Literature & Art by Pinellas County Teens

FALL 2020

The pages of the Mosaic are insight into the minds and artists of our future. By supporting, encouraging and guiding young talent you can make tomorrow more beautiful...ENJOY!

Avery Armanious

The Secret Animal Shape-Shifting Society

Safety Harbor Public Library
Age 13, Eighth Grade

Leslie was a part of a secret society, called the Secret Animal Shape-Shifting Society, or as known to its members, S.A.S.S. They had to be secret, because after the Great War, all shape-shifters were killed, and it was made genetically impossible to have children who are shape-shifters. However, the shifters that can shape-shift into animals can not be affected by the mutation. That's because a child with any animal shape-shifting ancestors, born on a night with a full moon, would become shape-shifters.

Leslie checked her watch as she ran down the streets of Blueford. She had an impromptu emergency S.A.S.S meeting, and it was bad to be late. Leslie ran faster, and faster. She was close to being late when she pushed open the door to her house.

"Yes, yes, I know I'm late, but I'm here," Leslie said to the empty living room. Hopefully, everyone would be able to hear her from the basement. As Leslie came down the stairs, a familiar old man glared at her.
"Brad, just because you happen to be the oldest, you are not in charge," Hunter, Leslie's best friend said, "Rena has been here the longest. Let her tell Leslie how late she is."

"Leslie, you're late." Rena didn't miss a beat. Leslie knew she was teasing her so when she went to her usual spot on the couch, she smiled slightly at her best friend's mother. Rena didn't return the smile. It seemed as though their brave and powerful leader was scared about something, which would make sense because Rena hated making emergency meetings.

"So, Rena why exactly are we here?" This was Krisopher. He had moved into Bluefort a few years ago, and found S.A.S.S.

Rena dug through the black bag that she always kept with her. When she found what she was looking for, she held it up angrily. It was a piece of paper. Looking closely, it was a Wanted poster. "This. This is why we are here. Someone has tipped us off to the government , and now they know we exist. They are going to hunt us down."
Leslie traded a glance with Hunter. "Rena, do we have a plan?" She asked.

"No, but that is why we are here. I need maybe two or three of us to go and figure out how to stop the government from taking us all. Any volunteers?" With one look at her best friend, Leslie knew what she had to do.

She put her hand in the air. ''I'll go. I'm tough, strong and incredibly sassy." At this, Rena cracked a smile, which Leslie took to be a good sign. "Okay, fine, but I need one or two more people."

Hunter put his own hand up. Leslie could tell that Rena didn't want her child to be risking his life with the government, but she couldn't show any favorites, even with her own son. "I am smart, and when I transform, I'll be able to fly and see if there is anything that is useful. I can also make a gadget that can turn Leslie and I into our animals on command, instead of once a month."

With the promise of the gadget, Rena could not refuse, and no one else wanted to go. The meeting was dismissed, and Hunter and Leslie went to their rooms to pack. They were leaving the next day.

Past midnight, Leslie was still awake, thinking about what might happen once they got to The Square. Hunter knocked on her door, and came in. He was holding two bracelets that looked a lot like replicas of vintage string bracelets people used before the Great War.

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(continued from page 1)

"Are those the gadgets?"

Hunter nodded and handed a black and white one to Leslie. She pushed her dark curly hair out of her face and looked at it. Even this close it still looked like a regular bracelet.

She put it on, and thanked Hunter, who left. Leslie fell asleep quickly.

In the morning Leslie couldn't eat much. She was worrying and worrying, but Rena still made her eat a pancake. As soon as breakfast was done, Leslie and Hunter grabbed their bags, and with goodbye and good lucks trailing after them, they hit the road.

The two started walking toward The Square, which was a long ways away, stopping at stations to grab some food and water, and getting some rest. In about a day, they walked into The Square. It was huge, with a large circular building in the middle.

"I think that's where we have to go." Hunter said. Leslie nodded. It definitely was.

It took him a bit, but Hunter finally figured out how to hack into the lock of the back door. Leslie walked in alone, while Hunter transformed into his eagle-self and kept watch. She looked for any room that might possibly be the one where the mayor works. Leslie honestly thought it would be harder, but she saw an exceptionally large man walk out of a room that had flashing bright sign reading: MAYOR'S OFFICE, TOP SECRET. Leslie shook her head. This stupid guy should not be running this city.

Leslie slipped in and pulled open drawers, looking for anything that would be interesting. There were folders after folders, and Leslie did not know what to grab, so she grabbed every single folder in sight. As she was walking out, Leslie was encountered by someone.

"What are you doing with those folders, ma'am?" This person's voice was very broken, like a robot. Leslie looked around carefully and punched the guy in the nose. While he was distracted, Leslie ran out the door, where an eagle was waiting for her. They both took off at high speed, not stopping until they were in the forests surrounding The Square.

Leslie turned into a fox, and she and Hunter made their way deeper into the forest. As soon as they were out of sight, the two of them transformed back.

"Files. I'm not sure what they are though." Leslie said showing her partner the folders. Hunter opened them, reading each speedily. The more he read, the bigger his smile got.

"Okay, so we finally have something. The mayor is taking money promised to the education system, and using it, not only to torture shape-shifters, but to torture anyone who even slightly defies him."

"How are they being tortured?" Leslie tried to keep the disgust off her face, but some things were difficult to hide.

"Okay, so this is the interesting part. The mayor is inserting a chip into their heads, and they all become his personal army, which makes them like robots!"

Robots? That means the guy that Leslie ran into was a robot. That was an interesting thing, indeed.

"So... what do we do?" Leslie asked Hunter. Knowing him, he always had a plan. And sure enough, he did not disappoint.

"The New Moon Festival is tomorrow. The mayor has to make a speech there, and so we can expose him then." Hunter gave Leslie all the details of his plan, and they went into the forest for dinner and to sleep.

The next day, Leslie was up early. She stood up and stretched. Hunter was already up, working on something that looked like a projector. They both ate breakfast silently, thinking about their plan.

After, they went to the festival to set up. The speech was the first thing, so they needed to be quick. "You got everything, Leslie?" Hunter asked.

Leslie nodded and worked on setting up the projector from her perch in the tree. They both had turned into their animals, and hopefully no one would notice.

The two of them barely noticed that the crowds were filling up until the mayor cleared his throat, ready to start his speech.

"Ladies, and gentlemen, welcome to the New Moon Festival. I am pleased to announce that--" The mayor stopped mid sentence. There was a bright light projecting on the stage behind him. Everyone in the audience was trying to read it.

This was Leslie's cue. In human form, Leslie ran upstage. "This is a document found in the mayor's office. It, in depth, illustrates that the money promised to go to your children's education was put to torture methods, for both animal shape-shifters and regular people. This is the man running our city."

The mayor looked very nervous, but he did not have enough time to explain himself, before the giant mob came in. When they were done attacking the mayor, who was quickly arrested, Leslie and Hunter changed into their animals. There was a huge gasp from the audience, and then someone started clapping. After that, everyone joined in.

The shape-shifters were safe.

