” he said. Maya wondered why she was calling her now.
Maya nodded and followed him. When the guard stopped at her destination, she saw a few other people wearing dresses similar to hers. To be exact, there were four people. They were all looking down at the ground, as the queen was sitting on her throne, looking at them, smirking. *She clearly enjoys torturing people who aren’t as fortunate as her,* Maya thought.

The queen looked up and stared at Maya. Her smirk grew bigger. Maya swore that she heard the queen chuckle. It was as if the queen was specifically waiting for her arrival. She felt that same tingling in her spine like she did earlier.

The queen stood up and started down the stairs. She was still looking at Maya. The queen walked toward Maya and said, “Maya,” in a very polite voice and a huge smile. Maya shivered, and she felt as if the queen could feel the fear radiating off of her. The queen gently touched Maya’s chin, as if she really cared for Maya. But Maya knew that the queen didn’t. She knew that the queen was tricking her. The wicked lady who calls herself queen was clearly up to something.

Maya gulped. *What was the queen going to do to me?* Maya thought. The queen removed her hand from Maya’s face and waved her hand in dismissal. Maya knew that this meant that everyone should leave the room. Maya looked around and saw that everyone was gone.

Then she noticed that the queen was staring directly at her. “Hello Maya,” the queen said, smiling. “Do you remember me from that day a couple weeks ago? When my husband was still alive?”

Maya slowly nodded. She wondered how the queen could easily just say that her husband died. It was as if the queen didn’t even care. Maya had a strange thought. *What if the queen had killed her husband so she could be the ruler of Egypt?*

Maya jumped onto her bed. All the queen wanted was for her to do an errand for her. She didn’t get why the queen had to get rid of everyone from the room just to tell her to that. But that wasn’t the main thing on her mind. She was thinking about if the queen killed her own husband. And why? Maya had to find out. She had to find evidence for that.

Just then, a woman walked into her room. Maya recognized her from the Royal Court the other day. She was one of the queen’s servants. The woman said, “Hello, Maya. I am Abasi. One of the queen’s servants. I am here to explain the rules of being a servant. These rules are especially necessary for the queen’s handmaiden.”

Abasi explained all the rules to Maya, and then asked, “Do you have any questions?”

Maya thought about asking Abasi about whether the queen killed the previous king. After all, Abasi must have still been the queen’s servant at that time. She took a deep breath, and asked Abasi, “So...how exactly did the king die...? Are you sure that he died because of old age...?”

Maya hoped Abasi would give her the right answer without realizing why Maya asked her this. Abasi’s eyes grew wide as she said, “Uhh...he died because of old age. Why? Did you think someone else kill him? ‘Cause haha, the queen didn’t kill him.”

She said that really quickly and gave a nervous look. Her voice was extremely high pitched when she said this. Something was suspicious. Especially since she mentioned the queen. Abasi clearly knew something. Maya needed to find out quickly. *But how should I ask her?* Maya thought. *If I directly asked her if the queen killed him, then Abasi would run out of the room so she wouldn’t have to answer the question. She may even tell the queen herself that I am suspicious. And I wouldn’t want that to happen.* Maya then thought of a solution. Maya thought that she should disguise herself and ask Abasi later that night. Maya thought of scaring Abasi, enough to let the words spill out of her mouth.
It was midnight. The perfect time. Maya wore a dark cloak around her and walked to the kitchen. She took a knife and started toward Abasi’s room. She remembered exactly where Abasi’s room was, for Abasi told her where it was earlier that day if Maya ever needed any help.

Maya concealed her knife, so no one would be suspicious. She wouldn’t harm Abasi, of course. She was just going to scare her. She was going to scare her just enough to hear what Abasi knows. Maya knew that this was risky. But she had to do it.

Maya stopped and peeked through one of the holes in the thick black cloak she was wearing. Abasi’s room looked exactly the same as her’s. Maya took deep breath and took a step inside.

Maya walked into the room. It was too dark to see anything, but she continued to walk farther. She slowly removed the knife from her cloak and held it in her hand. Maya was scared, honestly. She’d never done such a thing before. And she hoped that she wouldn’t get caught.

Suddenly, the lights turned on. In front of her was the queen. She noticed that behind her was Abasi. Abasi gave a sort of sympathetic look, but Maya knew that she didn’t actually feel any sympathy for Maya. She really shouldn’t have asked Abasi about how the king died. Abasi clearly told the queen about their conversation. Even though Maya made sure that Abasi wouldn’t find out that she was suspecting the queen, Abasi must have been suspicious that Maya was going to figure something out. So she told the queen.

And now she was dead. Or, at least, she was going to die. There was no way that she will have proof to explain why she was holding a knife and hiding in a cloak. They’ll kill her for supposedly attempting to kill Abasi. And she couldn’t say she wasn’t going to kill Abasi cause then no one would believe her. Even if she told them the truth, she was still going to die for suspecting the queen.

The queen directed the guards to capture Maya. Maya was dragged into the dungeon. As Maya was being pulled toward the dungeon. She saw the queen smile. And she was sure that she clearly saw it. Maya then realized that she was being framed. The queen did sort of give her a hint that she killed her own husband. The queen expected Maya to investigate, just so the queen could kill her or harm her. The queen really hated her. And she knew it from the beginning. Maya should have never ever thought to suspect the queen. Maybe the queen did kill the king. But Maya should have known that something would happen to her if she was questioning the queen. And now she was sure that she would die.

It turns out that the queen didn’t kill Maya. Instead, she did worse. Maya now had to serve the rest of her life in prison. And all Maya could think about was hate. The only thing she could think about was her hatred for the queen. She hated her. Hated.
FBI: Junior Department

Chapter 1: Alex

Alex listened to the two people arguing outside the closet.

“I don’t care if you haven’t been able to find a good mark. You need to give me my money by sunset tomorrow, or you and everyone you care about will die a slow, painful death,” a deep, gruff voice rumbled, giving the illusion of a mountain of a man.

A high, reedy voice replied in a pleading tone, “I-I-I can’t. The pigeons are all being plucked by the Blue Jaguars. There are none left. Everyone is wary of everyone else now. The war made people cautious, the spies even more so. My source in the T.Y.P.D. says everyone who the Blue Jaguars have stolen from have gone to the Police Department, claiming that spies have stolen vital information from them. N-”

The gruff voice cut the high-pitched voice off. “I don’t care. You will get me my money. Or else.”

The noise of a slamming door echoed. Alex breathed out in relief, and the closet door was yanked open.

“I let you listen in, now you owe me,” said the guy with the reedy voice. He couldn’t have been older than 15, with greasy black hair and acne so bad if you rubbed sandpaper on his face, you would burn through the sandpaper without making a dent in it.

“What do you want?” Alex said in a calm voice. All she needed was a blackmail attempt to get this guy.

“Well, kid, you’re gonna give me all your money, or you’re going to die,” the guy said, not knowing he was walking right into Alex’s trap.

Smiling viciously, Alex brought out her gun. “Now you have two choices. You’re going to come with me and face charges of attempted extortion of a federal agent, or you’re going to come with me and face charges of attempted extortion of a federal agent and resisting arrest. Your choice.” The guy paled and ran out of the room.

Alex sighed. “Why do they always run?” she asked herself. Then she took off after him. Having cased the building before setting the trap, she knew every twist and turn like the back of her hand. She followed the sounds of the boy’s footsteps and paused just outside a room where she heard voices. There was the guy who tried to blackmail her, and someone else she didn’t recognize.

