

FOUND

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Irene Smith

Classrooms have stories to tell.

Notes passed. Journals kept.

Surreptitious Texting.

Overheard conversations.

If only walls could speak.

*The whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like a snail*

Unwillingly to school.

"As You Like It" -William Shakespeare



PRIVATE!

KEEP OUT!

A POX ON YOU!

Edgar Prospero

Restart

I've been here before. Alone, bruised, fed up and angry.

Today is a new day. I am going to put the past in the past and move on. It's a fresh start. I bought this new journal, 35 cents, back-to-school pricing. I intend to fill it with my adventures as I make my way up.

Mom and I are hurrying so fast to leave our old life behind, I'm counting on it not being able to catch up. Of course we couldn't get very far.... Not having enough money to go to the next town, let alone the next state means our troubles are breathing just over the next rise. Still, I'm finding signs of hope.

Not far from our new place, I was walking along kicking pebbles on the sidewalk when I found two quarters in the gutter, a good luck omen. George Washington survived the Revolutionary War, including Valley Forge, and his image was still shiny hundreds of years later, washed as it was in a puddle of rain water. Two quarters, more than enough to provide me with an outlet.

I am my own boss.

Cal may have tried to beat that out of me, but like George Washington, I'm a survivor. I'm not going to let some low life rampallian steal my freedom. As he was pushing my head into the wall, and my feeble kicks and attempts to hit him were having no effect, all I could think was that I was so far superior to him that it was like we are on different planets. My aching head, my bruised and bleeding face, my tears of frustration and pain didn't mask my absolute contempt for him. When he walked away from me, it was the pathetic retreat of a dog with his tail behind his legs. His pitiful door slam was like a weak attempt at a punchline.

My mother's tears and her hasty packing reminded me that she isn't entirely lost yet. She still cares. Our leaving means we must be on the road to recovery.

9-1

Another new place. Another new school year.

New school. New people.

New lies.

Always.

Who really cares?

Shakespeare said, "This above all, to thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man." Clearly, Shakespeare wasn't talking about junior high.

One thing is for sure, I'll be true to myself, but I can't say that I won't be false to others.

Sometimes you have to be false to the world in order to be true to yourself. I'm pretty sure Shakespeare understood that too. The characters in his plays were always tricking other people, sometimes for their own advancement, sometimes for protection, sometimes for revenge, and sometimes just for fun.

Now that sounds more like junior high!

Most of these Yahoos haven't even heard of Shakespeare.

Then again, to them, Yahoo = Google = verb.

They probably don't even know what books are.

Reading and writing are my life. The rest is illusion.

I'm tough. Bring another school year on.

Dramatis Personae

Let me introduce you to my new world of Jefferson Junior High.

Edgar Prospero: ME! Tall, skinny, shoulder length brown hair, dark eyes, Roman nose, superior sneer, gray T-shirt, worn jeans, and battered sneakers. Backpack containing classic books and sharp pencils. Definitely a bit strange. Love reading, especially Shakespeare. The hero of my own story.

Ceria: Long dark hair and eyelashes, Hispanic, confident smile for everyone, flowered white blouse with long sleeves over an orange skirt. Orange sandals. Carrying poetry books and notepad. The other new kid.

Antonio: Medium height, hefty but athletic, short cropped blonde hair, narrow green eyes and a long nose, thin lips pressed together, appraising others. Expensive clothes, freshly pressed. Hands are empty. Commands attention when he walks in a room. I heard him make rude comments about the kids who mostly speak Spanish. A leader, most likely in the wrong way, for the wrong reasons.

Sebastian: Short, wiry, Hispanic, intelligent but furtive eyes under heavy eyebrows, bushy dark hair, and a broad mouth. He has a short jagged scar visible over his right eyebrow. Seahawks T-shirt and dark jeans. Clean shoes. Camo backpack hides whatever he is carrying. Friend to Antonio.

Sienna: Obviously a fashionista, medium height, with blonde hair, blue eyes outlined with brown eye liner and mascara, and shiny pink lipstick on a very pouty mouth. (Don't know if it's a potty mouth yet. Ha Ha) Wearing an assortment of jewelry, an expensive belted blouse over tight pants and a pair of fancy shoes. She holds a glittered phone and decorative school supplies. Vapid, spoiled princess, perhaps?

Kate: Tall, athletic, with intelligent brown eyes and short dark hair. She is wearing a light blue summer dress and dark blue, flat, slip-on shoes. She looks focused and serious, but was gossiping with Sienna. School supplies are stacked neatly on her desk. She has a separate athletic bag with a volleyball tucked into a large side pocket. Friend to Sienna.