Eliana Smith

On The Edge of The Forest

Safety Harbor Public Library
Age 17, Twelfth Grade

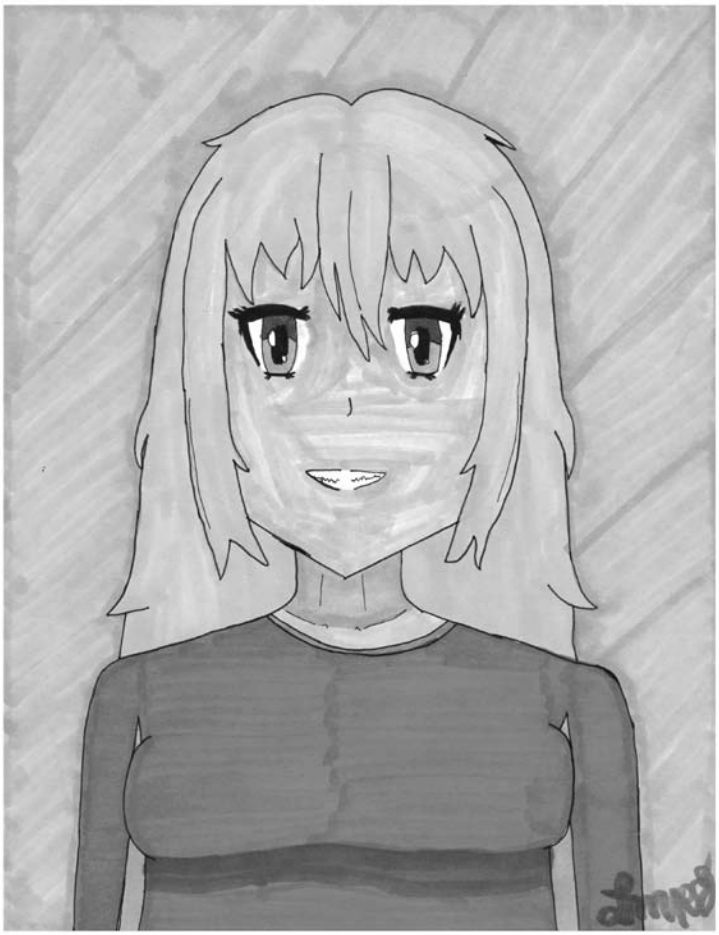
Leilani Pollack

Safety Harbor Public Library
Age 13, Eighth Grade

Entertaining Grace

Pride

Fire and Ice



Carolynn Steffel

Seas the Day

Dunedin Public Library
Age 14, Ninth Grade

We all have that one place where we feel truly free and at peace, for me that's the beach. The feeling of the sun on my bronze skin, running on the sand trying not to burn my feet, the smell of the salt hitting my nose, the spray of the ocean, the delicious taste of ice cream, and my mom screaming my name. Why was my mom screaming my name? I suddenly was pulled out of my dream like state. "Come on Coventina, you need to get into the car". My mom screamed excitedly.

I'm so totally excited to be cramped for the thirty-minute drive to the port.

What time is it, I thought before the world went dark. "WAKE UPPPPPPPP YOU SACK OF LAZY BONES"! My older sister Roxanne screamed.

"Hurry up Coventina you need to put your stuff down in your room, then go down to the pool to meet your cousins". My mom ordered brushing her shoulder length brown hair out of her eyes as I climbed up the ramp to the ship.

"KK mom. Give me five minutes". I replied, getting all the bags and the key while heading downstairs. As I set my bags down. I heard a short blast signaling that the ship was leaving. I felt the "BUZZ" of my phone in my pocket. I took it out and checked the caller. It's my dad. Ugh, he decided to work instead of coming on the cruise. Oh well, guess I need to be happy now.

"Hi dad, how are you"? I uttered trying to sound as happy as possible.

"Hey sweetheart! I'm doing great. How are you doing"? My dad responded not noticing my sugary polite tone.

"I'm doing good, but mom told me I have to go meet my cousins at the pool".

"Oh, ok honey I love you." He exhaled sounding like a lost puppy.

"Ok bye dad. Talk to you later". This was a complete lie. I wouldn't call him back. He chose work over his family. I heard Five short blasts come from the ship I wonder what that means I thought.

I figured I should go meet my family now. As I reached for the door.

"AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH". I heard screams and shouts coming from what I assumed was the top deck. My hand went to my phone. I fiddled with my password as I walked out to my balcony to try to get cell service. As I went out, I could see all sorts of debris in the water. I decided to go back inside.

"Okay something is definitely wrong, but what happened"? I ask myself, talking out loud.

I agreed to go to find more survivors. As I ventured out to the hall knocking on random doors. The floor started to sway, I barley stayed standing with the help of the wall "Coventina". A familiar voice called out. I run up to her ignoring the slight angle the ship is at.

"What happened? What's going on? What was all that noise"? I asked in a quick panicky voice.

"There was a big storm no one could escape. Katie was swept overboard, Loretta drowned, Mom and Ophelia fell overboard".

"Then what happened to Kacy where is sh". I asked, getting interrupted by loud off pitched singing. We turned to each other.

"Found her"! We yelled at the same time.

"Hey guys". Kacy yelled while laughing.

"Hi Kacy, are you ok"? Roxanne mumbled.

"Yeah I am fine why wouldn't I be"?

"Something happened to the ship". I replied trying to talk as slowly as I could muster.

"Oh no, is Katie alright". Kacy asked.

"Yeah she got into a lifeboat with mom I came down here to look for Coventina". Roxanne said.

The ship began to sway even more to the left.

"We need to get into a lifeboat". I said as we ran to the top deck.

"We pushed the door open with ease.

As our eyes finally adjusted to the light, I saw the death and destruction that took place bodies and chairs were spread out everywhere.

Seas the Day (continued from page 1)

"Guys we need to get into a lifeboat". I yelled my voice cracking. I looked and saw Kacy about to climb over the side of the ship.

"Kacy what are you doing". Roxanne asked her voice stronger than mine.

"I'm getting off the ship". Kacy said like it was the most obvious thing ever.

"Really so what are you going to do when you get into the water swim to land"? Roxanne asked.

"Yeah, I didn't think that far ahead". She said embarrassed.

"Let's just get into a lifeboat".

"Yeah sure sounds good". They said at the same time I was waiting for one of them to say jinx, but it never happened. We decided to do the stupidest thing in horror movies. Kacy and Roxanne would go look for a lifeboat while I stayed on the main deck looking for people who are still alive. After a few minutes of searching with no luck I decided to see Loretta's body.

I had to bit my fist to keep in a scream when I saw a person I loved lying face down not wanting to believe it was actually her as I went up to her I lifted up her hair and saw the horrified face of my younger sister. I let the hair fall as I fell backwards onto the deck letting out silent screams of grief. As I started hysterically crying Kacy and Roxanne came running over to me.

"Guess what we found a lifeboat we can use, but we have to hurry the ship is slanted even more". Roxanne said.

"Are you ok Coventina". Kacy asked seeing my state. "Yeah I'm fine, let's just go to the lifeboat". I said pushing the sadness that was eating away at me to the bottom of my stomach. As we walked down the narrow path to the side of the boat another wave launched itself against the boat pushing us the ship over but only for a moment before going right side up again. The three of us looked into each other's eyes as if to say we need to get of this ship. We picked up our pace from a brisk walk to a light jog. After five minutes of jogging to try and find a lifeboat we found they all fell into the ocean except for a little dingy looking one that could barely fit two people, but it would have to work.