She kicked down the door, mainly because it was fun, and burst into the room yelling, “FBI, freeze!” Inside, there were two guys. One of them was the guy who probably slept with his face caked in acne cream. The other one had bronze skin, chocolatey brown hair, and hazel brown eyes. He also had a tiger tattoo on his forearm.

He stabbed the greasy haired guy with a dagger, *Who has a dagger nowadays?*, and, grinning wickedly, said, “Don’t worry, I got him for you.” Alex was stunned for a second by the utter stupidity and
impetuousness of that sentence and smile, and that was enough for the young man to turn and jump out of the window that must have been the puberty victim’s escape route. That snapped Alex out of it, and she ran to the window, only to find no trace of the boy.

In frustration, she yelled, “Come back here, you sadistic sociopath!”

A voice above her said, “Well that’s rude. I’m Logan. What’s your name, gorgeous?”

Alex looked up to see the guy, Logan, perched on a flagpole that looked like it was about to break. “You’re right. I apologize. Your mother must have had a heck of a time raising you. Did you stab the toys you got from Santa whenever you didn’t like them?”

Logan laughed. “Maybe. Or maybe I stabbed the people who were stingy with candy on Halloween. You still haven’t told me your name, by the way. I know you’re an FBI agent, but, hold on, how old are you?”

Alex, seeing no way the information could be used against her, replied, “Sixteen. What about you?”

Logan answered, “I’m also sixteen. Because I am sixteen, I know you’re way too young to be an FBI agent.”

Alex smirked. “So you think I lied?”

“Yup.”

“Tell that to the agents rushing up the stairs right now and the snipers currently trained on you that will fire if you make a wrong move.”

Logan looked down at his chest and, seeing the clustered green target dots, snarled, “You little brat. You really are an agent. That’s what I get for trying to do the right thing while doing the wrong thing.”

Alex smirked as the agents leaned out the window and grabbed Logan, pulling him inside, and slapping handcuffs on him. “No, that’s what you get for underestimating me.”

Chapter 2: Logan

Logan was furious with himself. He shouldn’t have fallen for the female agent’s trap. He didn’t even know her name. Stupid stupid stupid. Now Rand would have to get him out of this mess, and all because Logan had fallen for a pretty face. If Rand would even get him out. Logan could imagine his trainer, Rand, pacing his office deciding if he should save his fool trainee or if he should save himself the trouble of training someone else to take his place as leader of the Slayers, a literal league of assassins.

“We’re almost there. Stop scowling at the back of my seat. The car didn’t murder anyone.” Logan glanced at the girl, startled. She was staring at him, assessing him.

Logan offered her his most charming smile. “Better?”

Instead of looking flustered like any human being should after receiving that smile, in Logan’s opinion, she just said coolly, “I’m sure the car is flattered. You’re probably going to juvie until you
reach eighteen, which is when you will be investigated to determine if you will go to jail or go free. From what I hear, you’ll probably go to jail. Most kids do. I’m Alex, by the way. Alex King. And if you even talk about my last name funnily, I will make your stay at the FBI very unpleasant.”

For the first time, the driver spoke. “Alex, we’re here. Try not to decapitate the criminal.”

Alex complained, “I didn’t decapitate her. I merely made her think I decapitated her. There’s a difference.”

The driver replied, “I know, I know. You didn’t lay a hand on her. You merely made her believe her head had been cut off by talking to her.”

Alex said petulantly, “Well it’s true.” The driver shook his head and laughed. Outside the car, Logan studied Alex. Her short straight hair was a bright red, and she had black highlights. Her emerald green eyes had gold flecks in them. She was wearing a black halter top and black jeans. Basically, she was gorgeous. Also, judging from her behavior, she had no idea she was gorgeous.

Alex noticed him staring. “Are you going to stare at me the entire time?”

Logan replied, “Just enjoying the view.”

Alex smirked, although Logan had no idea why, and said, “Well you might want to save some enjoyment for when we go inside. The view there is amazing, and I’m sure some of the girls there are going to enjoy the view as well.” Logan felt a flash of excitement as they walked inside before clamping down on it. He couldn’t get distracted. Still he wondered why Alex wasn’t at least being shy. Isn’t she at least a little interested? Maybe she’s taken already. Or she could be interested in girls instead. Or maybe she’s just clamping down on those emotions like I am. Or I should stop thinking about this. I should stop thinking about this.

Alex walked right up to the front desk and spoke to the beautiful blonde girl with sky blue eyes. “Hey Soph. I’ve got a murderer here. Killed the guy I was going to bring in for questioning. I even had a reason. Attempted extortion of a federal agent and resisting arrest. Now we have zilch, nada, nothing.”

The blonde looked at Logan, and her gaze was cold enough to freeze tartarus over. “Well. Now we have two charges to bring against this one. Murder and obstruction of justice. Go on in Alex.” Alex nodded and walked past the desk through the doors with Logan trailing behind. The world behind the doors was amazing. There was people sparring, people on computers, and people yelling at each other. There was a certain order to the chaos, but it was very hard to detect. Logan could sense Alex relax a little bit, and realised how tense she had been the entire trip.

Then a voice rang out over the din. “Alexandra Chamomile King. Get up here to my office right now, and bring the prisoner.”

Alex flinched, then turned to Logan and smiled apologetically. “Sorry about my dad. We should probably get up there.”

Logan raised an eyebrow. “Chamomile?”
Alex replied, “My dad thought it was a random piece of paper when he wrote that down. He was making a grocery list.” Logan filed that little tidbit away for further use.

Before he could make any jokes, however, another guy jogged over. “Ack! There you are!” *And enter the boyfriend.* The boyfriend was handsome enough, Logan guessed. He had red hair in a buzz cut and clear, green eyes. His nose had been broken at least once, but that just added to his looks. He looked like he worked out in the gym a lot, but not really trained to fight. Of course, looks can be deceiving, as Logan had recently learned with Alex.

Alex retorted, “It must have been so hard to find me. Especially after Dad yelled at me to get to his office. Let’s go.”

The guy said, “Indeed. Now come on sis. Dad is waiting. But before we go, are you going to introduce me to the killer?”

Alex rolled her eyes and said in a formal tone, “Logan, meet my brother, Jok. Jok, meet Logan.” *Ab. Enter the brother. Not the boyfriend.*

Logan said, “Ack? Jok?”

Jok said, “Alex’s initials make the word Ack, so I call her Ack. My initials make the word Jok, so she calls me Jok. My full name is John Olive King. I assume she told you about the grocery list thing? Well father dear did it to me first, since I’m older than her by a year.”

Alex punched John, Logan had decided to call him John, in the shoulder. “Which you only bring up every second of every minute of every day.”

Logan tentatively said, “Shouldn’t we be going?”

Alex started, as if she had forgotten about that little detail. “He’s right, let’s go.” Alex and John set off running with Logan running after them. Logan quickly passed John, but he couldn’t pass Alex. They ran alongside each other, and Logan could sense that Alex was struggling to pass him just as much as he was struggling to pass her. They reached an office together, out of breath. They waited for John to show up, and once he finally got there, the door swung open.

Chapter 3: Alex

Alex walked into her father’s office, with Logan and Jok trailing behind her. “Hey dad. Before you say anything, I’m late because Jok wanted a proper introduction with Logan.”

Her dad laughed heartily, and said, “Well, John always wants to know everyone new in your life. Especially if they are as good-looking as this one.”

Logan smirked while Alex rolled her eyes. “Thank you very much, sir. I’m assuming that’s because of your daughter’s beauty.”