Alonzo: *Short, dark skinned, large dark eyes, medium length black hair, friendly smile, quiet manners, expensive looking button up shirt and jeans. When he walked in the room, people were high fiving him and saying, "Hi! Missed you!" and asking about his summer. He offered me a pencil at the start of class when he saw I didn't have one. Popular with apparently everyone. Nice kid.*

Ms. Miranda: *Thirty something, short and plump, with a happy smile and wrinkled tunic blouse over a dark skirt and well worn sandals. Her room is full of affirmative commands— Imagine! Discover! Read! Behind her desk hang photographs of many students, likely spanning a decade or so. Teacher and apparent lover of language and kids.*

Principal Ferdinand: *Thirty to forty years old, medium height with slightly messy hair and somewhat wrinkled white shirt and yellow tie. He wears heavy thick-framed glasses. Nervously active as he patrols the halls, and awkwardly reminds students that he is their "pal" as in **principal**. He appears to be searching for validation. Principal of Jefferson Jr.*



Teria

Freshly and brightly she arrives,
Tossing long black hair and smiling with brown eyes,
Eager to express and embrace.

Surprising the unsure with nerve, wit, and kindness,
At her entry.
Hopefulness is unaware for whom it has been waiting.

I will prepare the way by creating a cheerful garden of successes while I wait for Mama and Papa to return for me.

Lets have fun this year. K?

ALRedy MAKING PLANS....

Keep me informed.

How was your summer?

Gr8! Went to Ocean SHORS With My grandparents. U?

Here and There. Mostly here. Boring.

9-2

Just like I expected. The first day of school was all about position. Already Antonio is pushing everyone around, trying to establish that he is the boss of everything. His lackey, Sebastian, echoes everything he says. The reason I even know their names is because our math teacher wrote them on the board; two warnings. I have them in three of my classes— Math, English, and P.E. I see them scanning the room looking for weaknesses. I'm a rock. I won't make a satisfactory target.

On the plus side, I like my English teacher, Ms. Miranda, because she obviously loves to read and is encouraging us to choose our own books. She gives us writing time too. Perfect. I noticed that during our writing time, Antonio and Sebastian were passing notes to each other. Ms. Miranda has pictures of students all over her walls, but no pictures of family, just a dog. I think she might be a bit lonely.

I told the teachers my dad is in Afghanistan and my mom works for the airlines so they might be hard to contact, but they'll always get back to her, usually in writing. That will make things much easier this year; fewer pesky questions, less awkward for me.

The school is okay. There is a city park next door and a museum. I think our History class gets to go to the museum to do research. I plan to spend some significant time at the park. I hate being home. The apartment smells like someone puked in both rooms. Mom doesn't even notice. I hope she can keep her new job at the convenience store. She's always so spaced out. I fixed her mac and cheese for dinner last night and she ate maybe two bites.

The park is clean with fresh air and inviting trees. Lots of picnic tables. This place might work out.

Did you see that?
No, what?
She looked over here.

MASH
Mansion Apartment Shack House

Husband

- ~~Hottie - Antonio~~
- ~~Nice - Alonzo~~
- ~~Jerk - Sebastian~~
- ~~Ugly - Jordan~~
- ~~Loner - New Kid~~
- ~~Mexican - Jose~~
- Celebrity - Chris Pine



Best Friend

- ~~Pretty - Alanna~~
- Smart - Kate
- ~~Rich - Sienna~~
- ~~Unpopular - Crystal~~
- ~~Ugly - Tara~~
- ~~Celebrity - Taylor Swift~~
- ~~Mexican - Ysenia~~

Location

- ~~Beautiful - Hawaii~~
- Foreign - France
- ~~Lame - Ghetto Walmart~~
- ~~Poor - Parents' house~~
- ~~Dream - Hogwarts~~



Job

- ~~Fun - Pop star~~
- ~~Boring - Accountant~~
- ~~# - Doctor~~
- Poor - Teacher
- ~~Worse - Trash collector~~