"Roxanne and Kacy get into the lifeboat I will lower it down for you". I said having no idea how to lower a lifeboat down into the water. They both climbed into the lifeboat as I looked around for the rope system that was holding the lifeboat up. After a few seconds of searching I finally found the pulley system and lowered it on top of the rolling ocean. As the lifeboat crashed into the ocean, I realized I had to jump into the aggravated ocean and then climb into the boat. I muttered a small prayer under my breath and with a surge of courage jumped into the angry water. With the waves rolling I lost all sense of direction I swam in the direction I thought was up only to see the light getting dimmer and dimmer this is it I will never see my family again I will never be able to get a boyfriend. I could feel death take its grip onto me as my eyes were closing, I felt two hands grab around my arms pulling me up. I felt my body fall onto the hard wood of the lifeboat. I looked up to see who my savior was it was Kacy she was soaked and breathing heavy with exhaustion.

"Thank you for saving me". I said gratefulness oozing out of my voice.

"No problem I just did what Lin would do". Kacy replied being completely serious.

"Ok guys stop with all the sappiness". Roxanne said clearly annoyed.

"Fine". I replied as I picked up the oars to start rowing knowing full well Kacy was too tired to do it Roxanne was too lazy. A few hours have past now, and the sun was about to set my arms felt like they were melting off, "Kacy the sun is about to set would you mind rowing so I could sleep". I asked hoping she will say yes.

"Ugh fine I guess I will have to do what Lin always does". Kacy said with a mix of excitement and sadness.
"Guys wake up I think we are here". Kacy said the tiredness dripping through her voice. I opened my eyes and saw palm trees on an island.

"We did it". I yelled my voice full of excitement.

Mackenzie Riling

Shadow Rose

Dunedin Public Library
Age 11, Sixth Grade

Katrina Diel

Man Down

Dunedin Public Library
Age 17, Twelfth Grade

Yesterday.
Unable to mend.
Let us begin.
Again.

Crashing. Clashing.
The moon and the sun.
Pulling, kneading,
fighting for the tide.
The day and the night
may never put behind their strife.

Pounding. Whipping.
Moments.
Of silence, for the fallen.
May the moon commemorate them
while the sun forgets them.
Days of glory wash away while I wring out my
Emotions.
And hang them on a clothesline made of stars.

Falling. Down.
Twisting the knife within my skull.
Pain, drowning.
Breathe.
Feeling breath.
Just.
Feeling.

Running. From what?
Out of time.
Turning to black.
Seizures.
Of color.
Disappear like the memories of
this day.

Repeat. Repeat.
The battle will never end.
I will seize.
Tomorrow.

Victoria Lisi

We Were Winning

East Lake Community Library
Age 16, Eleventh Grade

We used to be kings, rising to meet the sun
Looming over the world, which seemed so insignificant back then
We placed a crown upon our heads, our eyes fixated on our bejeweled dreams
We didn't realize how heavy the crown was back then

We used to be children, teenagers lazily laying on the cool concrete benches of school
Laying on the sand, the grass, the carpet of a friend's bedroom
We'd stare upwards, because that was all we saw-infinite possibility
Back then, the world was just us, and whatever lied ahead
Not once did we look around, to the left or the right, to see what the present held

We used to be squabbling seagulls at lunch, congregating, complaining, crying
Laughing, leaning on each other, reaching for the sun too

We used to rise, like sunflowers at dawn
Reaching up, up, up
Up because the Earth felt safe
Because friends were waiting to embrace us with a joking grin
Because we had the power to defy the world back then

We used to think that tomorrow would always come
That we were infinite, that the only way to go was up

We used to believe that we were warriors
That we gallantly rode into battle and always prevailed
We thought we were victorious, vaccinated, protected from the pitfalls of the world around us

Back then, we thought we couldn't be stopped
Back then, we thought we were winning

But today we are quiet
Gone is the carbon from our smiles, our laughs, our faces
Nothing is original now, everything is generated, censored by a screen, concealed by a mask

Today we are caged birds without a song
Muted, forgotten, ignored
We don't reach for the sun, because the sun is outside
And we have finally learned that outside is not ours to conquer
But rather ours to survive

We know that the world isn't small, but massive
A golden grail out of reach, moving along without us
Today we know that we aren't immune

We know that life abruptly
CRASHES.
PLUMMETS.
STOPS.
Time ticks tediously and yet each day has become the same

The halo of the world fades
Our laughter fades
Our smiles fade
And are replaced by a mechanic grin

"Keep going, keep going" it says
We now know that we don't have time

Time to waste whining
To waste believing in the falsehoods of childish comforts
To waste talking about dreams and ambitions
To waste thinking we can be keep winning

Now we have to focus on staying afloat
Bobbing along on the dark water, without a life vest, or a guarantee for tomorrow

We no longer have security or faith in the future
Because the veil has fallen

Today we see the world for what it is - a vicious viper
It wraps itself tighter and tighter
And we sink lower and lower
We are now in the clutch of the devil's grasp

We've been stripped of our innocence, our invincibility, our immunity
Now when we fall, we get hurt
When we're slapped by change, it stings
When we get sick, we become bedridden, isolated, a hazard

We can't mock the world anymore because it has made us meek
We are no longer kings
We haven't changed the world, the world has changed us

We no longer have the strength to defy the world, the zeal to create change
We no longer laugh at death, a thing that used to seem so far away
We don't rally our comrades together, preparing for war
Instead we sit in silence, in the dark, letting them think that we're okay

And maybe we will be
But for now
Without our boldness
Our battle cries
Our blanketed assumption that the world exists for our pleasure and for the taking