Alex scoffed. “Sure. I bet it has nothing to do with the fact that usually the ‘new people in my life’ are dangerous criminals.”

Alex’s dad smiled, his eyes crinkling. “That would be the case, if you weren’t much more dangerous than the criminals. I’m sure it is because of your good looks.”
Jok butted in just then. “Is no one going to ask me?”

Alex smiled sweetly and said cloyingly, “Oh of course. How could we forget you? My dearest brother, why do you make it a point to get to know every new person with whom I meet? Is it, perhaps, some kind of protective instinct for your sweet, innocent, gorgeous, helpless little sister? Or is it maybe because you know how strong and independent your sister is and just want to make sure the newcomer actually deserves the beating he or she is going to inevitably get?”

Jok was oblivious. “Thank you Ack. Actually, I’m just scouting. You know, scoping out the competition, or just checking out the fresh meat.”

The thought that Jok viewed girls as just things to have enraged Alex to no end. Her brother could be so condescending and oblivious it hurt. “Well, I’m glad to see you keeping on top of something. Now whether it’s the right thing, you’ll have to ask Dad about that.”

Alex’s dad piped in helpfully, “And your mother.”

To Alex’s delight, Jok paled significantly, and hastily added, “And I’m watching out for my delightful younger sibling who is far too attractive for her own good.” Alex smirked, and Jok scowled at her. Logan looked on in silence, unreadable. Alex wondered what he was thinking. Despite him being a killer, she felt a pull to him. Whenever she felt it tug, she knew she could show nothing. Even if he was really good-looking. Even if he had called her beautiful on more than one occasion. Even if she couldn’t help staring at him. She felt that connection tug, and she brushed away the emotions, but not before Logan caught her looking at him.

He smirked, and said, “Now are you enjoying the view?”

Alex fired back, “Nope. Imagining all the ways it could be improved.”

Jok laughed. “Logan, you have no chance at all with my little sister. No matter how hard you flirt, she’s going to find a way to turn it against you in a wonderful insult. Besides, she’s absolutely oblivious when it comes to boys.”

Alex replied, “And you’re absolutely oblivious to everything that doesn’t include pretty chicks.”

Alex’s dad interrupted what was soon going to be a very long, and fun, argument. “Ok kids. I need to debrief you, and I need to make my offer to Logan.”

Alex scowled at this. “Right. The offer. Am I finally going to learn what this mysterious offer is, or am I going to have to learn right along with the killer?”

Logan complained, “I’ve only killed, like, twenty people. And I’m next in line to become the leader of the- you know what? Never mind.”


Logan opened his mouth to say something, but Alex’s dad quickly spoke before him. “He’s the heir to the Slayers.” Immediately, Alex reached for her batons and assumed a defensive position. Jok just moved his gun to somewhere more easily reached. His hand.
Alex tried to make sense of the situation and rein in her increasing hysteria at the same time. “Dad, did you know Logan was going to be there? Did you know that he was going to kill the acne guy but would get caught?”

Jok raised an eyebrow. “Acne guy?”

Alex snapped, “Never mind.”

Alex’s dad said, “Alex, calm down. I knew someone from the Slayers was going to be there, and I knew you would catch the assassin. I didn’t expect Sean, the ‘acne guy’ to be meeting with Fadle Grandolf himself. Nor did I expect his heir, Logan Cassen here, to be there. My offer was going to be to whoever you brought back, and if you brought back more than one person, then I would choose one person to give it to. Lucky for us all, you brought me Logan here.”

Logan queried, “You keep talking about this offer. What exactly are you proposing? And please don’t say the word offer again. I’m getting sick of the word.”

Just to be contrary, Alex smiled wickedly and said, “Offer offer offer offer offer offer offer offer offer offer offer offer offer offer offer offer offer offer offer offer offer offer offer offer offer offer.

 Alex’s dad interrupted her. “That’s enough, Alex. Logan, I am proposing that instead of serving time in jail, you join the Junior Department of the FBI as a criminal informant. You will become an asset of this department, and will be an experiment to test if this fairly new department is capable of handling criminals.”

Alex objected. “We can handle criminals just fine. Besides, how is it fair to ask criminals to work alongside the people who ruined their plans for a better life and most likely deceived them in some way? And what if, instead of reforming the criminals, we manage to reform our agents?”

Jok explained, “Ack, these objections have been made. And ignored. We just have to make the best of this situation.”

Alex’s dad looked grim. “Alex, it gets worse. If Logan accepts, he’s gonna need a handler. You have been selected for the job. With guidance from me, if you want it.”

To Alex’s immense horror, Logan said, “I’ll work here. It’s better than going to jail for the rest of my life.”

Alex protested. “Oh no. This is not happening. Logan, you can do whatever you want, but I don’t have to be your handler. Dad, don’t make me do this. Please. I’m a good agent in the field, but I work alone.”

Logan said helpfully, “You seemed to work great with those other agents when you were arresting me.”

Alex glowered at him. “That’s because I thought you were going to go to prison as soon as my dad talked to you and offered you an offer you could and would refuse. I didn’t expect my dad to offer to sanction the freedom of an assassin.” To Alex’s satisfaction, Logan winced everytime she said the word offer. Ugh. Now I’m getting tired of the word.
Alex’s dad said in his you-better-shut-up-and-listen-to-me-right-now-or-you-will-be-in-big-trouble voice, “Alex. You’re Logan’s new handler and there is nothing you can do about it. John, get out.”

Once Jok, Alex had completely forgotten he was there, left, without turning his back on Logan, Alex’s dad sighed and said, “Alex, Logan, you two are going to be working together to bring down an elusive target. You have the entire Junior Department at your disposal. We need this win. The higher ups are deciding if a Junior Department is actually necessary and not just a babysitting program, and have assigned us this case as a test. The rest of the department are also being assigned test cases, but none as important as this one. Logan’s very presence is also a test. The details of your official test case are going to be withheld until I determine if you work together well enough. For now, get acquainted. I’ll give you the details for your first unofficial test case tomorrow. Go out. Have fun. Oh, and Logan, you’ll have a tracking anklet that is top of the line. Only Alex and I will have a key. Lift up your leg.” Alex knew her father had been all talked-out. Her dad would talk a lot for a short while, then wouldn’t talk for the rest of the day. She watched on in fascination as her dad clamped a thick black anklet onto Logan’s leg. Her dad silently pressed the key, a little device that looked like a flash drive, into her hand and sat down.

Alex attached it to her key chain, then turned to Logan. “Come on. I’ll show you your room. All the agents live here, since we’re pretty much all teens. You can get dressed there while I get some friends and get ready. Don’t worry. I’ll ask some guys to come along too.” Alex led Logan to the dorms.

When they got to Room 33, Alex turned to Logan, who had been quiet the entire time. “Press a finger of your choice into the gel box.” Without hesitation, Logan submerged his thumb into the gel and didn’t look at all surprised when the door slid open.

“Hey Alex. Who’s this?” said Doc. Doc was a handsome blonde with gray-blue eyes. He was also the boyfriend of Nee, Alex’s roommate.

Logan stared at Doc coldly, and said, “I was about to ask you the same question Alex.”

Alex smiled sweetly at both the confused boys. “Logan, meet Doc, your roommate. Doc, meet Logan Cassen, the heir to the Slayers and your new roommate.” Before either of the boys could complain, Alex walked off toward her room.

When she got there, a party was, unsurprisingly, happening full swing. There were couples making out in pretty much every shadowed corner, and throbbing strobe lights illuminated them every other second.