Pet

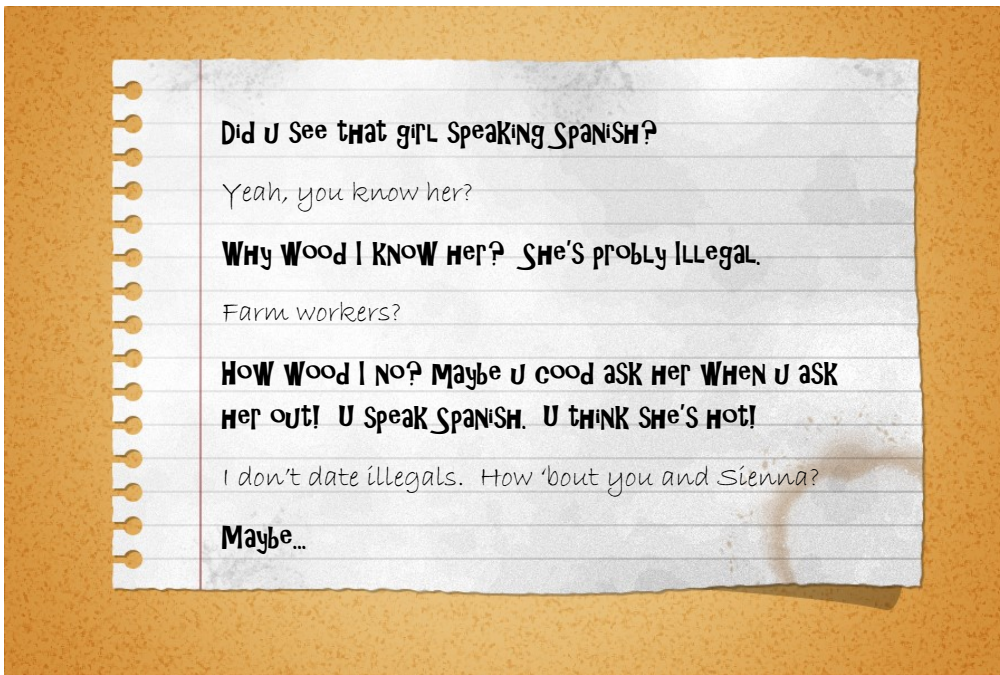
- ~~Normal - Dog~~
- ~~Exotic - Toucan~~
- Big - Elephant
- ~~Funny - Invisible duck~~



~~Location~~ Number of Kids

- ~~0~~
- ~~1~~
- ~~3~~
- ~~8~~
- 17





Hi Kate!

Excellent MASH game! 17 kids with Chris Pine. Way to go, but you're not going to make enough money to feed your pet elephant on your teacher salary in France.

Sienna 😊

We shouldn't pass notes in class. Bet you wish it had been you and Antonio with 17 kids. Ha!

Affirmation from the desk of Ms. Miranda

Dear Ceria,

Bienvenidos to our school!

I see you earned straight A's at your last school. I am pleased to see that you enjoy reading and writing poetry.

Ms. Miranda

9-5

Mom's missing! She didn't come home yesterday, and her boss called to find out why she missed her shift.

I've looked everywhere. I even called the hospitals. I don't know if she's been arrested again or if she's gone somewhere with that meth head, Cal. I totally hate that guy, and if I see him again, he's going to feel the wrath of Edgar! I will make him pay somehow.

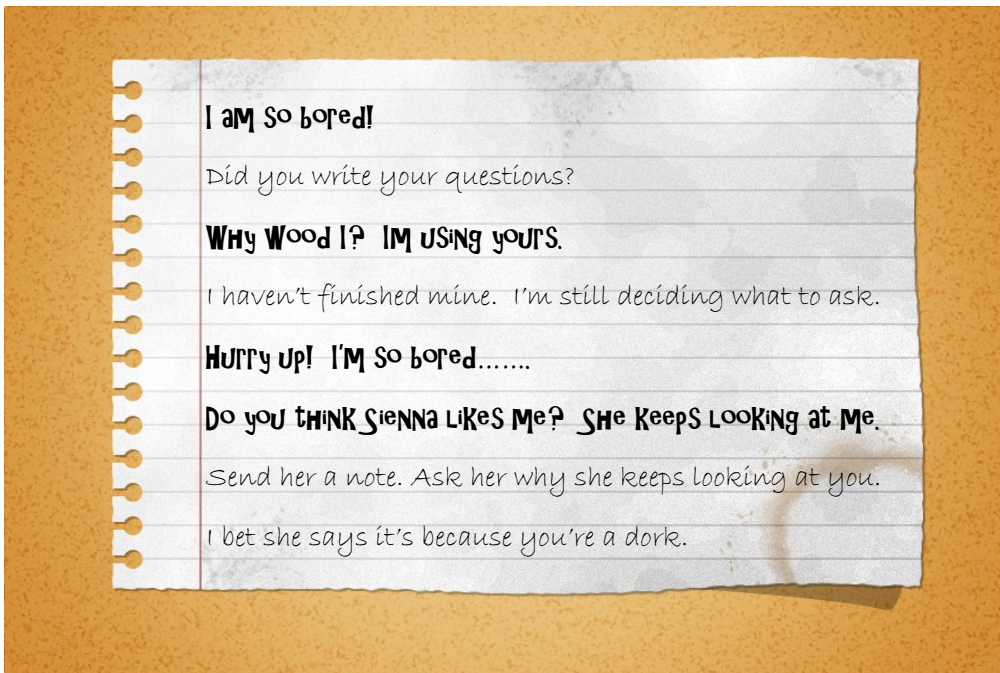
I decided to clean the apartment with bleach and soapy water to get rid of the puke smell. Maybe that will help Mom feel better when she gets back. It smells okay now but feels kind of like a cleaned crime scene.