We trek alone, feeble optimism our only friend
And for today, the world has won

Kaira Picard

Qilin

Dunedin Public Library
Age 14, Tenth Grade

Katrina Diel

Second Guessing

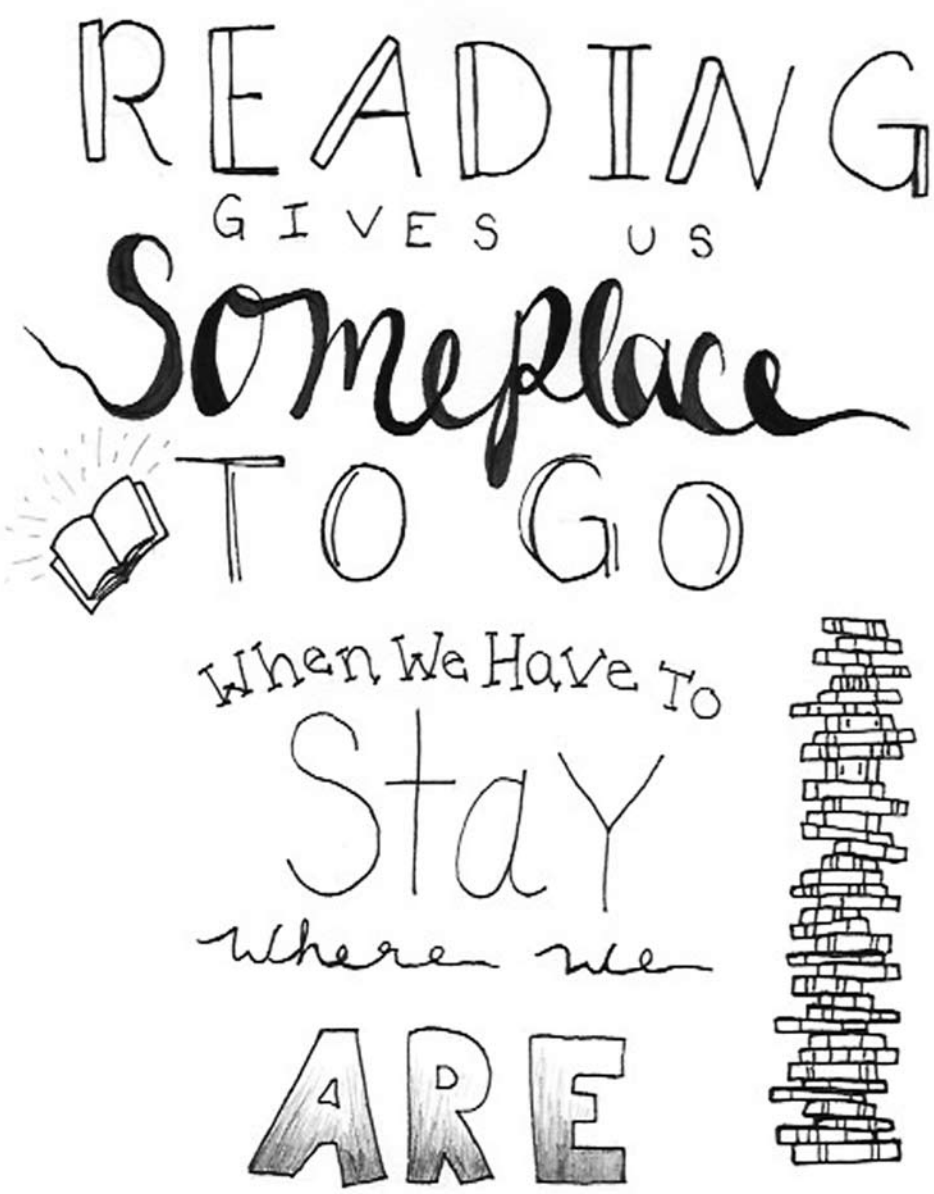
Dunedin Public Library
Age 17, Twelfth Grade

We toss around words
like leftover gum wrappers
and visit therapists like we go to work
—like it is our job.
Because lately I've found
it hard to get by without
asking myself why I
continue to drag my body
around
in a clockwise circle
when the people surrounding me
tell me to go straight.
And being different is not
something you choose it's
something
your
soul
does.
Because if it was up to me
I would
color in the lines
like the rest of them.
But I guess I'd rather
listen.
to the color than
smell.
the blackness.

Ceara Riling

Read

Dunedin Public Library
Age 13, Eighth Grade



Gretchen Haeussner

The Nighttime Forest

Palm Harbor Library
Age 12, Sixth Grade

When the sun went down
one lonely cold night,
a whisper echoed through and through…
"Time to come,
come out from your homes,
and rejoice, for nighttime has once again returned."
And the trees all waved their spindly arms,
and soaked in the rays
of the bright moon, hovering in the sky,
watching the forest as a mother would watch her child.
And while the creatures of the day settled in slumber,
the children of the night appeared,
from their lone holes and caves.
And the wind breathed through the branches
who extended their arms, soaking the breeze in.
A pair of eyes, arctic blue and cold as snow,
teeth gleaming in darkness,
shining silver coats, howling, calling to comrades,
leaving nothing but flurries of snow
whirling in agitation.
And the gentle snowflake ballerinas twirled,
alighting lightly on the forest floor.
And the sky, with its pinpricks of stars,
shone in the dark abyss.
The wind swept through the trees ice-coated arms,
making sounds like glimmering crystals,
adding to the wolves' songs.
The land, covered in a blanket of snow,
stamped with pawprints,
stretched through the wood straight to the horizon.
A sleek form, long tail, and catlike eyes,
prowls through the forest.
A cotton tail sticks out from a bush,
long ears topping it off like a child's headband.
And they are all headed,
headed to the one place.
And as they gather,
with the moon basking down on them,
by the towering forms of boulders,
placed in a circle, huddling together,
almost conspiring with the other stone.
And slowly, the wolves let out their resonating howls,
the cougars, with a bloodcurdling scream,
the hares drum their feet against fallen snow
and hiding green earth waiting to appear,
and the sweet hoo-hoo of the owls, calling into the night,
"I am here".
And finally, all the children of the night
call out to the moon,
their voices echoing through
the cold wood
and the wind sings among them.
And slowly, the moon goes into slumber,
and the ones in the night
disappear into shadows,
and the darkness of their dank caves,
and into their hidden homes.
As the moon settles in,
and the sun awakens,
and the friends of day begin to stir and appear,
the children of the night vanish…
But they will be back again.

Victoria Lisi

When the Shadows Sing

East Lake Community Library
Age 16, Eleventh Grade

Light filters unannounced through my window, the glaring rays of the sun dancing across the glare of my unamused face. I look accusingly at my clock, for sure enough, I overslept once again. Not that the four extra hours have done any wonders for my mood. I must have had a fitful dream, for I'm a simmering volcano, waiting to erupt. The reason for my confused, upset mind has yet to be revealed on the surface, but below my conscious it lurks, waiting for the time to erupt and come into the light. I shake my head feverishly back and forth, trying to wriggle all bad thoughts from my mind. When I finish, my eyes land once again on the window, at the bright display of glinting light. My frustration melts away, and I yawn pleasantly, pushing my covers aside.

As I sleepily crawl out of bed, the night before comes back in colorful flashes, and as the sun continues to rise, so do my spirits. *The camping retreat. The fire. Cassidy smearing her smore across Daniel's face. Laughing. Brian strumming his guitar. Diego singing. Music.*

The list continues, every little memory stringing itself along until the night becomes clear once again in my fuzzy, disorientated mind. The picture of the previous evening mesmerizes me, and I forget my grogginess. I went camping with friends, five figures casting shadows along the grass, their voices being lifted with the smoke of the fire, up towards the night stars. *Waitshadows*.And suddenly the warm, will-o'-the-wisp of memory is cut by a searing pain, a fiery blast of clarification. I yelp and grab my head, shutting my eyes tightly to block out the throbbing rhythm. *I know this rhythm.* The pulse of my own head matches the panic of my heart, and the consistent thudding transports me back to the night before...

"Chelsea, I'd like to get there before the sun sets". I swat Diego with my hat as I climb into the front passenger seat of his car. Diego has been my neighbor since we were little kids, and he knows better than anyone that I run late. Always.

"I just got off the phone with Cassidy, she hasn't even finished packing" I say, throwing my pale blue duffel bag into the back seat.

Diego pulls out of the driveway, silently shaking his head. "What is it with girls who have names starting with C? Is that like, a guarantee you're gonna be late? I mean there's you, Cassidy, Cinderella... " I punch his arm lightly and settle into my seat. The five of us- Diego, Cassidy, Daniel, Brian and I have been planning this camping trip for years. Given that we all just graduated high school, all on the verge of dispersing like seeds to settle into our own independent lives, it seemed like the perfect way to end summer, a final hurrah. It makes me sad to think that I'll have to leave the life I've always known behind, to disentangle myself from the pentagon the five of us make, but I push those feelings aside, focusing instead on the long stretch of road in front of me.