Alex walked up to the DJ, unplugged the equipment, and grabbed the mic. “Hey guys! I’m about to get ready for some major clubbing, and none of you are invited! Yay! If you want to keep partying, head on over to some unfortunate club! Just make sure it ain’t the club where I’m going. Have fun! Now scram!”

“Alex. You know you aren’t getting any popularity points when you bust my parties,” Nee said.

Alex replied, “But I do gain them the next morning when all your guests are suffering hangovers and I cover their tracks.”

Nee frowned, clearly a bit drunk. “I suppose. What’s this about going clubbing?”
Alex waited for everyone to clear out and used her bug scanner to, well, scan for bugs before answering. “You know the drug circle I was sent to bust? Well, the only link to it was killed by the heir to the Slayers. He’s really good-looking, btw. Anyway, I brought him back, and apparently that offer my dad was raving about was that Logan, the heir, had to become an asset of our department. The only problem is that I’m his handler. We’re allowed one night of fun for getting acquainted, then tomorrow morning we have our first case.”

Nee, having shaken off her drunkenness while Alex was talking, looked thoughtful. “Which club are we going to, and who else is coming?”

Alex replied immediately, “We’re going to Tango Terrace, and you can only invite one boy.”

Nee asked Alex, “Who’s Logan’s roommate?”

“Doc.”

“Perfect. You can bring your asset, I’ll bring my boyfriend.” Alex and Nee started cleaning up the place, then got ready. Alex wore a short black dress with thin straps and gold accents, fishnet stockings, strappy black heels, and dangly black earrings with gold accents. Nee wore a short silver dress without straps that complimented her platinum blonde hair, white stockings, silver platforms, and dangly silver earrings. Alex had on black eye-liner, mascara, black eyeshadow, and red lipstick that popped against her pale skin. Nee had on similar makeup, only her eyeshadow was silver. Basically, they had on their usual clubbing outfits. Alex being the shadow to Nee’s light and vice-versa.

Nee looked Alex over one last time, and Alex did the same to Nee before they both declared at the same time, “Perfect!” Then, laughing, they walked out the door arm-in-arm.
Flashbacks

My name is Lilia Johnson, and I’ve never seen the world the same way others have.

I’ve been told many things in my life. That I was ‘cut from a different cloth’, if people were being nice. If they weren’t, they usually said that I was a freak.

I can’t really say I disagree. I saw things about people that other normal people didn’t. I could tell someone’s life story by the way they held themselves, or what they were thinking of by the way their eyes fluttered shut.

Then I met these three people who accepted me for who I was. Insulting, freakishly smart (ha!), arrogant me. People who truly enjoyed being around me. People that changed my life, which, being an orphaned genius no one could stand being around, was already in shambles. They fixed me.

But one day, something made me forget. I forgot. I forgot everything.

My mind felt woozy. All my senses were sluggish, as if they had been dragged through mud. I couldn’t open my eyes.

Then, my mind cleared as if a barrier had been lifted. I could tell where I was.

The steady beeping and the horrible stench of the hospital told me that much.

What had happened to me? Why was I here? I was very afraid to open my eyes, to find out. Was I in a coma? What was wrong with me?

Strangely, I couldn’t remember.

I was probably on some kind of pain medication that slowed down my thinking. When I open my eyes, the doctors would tell me what was going on.

Mentally preparing myself, I slowly opened my eyes—only to be struck down by the blinding hospital light.

My eyes quickly fluttered shut.

“Oh my god,” a girl’s voice breathed. Someone was here with me. The voice sounded very close. “Are you awake?”

I decided not to answer. I couldn’t recognize the voice. I didn’t know who it was.

There was the sound of a chair scraping against the linoleum floors.

“Guys, I think she’s awake!”

The door flew open with a bang as the sound of multiple footsteps entered the room.

“Lilia?” a different voice asked. “Are you awake?”
I didn’t know how this person knew my name. I struggled opened my eyes again, this time preparing for the brightness.

Three concerned faces stared down at me.

“Oh, thank goodness,” the girl said, who had auburn hair. “I thought I imagined it for a second.”

“Like you have for the last, I don’t know, twelve times?” said a blond boy dryly.

The other boy, whose eye color were a unique swirl of blue and grey just raised his eyebrows. “Glad you’re back,” he said simply.

Something struck me about his eyes that I couldn’t exactly place. It was like I’ve seen them before, but I ignored the thought because I didn’t recognize anything else about the three teenagers.

“Oh, ignore him,” said the girl. “He’s missed you like crazy, but he’s just too proud to admit it.”

I blinked, trying to get rid of the hazy spots dancing in my eyes. “I’m sorry,” I said, confused. I had no idea who these people were. “I don’t think I know you guys.”

I tried. Really, I tried so hard to remember. Who were these people? I was important enough to them that they all were here, waiting for me to wake up, but I drew a blank. It was as if someone had smeared paint over my memories.

All three of them looked shocked.

“I’m sure it’s fine,” I said hurriedly, not liking the looks on their faces. “It’s probably just the drugs I’m on or something.”

They exchanged looks.

A flash of panic hit me. What was wrong with me? The wooziness from before was completely gone, and I didn’t even feel fatigued, but I still couldn’t remember anything.

“Evelyn, check,” said the blue-grey eyed boy.

The girl, Evelyn, scurried over to the hospital file beside me.

“Nope,” she confirmed. “Just the usual.”

Usual? Who was she, some small genius doctor?

“I thought so,” he muttered. “We’ve been over that file millions of times.”

I tried to sit up despite the raging headache that burned in my skull. “Wait, what’s—what happened to me? Why I am I here? Who are you guys?”

They all stared at me.
Evelyn was out of the stupor first. “Lack of oxygen in the brain can cause some sort of short term amnesia,” she began with a professional voice that started to tremble as she continued, “which would be diagnosed as retrograde amnesia.

“You were in a deep part of the water for about two and half minutes. You know, brain cells die first; three minutes without oxygen, the damage is permanent—”

“What?” I asked, completely afraid that what she was saying was true. I felt kind of dizzy. “I—I drowned?”

“Yes,” Evelyn said quietly. “You were in a coma for two weeks.”

The blond boy cleared his throat. “You were drowned by another person, if that helps,” he said, shuffling his feet.

“No, Steve,” Evelyn shot back at him with a pointed glare. “It doesn’t.”

“Whoa, no need for tempers to be running high here,” said the other boy, his eyes flashing. “We should be glad that Lilia’s finally awake, not be caught up between another one of your feuds.”

“Lilia, you know I only want you to be alive!” he said, reaching out to me.

“No!” I said, jerking away from his touch. “You don’t understand! I have to do this. He’s getting away. Tonight. I have to stop him.”

He grabbed my arm, his blue-grey eyes boring into my own. “This man can kill you.”

“He won’t,” I said impatiently. “I’m not stupid.”

Lilia—”

“No, go away, James!”

“James,” I blurted out.

The boy turned to me sharply. “What?”

I didn’t know what to do. Or what to say.

“I don’t know,” I said truthfully, feeling so confused.

He narrowed his eyes. “You just said my name,” he said. “How can you not know?”

“It’s true!” I said indignantly. “I don’t know what made me say that!”

Well, that wasn’t true. There was something about his eyes…

These people I was friends with… they were some really weird people. They managed to get me out of the hospital (I don’t know how), and bring me to their place. Our place, apparently.

Evelyn assured me, though I didn’t really know if I could trust her, that it was a temporary memory loss, and that I’d remember things soon enough.
She didn’t tell me an exact date or statistic, so what she said couldn’t exactly count for anything.