Despite Diego's worry, we arrived to the camp site first, giving us a chance to enjoy the quiet whisperings of the woods before the clown car arrives.

Sure enough, Cassidy, Brian, and Daniel pull up noisily; music blasting, horn honking, Brian and Cassidy cheering as Daniel turns the ignition off. Cassidy barrels towards me, wrapping me in a hug.

"Let's get this party started!" she yells as she releases me from her grasp. I shake my head, laughing at how much energy she has, even though it's almost sun down.

I take a seat next to Cassidy on one of the logs by the fire pit, ripping open a bag of marshmallows. Brian, Daniel, and Diego are squabbling like seagulls, trying to figure out how to set up the tents.

"Some help ladies would be lovely" Brian says huffingly as he wrestles with the contraption. Diego glares accusingly at my idle state, but his eyes hold a good-natured warmth to them as well.

"You know there's no way to get C^2 away from smores" Diego says, using the nickname the guys made for Cassidy and I. "Chelsea can't be pulled away from chocolate for anything" he winks at me as I stick out my tongue.

Daniel, however, stares at the guys in disbelief. "So they just win?" He drops the part of the tent he was holding and marches over to Cassidy, grabbing her wrists

as he struggles to pull Cassidy from the log. Laughing, Cassidy pulls an unsuspecting Daniel closer to her, smearing her smore across his face. A mash of chocolate and marshmallow drips from his face, and he grins, trying to lick it from his nose.

"Just forget about the tents for now, we'll figure it out later" he waves a dismissive hand at the heap of tents on the ground and wriggles into the space between Cassidy and I. I pass out smore ingredients as Brian lazily strums his guitar, his eyes focused on the flickering flames of the fire. I've know Brian long enough to know the worry etched into the lines of his face. He's thinking about moving across the coast on Monday, of how he's leaving. Part of me wants to bring it up to the group, but instead I ignore the observation and look instead at the stars.

Diego starts to sing, and I'm thankful for his tender tenor voice, as it causes Brian to forget about college and farewells and focus instead on his beloved instrument. Daniel, who plays the drums in the church band starts tapping a rhythm on his seat, and together, the three of them create an alluring melody.

I shut my eyes, allowing the music to wash over my sadness. It fills me with hope, and I savor the moment like a sweet smore. Everything is perfect, just as it should be. Until I hear Cassidy scream.

My eyes fly open, landing on Cassidy. At first, nothing seems out of the ordinary, until my eyes land on her feet. A darkness has encircled her legs, slithering its way up her body. "Is that, is that a snake?" I stammer, slowly moving back.

Cassidy whimpers, shaking her head. The being doesn't have a head. It's just a manifestation of the shadows, shadows that somehow came to life.

"Cass, it's going to be alright" Daniel whispers, gently grabbing her hand. But his soothing doesn't stop the snakelike darkness from climbing higher and higher up Cassidy, until suddenly, she's consumed. I watch in horror as my best friend withers and fades away. Daniel lets out an anguished cry, and the darkness moves in on him, its menacing figure pulling Daniel towards the woods. I try desperately to grab onto him, but I'm too late.

I scream his name, but there's nothing I can do to stop the shadows from ripping him from the log and dragging him towards the dark woods. Before I have time to think, Diego and Brian grab my hand, pulling me from the log. We start running, trying our best to escape the fates of our friends. We run past trees, under the guise of the stars, the cool night breeze tickling my neck. It would be beautiful except for the beast stalking our every move.

I round a corner, checking to make sure Diego and Brain are still by my side. My hurt sinks as my eyes only find Diego's tousled hair. The booming sound of his guitar breaking echoes in the distance, confirming we lost Brian. A sob forms in my throat, and I want to stop running, to take a minute to mourn. I slow down, placing my hands on my knees. Diego comes up beside me, gently touching my shoulder.

"We can't look back Chelsea; we have to keep going".

Eventually we find a small cave, and crawling in through its narrow opening, I curl up beside Diego. As I gain control of my breath, I hear a sob finally escape my lips. Diego just pats my head, singing softly. I hear the shadows enter the cave, and I shut my eyes tightly. There's nowhere left to run. All I can do is brace myself. With my eyes shut, I let Diego's song carry me away, away from the cold snake wrapping around my body... Far, far away.

As quickly as it came, the memory leaves, and I'm left with a sudden pain. My friends are gone. I don't know why I survived but I can sense they are no longer with me. My brain is in agony as it tries to decide how to remember our last night together, to remember the light or the shadows. Suddenly, my phone rings.

"Hello?"

Cassidy's voice fills my room. "Hey Chelsea! You ready to go camping?"

Victoria Lisi

The Birth of the Beginning

East Lake Community Library
Age 16, Eleventh Grade

I look down below,
as the sun casts a heavenly glow

And the wind blows a teasing breeze
And the sound of birds puts my mind at ease

I try to maintain this picture in my head
of how the world looks before society rises from bed

There's a detectable sensation in the air
as the sun plays with shadows across my hair

The possibility of happiness is very much in reach
And as the waves crash along the beach

I smile as I think of this tender little Earth
All of it's aging and dying and reviving and birth

Is it ready for what today has in store?
Will it be everything she hoped for?

Or a colossal disappointment, a complete bore?

I think of the people, the animals, the sky
Everyone's ambitions and want to aim high

It pains me to see the world so still
Knowing it will only last until

The lightning and crack of thunder
When the world wakes to fight and to plunder

But I shut out the future briefly
And instead inhale deeply

Focusing on that hopeful glow
of the sun at its high instead of its low

And I watch slowly as the world wakes up and
takes a breath
And as serenity approaches her untimely death

She offers me this advice
Some things must make the sacrifice

So that other things can be

And I realize that the end of perfect dawn
Occurred when our lives begun

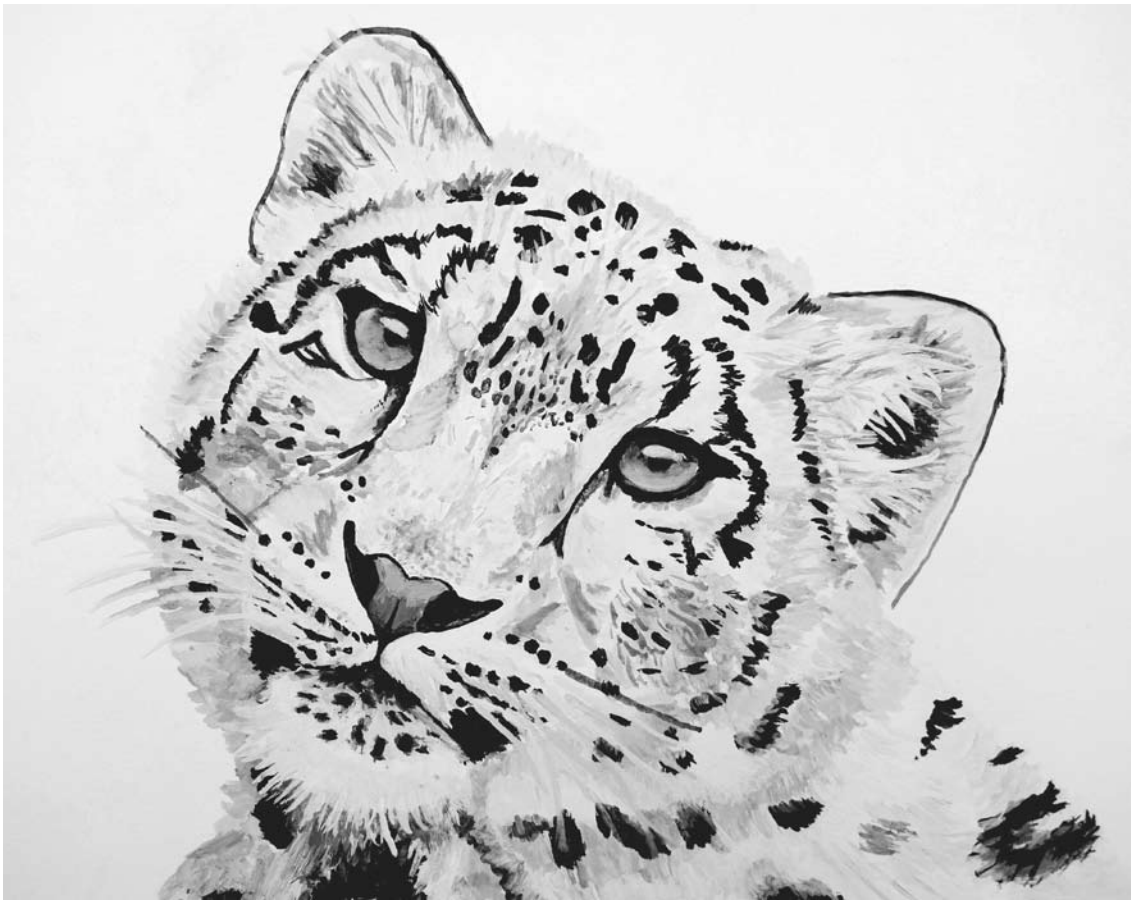
That the world is no longer a scene of tranquility
But one of wild, chaotic possibility

Because of the birth of you and me

Kaira Picard

Snow Leopard

Dunedin Public Library
Age 14, Tenth Grade



Emma Jane Nagy

Dust Storms

Palm Harbor Library
Age 12, Seventh Grade

Watching everything be demolished, I feel depression approach.
No field, no crops.
No money, no home.
This is not how my kids should see memories fade.
This is where my kids grew up.
That's where he took his first steps.
Next to us was our home where my youngest was born.
No speck of wood was left.
It was all overtaken by the dust.
Dust that was faster than a tiger.
Stronger than an elephant.
Will normal ever return?
Nothing was in sight.
And nothing was left behind.

Gretchen Haeussner

The Rat, the Dog, & the Cat

Palm Harbor Library
Age 12, Sixth Grade

The house on Timbering Road was nothing but silent. The house was vacant of any people. The parents had left for work, the children had left for school, and the grandmother had left to the library after baking a fresh batch of cookies and leaving them on the counter to cool. The dog slept on the couch, the cat on a cushioned chair, the canary in its cage feeling drowsy. The clock on the wall ticked gently, counting each second, which turned into minutes, and then hours. The cleaning lady had long since left the humble home spotless and glimmering.

So the house sat there, quiet except for the ticking clock. *Tick, tick, tick.*

From a mouse hole, a rat suddenly emerged from the dark, snout up, sniffing the air. The warm aroma of chocolate chip cookies drifted hazily through the house, coiling around the rat and into his snout.

The rat scrambled to the kitchen, following the scent, and looked up.

Upon seeing the treat, the rat leaped onto a crate packed with flour, jumped from the crate to a wooden chair, climbed the chair's wooden frame, and leaped onto the counter.

Whilst the rat had been ascending to the cookies, the cat had heard a scuttling sound as the rat climbed. The cat's eyes flew open, and whipped its head round, ears pointed.

The scuttle came again. As quiet as a breeze, the cat alighted from the chair onto the soft carpet and crept softly toward the kitchen. The carpet muffled any sound the cat could have made.

The cat walked through the doorway and into the kitchen. The rat was on the counter, holding a cookie between his paws and nibbling contentedly, perhaps thinking there was nothing to fear in this cozy house.

The cat carefully hopped to the stool, head peering over the counter's edge, watching the rat closely, muscles tense, ears pricked, patient.

Finally, the cat sprang, leaping gracefully onto the counter, and the rat looked up to see the cat bearing down on him.

Dropping the half-eaten cookie, the rat leapt down from the counter onto the tiled floor, racing around the kitchen, the cat in hot pursuit.

The rat raced toward the north wall, the turned at the last moment causing the cat to almost hit the wall before she caught herself and went at the rat again.

The rat ran towards a cabinet, its doors wide open, displaying several pots and pans inside. The rat sprinted toward the cabinet, and spun round, diving right under the cat's legs. Shocked, the cat stumbled and slid right into the cabinet and the dozens of pots and pans, causing a large clash.

The commotion woke the dog, who jumped down from the couch to see what the trouble was. Whilst this happened, the rat scurried into the living room, determined to get back to his home. Instead, he was met with the dog, who towered over him.

The dog let out a series of barks and growls, snapping at the small creature, her face carved into a snarl.

The rat turned to the kitchen, but was met with the cat right behind him, who had untangled herself from the onslaught of pots and pans.

The story would surely end here, you may think, where the rat would be killed by the pets, when the front door burst open.

So what do you think the family felt, as they stepped inside their home, and saw a rat cornered by the dog and cat, both snarling viciously?

The sound of the door startled the pets, whose rage melted as they spun towards the family in the doorway. And in their distraction, the rat bolted out the front door, never to come back.

The family stepped inside and gave the pets gentle pats and poured beef and salmon in their dishes as a reward. The grandmother walked into the kitchen and grumbled in annoyance.

"Oi! The filthy rat was snackin' on one of the cookies! She glared at the half-eaten cookie angrily.

"Oh, grandma, I'm sure it's only one cookie" said the children as they walked in.

So that night, after the family had their dinners and were snuggled in bed, the cat and dog lounged on the couch, full and content, and feeling quite proud of themselves. As for the rat, he ran through the night, contemplating where he was to live next.