But I didn’t remember anything. I knew my name was Lilia Johnson. I knew that I was sixteen years old, and that I lived in an orphanage because my parents died a long time ago. I knew that somehow, I chose to be with these three people rather than the orphanage, and that was how I figured that I could trust them for now.

The place we had arrived at from the hospital was some sort of lab. Former lab. Apparently they— we—had patched it up a year ago, and made it a living place slash functioning lab.

And what kind of people were they? Geeks. They were full-out teenage nerds who read chemistry and physics books for leisure. Who solved linear equations and quadratics just for the heck of it.

But surprisingly, they weren’t squeamish about bending the rules a little bit.

“Isn’t it illegal in America to live without a supervisor when you’re not an adult yet?” I asked when we arrived.

“Dah-ling,” Steve replied in a terrible Southern drawl, “do we look that boring to you? We’re vigilantes.”

I snorted. “Sure,” I said.

Steve glanced at Evelyn. “We are, right, Eve?”

“Mhm,” she mumbled, immediately heading to her lab table, peering through her microscope.

“What is she looking at?” I asked Steve.

“Some bacteria experiment she’s working on for weeks,” said Steve, pulling out a small metal rod and some screws from his pocket and fiddling with them. “She won’t rest until she completes it and proves her point. She’s a complete neat freak, in case you didn’t know.”

“Huh,” I said. I had figured that out on my own. Her lab table was compulsively neat and her clothes constantly ironed, from the looks of it. No one ironed their clothes that often. “Where’s… James?”

Steve shrugged. “Probably hacking into NASA again. It’s what he does in his free time.”

I raised my eyebrows. “What, so he’s a hacker?”

“We… all have our specialties, actually. James’s is computer science, Evelyn’s biochem, and mine’s engineering—or mechanics. Both, really.”

“No,” said Evelyn, not even looking up. “Steve’s specialty is Star Wars, as he does not shut up about it.”

“Evelyn?”

“Yeah?”

“Please shut your mouth.”
“Oh my god, Steve! How many times have I told you not to mess with my stuff? I have to give this report to Lilia later; I can’t have you mix it all up!”

“It’s in my workspace! Respect the boundaries of our designated areas, then,” said Steve, shoving Evelyn’s papers off a section of the lab table.

“We’re sharing the stupid lab table! Who cares if—if a corner of my paper crosses into your ‘invisible’ boundary?” Evelyn argued.

“Oh, please, like it was only a corner. You’re practically using my side of the lab table as a storage room.”

“Guys, please, stop,” I said, entering the room. I held my head in my hands. “Every time I walk in here, you’re arguing. They stayed silent.

“Do you have the thing I asked for?” I asked Evelyn. She nodded, handing a manila folder to me. “Thanks,” I said.

“Wait,” said Steve suddenly. “What’s that?”

“None of your business,” Evelyn snapped. “It’s just stuff for me and Lilia.”

“Is that something about the man we’re tracking? James warned me that you were going to go after him and that I should definitely stop you.”

I raised an eyebrow. “Is this only James talking or are you agreeing with him too?”

“I’m agreeing with him!” Steve said, setting down the pen he was flipping. “You really shouldn’t go.”

Evelyn looked down at her fingers. “I… I actually agree with him. I mean, I know you’re going to get the information anyway, which is why I want to give it to you—I wouldn’t want you to get it some unorthodox way—but don’t go.”

Steve looked at Evelyn in surprise. “Did you just say I was right?”

She huffed. “No, I just agreed with you. Not the same thing.”

He shrugged. “Same difference,” he said, smirking.

Evelyn crossed her arms. “Steve?”

“Yeah?”

“Please do shut up.”

“Lilia? Are you okay?”

I blinked, my mind reeling at this barrage of new information. Was this… was this a memory that I had forgotten?

“Lilia?” Evelyn and Steve were now looking at me with concerned expressions on their face. I felt self-conscious as they stared at me. I don’t know, maybe it was something they did all the time I just got used to.
"Yeah," I said, recovering. "I just blanked out for a second."

"A second?" Steve joked. "Looked like you were in some different zone."

I felt defensive. "Oh, well, not that you would care," I exclaimed. I had no idea what I was saying. Words just tumbled out of my mouth. "You won’t be staying long, anyway."

He frowned. "What?" he asked.

"Your clothes have these unnatural creases that don’t appear if you simply fold them." My mind ached, like someone was wringing my brains out, but my eyes darted back and forth on him, drawing more and more information from a source in my head I couldn’t identify. I wasn’t even conscious of what I was saying at this point. "You obviously are not putting your clothes into your drawers or whatever we use to store our clothes in. And I know because none of James’s or Evelyn’s clothes aren’t as wrinkled. No, it’s into some sort of small bag that you have.

"Why would you have clothes in a bag? Maybe it’s because you’re leaving, and some time soon, seeing how you’re to leave a moment’s notice. Waiting for the right time? I don’t know—"

"I’m going to cut you off here," Evelyn said. "But Steve’s not leaving. I think your deductive reasoning if kind of skewing off the charts here; I mean, your amnesia probably had to do something with it."

"Actually," said Steve, scratching the back of his neck. "I was thinking about leaving."

Evelyn’s mouth dropped open. "What?" she asked.

"I—I mean, you know, Lilia wasn’t waking up anytime soon, you and I are falling apart, James is locked up in his room more than ever, and I thought, well, maybe this is it for us. No more criminal tracking—"

"Okay, sorry, I’m going to have to cut you off here," I said, not particularly feeling very sorry, "but um, what do you mean by ‘criminal tracking’?"

"Oh... we..."

"You know how you drowned?" Evelyn asked.

I tilted my head. "Uh, I don’t know, I fell into the river?"

Evelyn sighed. "As ‘vigilantes’, though we’re really not," she gave a pointed look at Steve, "we do stuff that we wouldn’t do under supervision."

"Like track down common criminals and, you know, catch them."

"Catch them?" I asked.

"And anonymously hand them over to the police," Steve confirmed.

I probably looked incredulous. "We do that?"
“Yeah,” said Evelyn. “And you drowned.”

I blinked. “Okay, back up. I drowned because I turned a criminal over to the police?”

“You nearly drowned because you were stupid enough to try to chase a criminal,” Evelyn corrected.

“I… chased a criminal?” I asked, incredulous.

“Yep,” she said, popping the ‘p’. “Hey, why I don’t I get the file from James?”

Moments later, she returned with a manila folder, an irritated James trailing behind.

“Not a good idea to bring this up again,” James muttered. “Last time someone opened this file, they involuntarily went scuba diving and lost their memory on everything that had happened these past two years.”

“Shush, we need to show Lilia this—who knows, this kind of stuff might trigger the removal of the memory block,” Evelyn said.

She handed me the file.

I opened it to see a pile of papers inside. The first page showed a grainy picture of a large, hairy man that had almost a comical beard with a brief biography of him. His name was Cellere Fertunita.

“Brutal,” I muttered.

“Yeah, he was pretty scary,” Steve agreed.

I shook my head. “No, I meant, what kind of parents name their kids Cellerc?”

But inside, I felt some kind of sickening jolt in my stomach upon seeing his picture. Even if my mind didn’t remember him, my stomach did.

The other pages were dedicated to the crimes he had committed as well as sightings and witnesses.

“He’s the one who drowned me?” I asked.

Everyone nodded.

“He was a vicious jewelry thief who used aggressive actions to get his way. I think he broke a man’s neck once,” Steve said.