Emma Jane Nagy

Covid-19

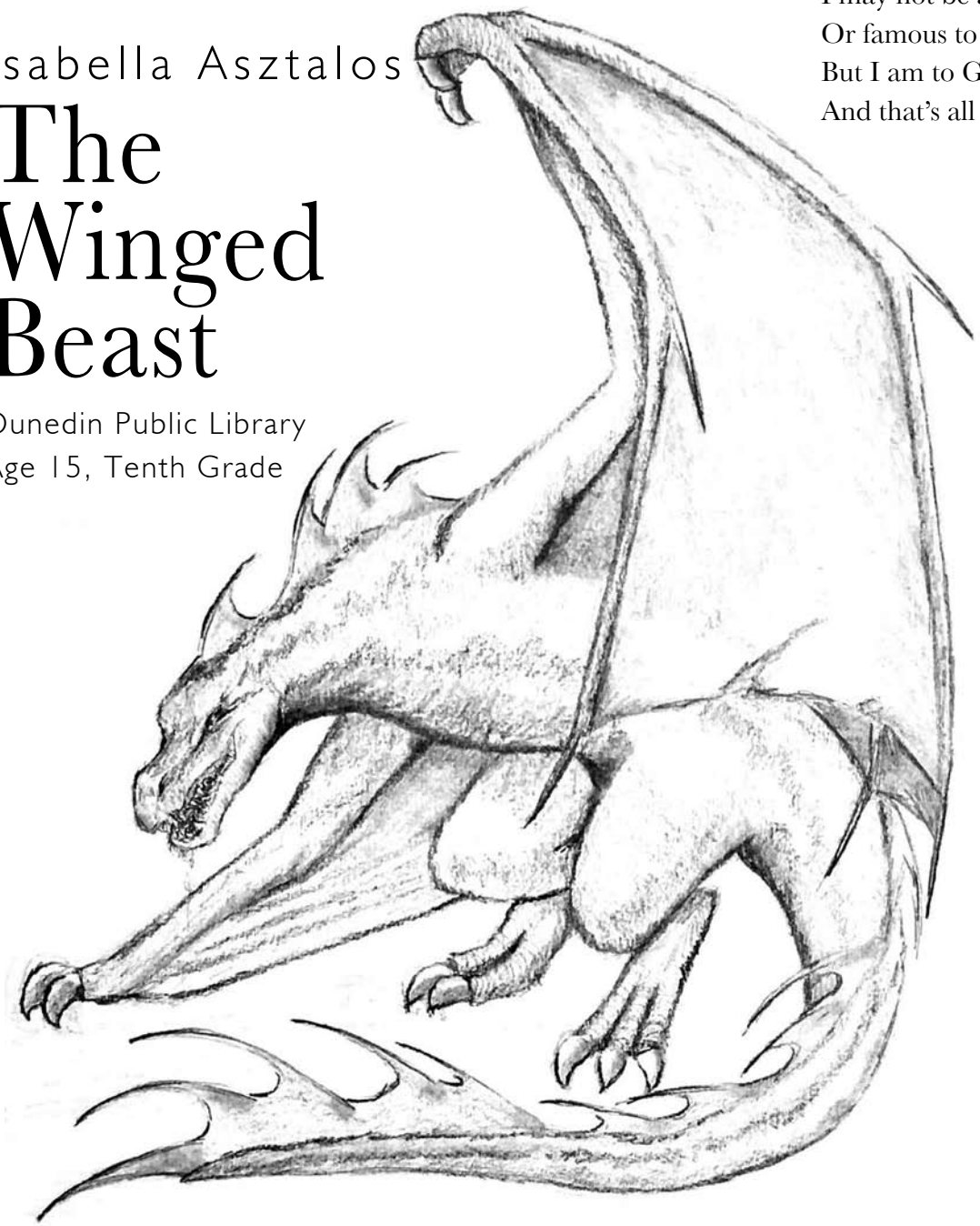
Palm Harbor Library
Age 12, Seventh Grade

As I walk to room 13
I wonder who my next patient will be.
Whoever it is I must remember,
They need me and I need them.
I've made a difference in many lives.
And I will continue to do so.
I may not be appreciated by some.
Or famous to all.
But I am to God.
And that's all that matters.

Isabella Asztalos

The Winged Beast

Dunedin Public Library
Age 15, Tenth Grade



Gretchen Haeussner

Helping Paw

Palm Harbor Library
Age 12, Sixth Grade

I went to the park
to climb up the ole' oak
But whenever I- tried, I started a-stumblin',
Trippin', clawin', climbin' then fallin'
Stuck at the roots of the oak.

And you wouldn't believe what happened next.
A DOG ran up to me.
Said his name was Buddy,
said he could help me up the tree.

This seemed crazy.
What was he thinking?
I'm a cat for goodness sake!
I have claws,
and sharp teeth.
I can jump several feet.
Me, get help from a dog?
Absolutely not!

I quickly dismissed him,
not caring at all
if I hurt his feelin's
I thought, "He should know better
than to help me,
thinking I can't climb this tree.
What did he expect from me?

But I kept tryin'.
I kept climbin'
but then fell down again and again,
jumpin', grumblin',
climbin', fallin'

Well, while I was busy,
a storm blew in,
winds a howlin', rain a pourin'.
nto the ditch that I was in,
gales a shriekin', rain a poundin'
straight for the tree
where I was sittin'.
Was a caged animal
screamin' and clawin'.

You could say I was scared,
of the rain and wind,
moaning and shriekin'.
Raced up the tree as
fast as I could.
Yowlin', clawin'
leapin', climbin',
'til I reached the top.

But the water climbed too.
Floodin' the ditch,
lickin' the ole' oak's roots.
It rose higher and higher,
but I was stuck there,
in the tree
bearing the howlin' wind,
and the poundin' rain,
with the tree a swayin'
and the water risin'.
Stuck in the ole' oak.

When I spotted
that dog I' d- seen before,
paddlin' his way
through the wind,
and the rain,
and the flood,
and the storm,
drenched in the water
an' comin' my way.

Was he insane?
What was he thinkin'?

He came up to the tree
told me to jump on e'm,
I wanted to refuse
help from this beast,
even when it seemed
to be ending for me.

For I am a cat!
My cousins roam the world.
Always have and always will.
For I am a cat.
With sharp fangs, and razor
claws,
I am the mightier predator!

But this dog
risked his foul life for me
paddlin' to me and the tree.
And the water rose higher still,
lickin' my feet and tail.

So, I leaped from my perch,
crawled onto his back,
and we swam away,
from the ditch and the tree,
and the flood and the storm,
into the neighborhood,
down a few streets,
with familiar smells,
like master's pies and meats.

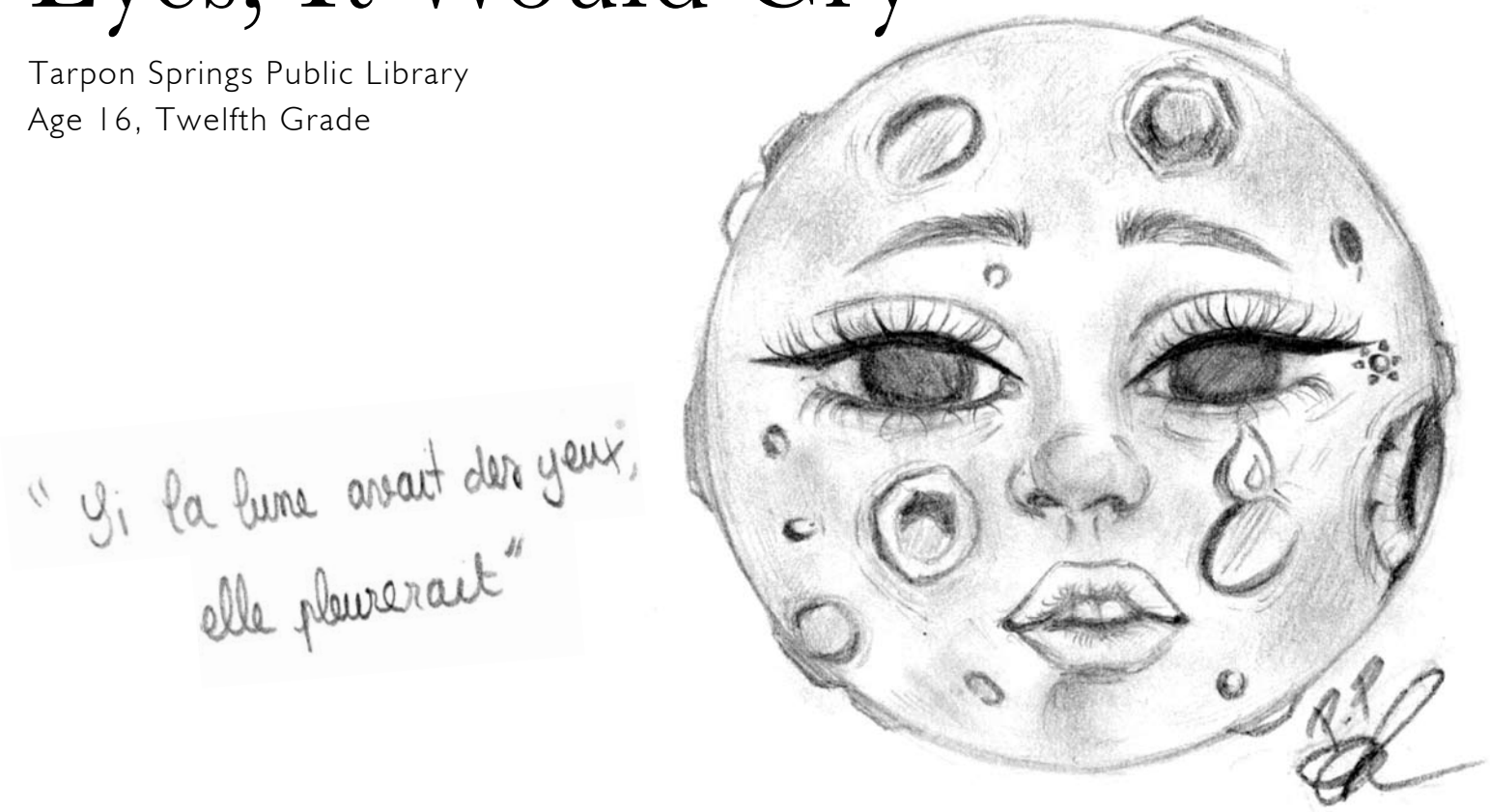
Went our separate ways
straight after that,
but we can't become pals,
we supposed to be enemies.
This was just a one-time thing
One-time thing.

Because can you imagine,
two best friends,
one a dog, the other a cat?

Priscila Picard

If The Moon Had Eyes, It Would Cry

Tarpon Springs Public Library
Age 16, Twelfth Grade



Kaira Picard

Even Piggies Love to Read

Dunedin Public Library
Age 14, Tenth Grade

Ceara Riling

Sandia Mountains

Dunedin Public Library
Age 13, Eighth Grade

MEMBER LIBRARIES

Clearwater Public Library System
100 N. Osceola Avenue
Clearwater, FL 33755
P: (727) 562-4970
www.myclearwater.com/cpl

Dunedin Public Library
223 Douglas Avenue
Dunedin, FL 34698
P: (727) 298-3080
www.dunedingov.com/library

East Lake Community Library
4125 East Lake Road
Palm Harbor, FL 34685
P: (727) 773-2665
www.eastlakelibrary.org

Gulf Beaches Public Library
200 Municipal Drive
Madeira Beach, FL 33708
P: (727) 391-2828
www.gulfbeacheslib.org

Gulfport Public Library
5501 28th Avenue South
Gulfport, FL 33707
P: (727) 893-1074
www.mygulfport.us/gpl

Largo Public Library
120 Central Park Drive
Largo, FL 33771
P: (727) 587-6715
www.largopubliclibrary.org

Oldsmar Public Library
400 St. Petersburg Drive East
Oldsmar, FL 34677
P: (813) 749-1178
www.oldsmarlibrary.org

Palm Harbor Library
2330 Nebraska Avenue
Palm Harbor, FL 34683
P: (727) 784-3332
www.palmharborlibrary.org

Barbara S. Ponce Library
7770 52nd Street
Pinellas Park, FL 33781
P: (727) 369-0669
www.pinellas-park.com/library

Safety Harbor Public Library
101 2nd Street North
Safety Harbor, FL 34695
P: (727) 724-1525
www.safetyharborlibrary.com

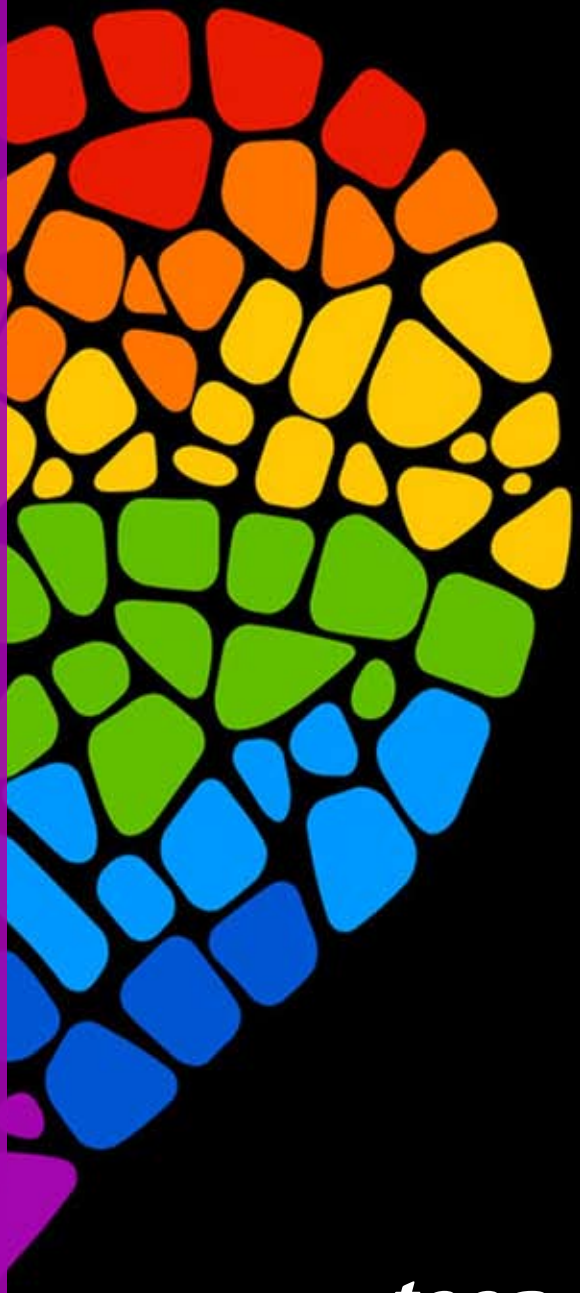
St. Pete Beach Public Library
7470 Gulf Boulevard
St. Pete Beach, FL 33706
P: (727) 363-9238
www.spblibrary.com

St. Petersburg Library System
3745 Ninth Avenue North
St. Petersburg, FL 33713
P: (727) 893-7724
www.splibraries.org

Seminole Community Library
9200 113th Street North
Seminole, FL 33772-2800
P: (727) 394-6905
www.spcollege.edu/scl

Tarpon Springs Public Library
138 E. Lemon Street
Tarpon Springs, FL 34689
P: (727) 943-4922
www.tarponspringslibrary.org

www.pplc.us



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Literature & Art by Pinellas County Teens

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