“Glad that didn’t happen to you,” Evelyn mumbled.

I fingered the pages. “How did you get this information?”

Steve jerked his head to James. “Computer genius there, remember? He does some furious hacking for us on our cases.”
I looked back at the picture of the man, and then suddenly, something hit me. It was a large impact, like a truck ramming through a brick wall. I could feel the bricks crumbling in my mind; something important was breaking through the barriers.

The riverbank was slippery, but I continued running. Mud slicked my shoes, and my clothes felt heavy with the swirling morning mist.

I could see Fertunita ahead of me, the buckles of the briefcase of stolen diamonds flashing in the pale rays of the sun.

He was about ten feet ahead of me, so I pressed myself to sprint harder. If he got away, if he sold those diamonds... No, this was my chance to stop him before the police did. The police were always too late, but I was there, running dangerously close to the water after him.

I panted, my lungs screaming for a proper breath. But I had to keep running.

I was closer, closer to Fertunita, so close that I could just reach out and grab the briefcase—

He suddenly whirled around and caught me off guard. He seized the chance, and shoved me to the side of the river where I slid on the slippery riverbank and fell into the river with a splash. I flailed in the deep water; I knew how to swim, but in my panic, I couldn't think straight.

My lungs burned as I tried to claw at the riverbank while Fertunita ran farther and farther away.

My friends caught up with me, as they had been following. I was unconscious by then, and they had to drag me out of the water.

I suddenly stumbled, my head spinning and my vision of the room whirling as a whole load of other memories permeated my head with bursts and flashes of color.

“I remember, guys,” I gasped as my friends looked at me with worry. “I remember everything.”

My name is Lilia Johnson, and because of my stupid mistakes, I almost lost the only people that I've ever even considered as family. I was different. Headstrong, stubborn, stupid, even. But these people I know, James, Evelyn, and Steve, they shaped me into the person I am.

I lost my memory for a while and stayed in a coma for two weeks, immensely worrying my friends.

I was confused, lost, and had no idea who my friends were.

But now I remember. And I won’t forget again. Ever.
The Disappearance of the Proletariats

It all began on a warm, breezy night in Cairo, Egypt, 2011 AD. Dr. Yvonne Williams, an archaeologist, was getting ready to leave work after the long day’s work. As she stepped out her mucky, disorganized office in downtown Cairo, she heard the street vendors and merchants chanting their last slogans for the evening and the song of the crickets, a high, melodic tune just beginning.

It had been a couple of months now that Dr. Williams was researching about Queen Nefertiti, an Egyptian ruler who was the wife of Akhenaten. The couple were part of the 18th dynasty of Egypt and were known for a religious revolution in which they proposed the idea of worshipping only the sun disc, Aten. Dr. Williams had been trying to see how the ancient Egyptians reacted to this idea and how the artifacts at the time were related to the family of Queen Nefertiti and the opinions at the time. Along the way, her research led her to Dr. Jason Sean who was now one of her favorite colleagues and co-worker. Together both friends tried to learn more about the 18th dynasty.

A couple of days before, Dr. Sean had asked Yvonne to come to his office in Alexandria for an important cause... “… probably related to our research,” she mused. “Finally I can go home away from this indecent office and puzzling and mysterious research,” she stated loudly without meaning to. That night she drove off to her estate located on the outskirts of Cairo.

The next day she decided to drive to Alexandria to meet up with Dr. Sean and discuss both of their findings. Yvonne calculated that it would take her about two hours to drive from Cairo to Alexandria, a distance of about 200 kilometers. Throughout the long drive, she listened to the radio and heard some quite perplexing news. News Reporter “It is said that Dr. Sean of Alexandria has mysteriously disappeared without any trace…” Yvonne couldn’t believe it; she must have been dreaming! This could not have been happening! Why, to Jason, her partner through her hardships and research, why? Now everything made sense, Jason not answering his phone, not replying his texts...still, she couldn’t believe it. Carrying a spare key to Jason’s office, Yvonne spun around roads and pressed her foot to the pedal to get to Jason's office faster.

When she had reached the outskirts of Alexandria, her blue Mercedes Benz started to make unsatisfying noises like clubs and clinks. Suddenly it started to clunk, club, and cluck, and her car stopped.

Yvonne was in a rage of fury. She couldn’t believe that Sean wouldn’t reply her texts and now while driving to Alexandria her Mercedes broke down. “I cannot believe my luck,” as she kicked her clunker. After calling for help, she waited impatiently. Tapping her foot on the uneven pavement of the old, run-down highway she screamed and cursed everything she had, from her job to her parents. In the distance, she could see the bright lights of the yellow tow truck coming closer and closer.

Finally, she got a ride to Alexandria and had the chance to rent a car and find a hotel to sleep in. That night she could not sleep. Her mind wandered and she shook in fright. In the morning she woke up to the song of the happy, joyful tune of the robins. She stood up and wore her beige pants and brown shirt and slowly making no noise she stepped out of her bedroom.
She sat in her rented car and ignited the old, rusty engine of the Camry 2003 model. She then proceeded to go to Sean’s office and find his whereabouts. After arriving at Sean’s office, she trudged up the old, creaking stairs and found herself in front the comforting office door. She frantically searched her purse for the key and found it sitting right next to her phone. She took it out and carefully inserted it in the keyhole and turned for the door to open. Slowly walking in she smelled the damp, wet office smell and continued through the disorganized office just like hers. In the corners of the room, she saw piles of papers and artifacts laying on the floor and dusty bookshelves.

Finally, she came across an unusual area in her colleague’s office it was only littered with crumbs and a lonesome trinket box. Once observing it she inferred it was an ancient Egyptian box probably for jewelry. As she dug through Sean’s messy work she found that trinket box was more than it seemed. In a couple of his notes, Sean talked about a glowing effect, noises coming from the box, and movement of the box. Yvonne was really puzzled, after looking some more she found Sean’s journal and saw it was wide open on his mahogany desk. She looked through and almost every entry was about the box. She finally came to the last diary entry. It was dated to a week ago, around the same time Yvonne had lost contact with him. She glanced at the bottom of the page and saw it was blank and that his handwriting was rushed; she then realized that Sean was in trouble.

It seemed that the box had something to do with Sean’s disappearance but she didn’t know the connection. The box was here and Sean was lost; what could have happened a week ago? Then an idea popped into her head Sean’s office had cameras so she could hack into the system and observe the evidence it had filmed. What she saw on the footage baffled her. She saw sean come into his office like usual and went directly to his desk. He then took out the trinket box and struggled to open it using a tool he pried it open. Suddenly on the computer’s screen, she saw a storm rising and Sean being sucked into the trinket box.

She could not believe it how can a small box like this one could do that. It broke all types of scientific laws and theories. She quickly stuffed everything into her purse took Sean’s journal and left the office.

Hurrying up the hotel’s stairs she knew she should open the box and figure things out. But being so exhausted from the day’s work made her jump into bed and sleep for a couple of hours. Once she woke up she put the trinket box on her study and decide to pry it open. However, whatever she did the lid did not budge and she was very frustrated so she decided to destroy the lid. After hours of frustration, she got the lid open. Suddenly the world around her changed. She was sucked into a vortex where she was blown and rocked back and forth until she was caught and then released in a whole new world. She kept falling and falling until she hit hard bedrock.

She then realized she was no longer in the hotel room but in a different place in a different time. It seemed like she was sucked into the past just like she saw Sean on the security cameras. She didn’t know what to do; she was lost.

Walking around the strange town, she realized she was far away from home it even seemed that she was in Ancient Egypt. There were long rows of homes made of mud and rich, beautiful palaces for the nobles. People were resting on benches and in the shade. Townsfolk were talking and bartering in the shops. But how could that be? Time travel was an impossible thing indeed but then it hit her she realized that this might be the explanation why Sean did not answer his phone and mysteriously disappeared without a trace maybe because he was after all 5000 years back in time when the kingdom of Egypt thrived under the rule of the pharaoh.
Quickly, she decided to fit in so no one would realize she was an outsider so she shopped around with some old coins she had put in her purse to study from Sean’s office. She then changed into her new clothes, applied makeup, and wore her fancy leather sandals. Right there she looked amazingly like an ancient Egyptian woman. Since her origins were half Egyptian and half German she looked amazingly like an Egyptian. She looked around and tried to find Sean after searching for hours she wearily came to a bench and sat down. She was so exhausted. She watched as the townspeople passed by. Then right there out of the blue from the corner of her eye, she thought she saw Sean kneeling down next to an inn. She then took her possessions and dashed towards Sean, calling his name frantically…

To be continued.
The Wish Pearl

My mother would always be the star of my life, my lifelong inspiration. I could never be anything without her. She was a scientific inventor, and honestly, I thought that she could create anything. It had always been her dream to create a teleporter. It had never been done before, considering the insane amount of work it would take, but cracking teleportation was the biggest of her dreams.

Everyday, she would sit in her office, for about 10 hours, and do nothing but invent. I would leave for school, and she would be in her office. When I’d come back from school, she would again be sitting in her small invention room, with random materials all over the place, and one small table about the size of a nightstand with nothing on it but a glass of orange juice with a purple straw. That was basically her everyday life. She would stop her work once in the middle of the day for a break (and for lunch) and at the end of the day to eat dinner and be with me!

But one day, I came downstairs for breakfast and I saw my mom sitting at the table where I would usually sit, looking very disturbed. She was eating a waffle, and after each bite, she would lean back in her chair, looking like she was deeply pondering something. I wasn't sure what had happened, because I had never seen her like this before. She put her waffle down and came up to me. She pulled up close to my face, and said, “I’m going to do it. I’m going to create the teleporter.”

God, I knew that once there was an idea in my mom’s head, there was no getting it out. So for the next couple of weeks, I did not see my mom. Not once. I knew she was in her office, working. I just hoped that her hard work would pay off. She had told me before starting her life-changing project that she wouldn’t stop until she built it. Then, she would take a couple of days of rest, and start to program it. When she finished part one of her project, I couldn’t have been more impressed. She opened the door and walked out of her office, she looked like she hadn’t slept in days. But she was smiling. Like always.

I knew that the next few days I would actually get to be with her. More than usual, that is. When I was about to leave for school the next day, my mom came running up to me and grabbed me in her arms. She lifted me up and squeezed. I wrapped my arms around her in return and gave her a small kiss on her right cheek. I waved goodbye on my way out and raced to school as fast as I could.

When I came home, once again I was greeted by a big hug and some freshly made spaghetti. I ate as slow as I could, savoring each bite so it would last longer, as my mom’s cooking was truly the best I had ever tasted. But later that night, when my mom was fast asleep, I decided to get up.

I tiptoed out of my bed, out of my lavender colored room. I tried my best to quietly run down the stairs and I reached the door to my mom’s office. As I opened the door, the hinge’s squeak echoed throughout the house. I closed the door behind me, I heard the sounds of victory bells jingling inside my brain. The teleporter was beautiful. A huge square with rounded edges created out of metal, the inside all white, and the outside a shiny grey titanium color. I walked up to the computer, sitting on the side next to it, while rubbing my hands together. I was about to place my hands on the computer, when I felt as if I was being tugged forward. I tried to take a few steps back, but I couldn’t. My feet were sliding towards the teleporter as I tried to pull away. Within a few seconds, I had disappeared into the teleporter.
I screamed as loud as I possibly could as I felt my body being stretched, scrunched, and pulled apart. I couldn’t feel myself, and I suddenly felt as if I had been electrocuted and was having a seizure at the same time. Suddenly, I hit the ground flat on my face, with my arms tucked in by my chest and my legs bent behind me. I couldn’t stop screaming, as I tossed and turned and twitched on the open ground.

After a couple of minutes, I opened my eyes and tried to force my limp body to get up. It wasn’t until then that I realized that I had been crying. I looked around to see that I was on a purely uninhabited island. It seemed as if the entire island was a bare piece of cement that had been put onto a jumbo sized floatie and dropped into the ocean. The island slightly moved every so often, as if old waves that had spent their life trying to move the island had decided to hopelessly try once again.

I looked around for a building, the most common sort of object that one expected to find everywhere. It wasn’t too hard to find, as the only building on this barren cement island was an empty, clear glass cube building with the width of about a school auditorium. I started to panic. What was I doing? I needed to find a way to get home. I began to pace around, and the more I thought about being home, the faster my heart started to beat. Maybe I would be able to find a clue inside the building. I walked up to one of the walls, and a door appeared. It opened automatically for me, and as I entered, I heard a slight twinkling sound all around me. Around my wrist, as I entered the building, a gold bracelet appeared. It was flat, very thin, and about one centimeter wide. Right in the center, there was a small ring, with a single pearl inside. The pearl was pure white, similar to the one my mom had and wore all the time.

As I stepped inside, I suddenly felt a huge gust of wind, and I thought I had been dropped off of the edge of a skyscraper. I screamed the entire way down, a grand total of about 5 minutes, and fell flat on my face when I hit the floor.

I entered a sort of city, that looked similar to San Francisco, that was bustling with activity. I looked up, but all I could see was the sky. No glass box, no cement land, nothing. The only thing that was completely different about city was the people. They all looked like a mix between aliens and humans. For example, one man only had one eye and had an antennae. Another had 4 arms and 3 feet per leg. One woman had extremely huge ears and her daughter had 2 wings.

I was impressed, but I was terrified. I tried to jump up, to go back to the cement floor, go back to my home. I shouldn’t be here. I sat down on the edge of the street, and buried my head into my hands. Lost in my thoughts, I fell asleep. However, within a couple of seconds, I was awakened by someone who accidentally kicked me with one of their 8 legs. I looked up and noticed that rather than cars in this city, above the road, people were being carried by those who could fly. It was just like the city we had back at home, with the traffic and the stoplights, but rather than cars, they used people with wings as their transportation.

I caught the eye of one of these transporters, with wings and a tail. She smiled at me, and I found myself smiling back. Hopefully all of the people of this area were like this. But all I really wanted was to go home. I wiped away the tears as I realized that while I was figuring out how I would get home, I had to stay calm. Otherwise, nothing would work out. I walked down the side of the street and hit a store that was titled: Food, Snacks, and More!. I entered the store to hear a jingle from the bell on the door, and thought of what food might be here, based on what I thought was common in most places. I immediately thought macaroni.

I asked the cashier, “Could I get one plate of macaroni please?”
He answered with a harsh, “You got any Jafquar?”

I was so surprised to hear such a word, such a silly word, but when I noticed he was serious, I tried my best to politely answer, “I’m sorry, I am new here? Could you explain to me what Jafquar is?”

He answered simply, “Money. You got anything?” I shook my head and left the store with my head hanging low.

I once again sat down at the side of the street, closed my eyes, and started to sniffle. I wanted to scream, scream it all out and open my eyes and be home, be with my mom again. I stomped my feet on the ground as loud as I could, I heard footsteps walking towards me. Wanting to find some way to get money, I had to make a good impression. I wiped away my tears, and put on a fake smile. As I looked up, I saw the same girl who was flying people around on the street. She held her hand out and grinned.

I reached out and grabbed it at once. Warm, but clammy. I wanted to speak, so I could possibly make a friend, but I had no idea what I would say.

I moved my dark brown straight hair away from my face and simply said, “I’m Alexa. I’m new and lost here.”

She responded, “I could tell. I’m Lily, by the way. You seemed really confused when I first saw you, but I can show you around the area.” I smiled as wide as I could and nodded.

Within a couple of hours, Lily had showed me the entire city, given me a ride on her back around town, and taken me to the city officials to get me a job. Apparently, in this city, you chose a job with the city officials, and then were given the materials necessary to make that happen. At first, when she asked me what I wanted to do here, I really wasn’t sure. My dream had always been to be like my mom, but I knew that there was no way I could create anything as fantastic as her. When I told Lily, she just said that I could be a simple inventor, not as complex as my mom, but still something that I would enjoy. I took her word, and the city gave me a computer and some wires for programming.

Lily took me to her home, and it seemed that she was the only one who lived there. It had more of a modern look to it, as most of it was white and black, with sleek objects filling the room. It had a kitchen, 2 bathrooms, and 2 bedrooms. She said that since I didn’t have a home, I could use her extra bedroom and bathroom.

We lived together for some time, and we both did our jobs. She would leave early in the morning, and set out to fly people around. I, on the other hand, would wake up quite late, get ready, and set out for the building that the city had let me borrow. It had said on the top: Alexa’s Creations. So far, I had created some color changing buttons and a couple of tables that moved with a joystick. I would make quite a bit of money, as I was one of the few stores in the area that sold random, yet interesting, inventions.

When I first started working there, I just hoped I would be able to create a way to get home. But after some time, as I met the city’s people, I decided that I would stay for a couple of days to see what my life would be like. As guilty as I felt, I really liked it there, and almost didn’t want to leave. I lost track of time, and ended up staying there for about a month. Every day, it was the same routine. Walk down the beautiful streets lined with roses and wood buildings. Take a right on Laney Avenue. Walk into my store to here the classical music that was always playing inside. After work, I would come back to Lily’s house and fall on my back onto the bed. But one day, right before I was about
to go to sleep in my bedroom, well, Lily’s bedroom, I remembered my home. I remembered my mom, my house, and my school. I realized the intense worry and pain my mom must have been under. I suddenly felt a strong urge to leave, to hate this world that had captured me. I started to hyperventilate. What if I couldn’t find a way home?

Immediately, I heard a soft humming coming from my right wrist. I lifted it up, and I saw the bracelet that had appeared when I had first entered the glass building. The pearl right in the center was glowing a bright yellow, as if someone had stuck a golden light bulb inside the pearl.

As I looked closely, 2 words appeared on the pearl: **GO BACK**. I slowly moved my left hand towards the pearl and gave it a slight rub. I closed my eyes, pressed it, and all I heard was a small clicking noise. And there I was again, in front of the teleporter, but this time, I had a small white pearl in my hands.
The Machine

It was while we were on our way that I regretted picking this destination. Of course, it wasn't like I had a choice, but I really wished I had not agreed to come. The reason for my regret were the twists and turns on the highway that we were going on. It made me feel nauseous like when I was once on a boat that kept rocking back and forth, so I decided to name the occasion “getting carsick”. The ride was boring, and I had luckily brought my pillow, so after a while, I dozed off to sleep. When I woke up in the car we had reached the house along the beach that my Mom had rented. It was a pretty big house and had a sea view two floors and had an amazing view of the ocean. My mother had started unloading the kitchen groceries we had gotten with us while I was helping my dad with the other luggage.

Since Mom and Dad were both organizing our things, I decided to explore the house. The first floor had all the bedrooms, the kitchen, living room, and restrooms. While the second floor had a huge pool table, a balcony with a view of the ocean, and a large telescope to see the stars from the balcony. When I had hauled all my stuff into one of the bedrooms that I picked, my Mom said that we had to go get a couple of things from the nearby store. When we came back Mom had started cooking our dinner. My Dad and me went upstairs and played a few games of pool, which was a lot of fun. When my Mom called me and my dad down to dinner I immediately started to put away the pool balls and billiard sticks while my dad went downstairs. But something caught my eye. The eight ball had a large crack in it. I picked it up, but the crack became even larger until the ball split into half in my hands. I gasped, I would be in so much trouble, I looked at the halves in my hand until I saw something sticking out of the halves of the ball. I quickly took it out.

It was a small cube and on each side of it had a series of numbers. One side had a button with the word activate on it in bold letters. 3 sides had numbers and were labeled month, day, and year. The last 2 sides had latitude and longitude. That night after dinner I started to play around with the cube I had found in the eight ball. I started to turn the dials with the numbers and coordinates. After that I pressed the button labeled activate multiple times, but nothing happened. Just some piece of junk, I thought. I put it down on the bedside table. But just as I did it started to vibrate and there was a burst of light and I fainted.

I woke to the sound of speaking. I seemed to be lying down on a dirt covered floor. I blinked a few times until my vision cleared. “Whoa!” I exclaimed. “Who are you?” I was confronted by three men that were all dressed in ponchos and leather and was on a beach. “Where am I?” I said in panic. I felt something in my pocket. The cube was still there. Then it started to speak.

“Hello I am Tyso your time machine operator and A.I.,” said the cube.

“What? Where am I?” I said frantically.

“August third 1492 The Bahamas, significance: day Columbus found America.”

“I traveled through time!” I gasped.

“Affirmative,” said the cube. I started to walk around.
“What to do? What to do?” I kept asking myself. I looked at the three men, “If this is where and when Columbus finds America, you must be the American Indians!” I exclaimed. At that second there was a huge rush of people to the three ships were sailing towards the shore. In a few minutes, the sips had sent smaller boats to the shore, and on the first boat, there was a tall man with a black sailing hat and blue coat. He had brown curly hair and a broad nose and blue eyes. He started to walk towards the group of Native Americans.

“Hello, I am Christopher Columbus I have arrived here with orders from the Queen of England.” He said in a hoarse voice, “You, young man, come here.” He pointed to me. Quickly, I started to run.

“Get him!” shouted Columbus. I took out the cube and glanced behind me. The men were catching up.

“Come on! Come on!” I said. “Tyso take me anywhere but here, quickly!”

“Yes Sir.” There was a whir as the number dials started to move.

“Come on Tyso!” I then saw it, the end of the trail which in fact was a cliff, nervously I glanced behind me, and to make things worse, the men now had dogs.

“Come on Tyso! There are three seconds until I fall down a cliff. “I need you to...Ahhhhhh!” I shouted in midair.

“Done Sir,” said Tyso. There was a crack and then an explosion of light, and I fainted, only left with the image of me being one centimeter from the ground.

When I woke up, I was back in my bed and the cube was still in my hand. I realized that the cube and the time machine was just a funny dream, so I went back to sleep.

In the morning, I woke up with a lot of dirt on the back of my clothes, and that was when I realized that the cube and time travel experience wasn’t a dream, but reality. Again, that night I searched up longitude and latitude and the dates of every historical event in the world and prepared myself for another leap through time in the machine.
ARTWORK

SAIRA HAMID; GRADE 7
NISHEET PANDA; GRADE 7

The Light in the Dark