I was glad there was bleach in the cupboard, because that was about it. We still have some packages of mac and cheese, canned milk, and some Ramen noodles, but we won't have anything else until Mom's pay check comes this Friday.

They're going to fire her when she gets back, though. Said she can't miss even one shift without calling in. Guess that means we'll have to move again unless she finds something fast. The landlord told us we would be out on our gluteus maxima if we didn't pay on time. Whatever. Been there, done that.

Ms. Miranda gave us a writing assignment to interview an adult about their early teen years' experiences. We spent the whole period brainstorming questions we are supposed to ask our adult. I'm going to write about the life my mother should have had, instead of her life as a drug addict and teen mother.

I wish I had at least one adult I really could interview, maybe then I'd have someone to help me find Mom.



Hi Kate!

I finished my questions. Are you almost done?!!! Antonio keeps looking at me. I think he likes my new shirt.

Sienna 😊

We shouldn't pass notes in class. Your shirt is cute. Antonio is a jerk. He called me "Hippo" yesterday. I hate that guy. The boys I like are Alonzo, Sebastian, and Alex. Alonzo is nicest though.

Affirmation from the desk of Ms. Miranda

Dear Edgar,

You are a pleasure to have in my class. I love to see you reading when it's appropriate timing.

Your past school mentioned you were in the advanced program. We must work to make sure you are challenged here!

Please return your field trip form with your mother's signature ASAP.

Ms. Miranda

Edgar Prospero

Sept. 9

ELA Miranda

Interview Assignment

B
Needs more detail.

1. What was life like when you were young?

My family lived in a large home in the country where there were lots of trees and birds. Deer sometimes walked down our street. We had lots of really good food to eat like fried chicken and watermelon. Everyone was friendly.

2. Did you have friends?

I had many friends. We would get together and walk through the trees and look at the birds and talk about the books we were reading.

3. Were there any problems back then?

Once in a while we could hear the wolves in the forest nearby, but they didn't bother us and everyone was friendly so there weren't any real problems.

4. What was your school like when you were my age.

The school was small so we knew everyone. The teachers were really nice.

5. What was your favorite class?

My favorite class was English because we did lots of reading and writing. My favorite author was Shakespeare, just like yours, Edgar.

6. Was there anything else you wanted to tell me?

Nope, that about covered it. It was really great, and then I wanted to travel, so I became a flight attendant, and that's why I'm gone so much.

THAT KID EDGAR IS SUCH A LOSER. HE
TALKS LIKE A TIME TRAVELER.

DID YOU SEE HIS SHOES? THEY ARE
TRASH! WE SHOULD HIDE HIS BOOKS. SEE
WHAT HAPPENS!

You are one messed up person. Distract him and I'll grab the
one under his desk.

Dear Ms. Miranda,

I would like to schedule a classroom observation
for next week. I hope that is convenient for
you.

I'm looking forward to discussing instructional
methodology with you.

Sincerely,
Principal Ferdinand

9-10

Mom's still gone. I saw Cal going into the pawn shop near our apartment and followed him. He said he hasn't seen Mom, but I don't know if I believe him. He says she owes him money. "Get in line," I told him. I really wanted to throw something at him, but I decided he wasn't worth it, he'd probably beat the crap out of me, and besides there were people staring at us already. I don't want to draw more attention to myself, especially with Mom gone.

I can't decide if I should talk to the police about her being missing. She's gone away before, usually with Cal, but she always comes back. If I go to the police, they might try to put me in foster care and Mom might get in trouble. It's better to wait it out. She'll be back. The coffee can money was still in the kitchen cupboard, so she can't have gone too far.

I went to Mom's work to collect her pay check. They asked about her and I told them she's been sick all week. They said she can't come back because she didn't call in and they were short-handed. At least they let me take her check. It wasn't much, though, and I don't know how to cash it. I've got to figure it out, though, because there is no food left in the whole house. I took some toilet paper from the school because we're out of that too. It's a good thing breakfast and lunch are free at school. I just wish they gave us more and it tasted better.

Rent isn't due until the first of the month. I should be able to pay it with the money in the coffee can plus her check, if I can figure out how to cash it. She should be back by then for sure.

Alonzo Ariel and I have a project together in Social Studies. We are going to the museum to study how the native Americans from this area lived. We decided to do our writing at the park since it's between the school and the museum. He said he likes being outdoors too. He seems okay, unlike some people.

Some jerk stole my copy of *Twelfth Night*. I found it in the garbage.

Hi Kate!

Can I go to your house? <3 :)

Sienna 😊

Sure. Want to work on our Native American project?

We could do that. We can also call guys on the phone and pretend to be other people.

Seriously? You're crazy! Everyone has caller ID. They would know it's us.

Oh yeah. I guess we could do the project. We can have fun too, though.

I'll call my mom at lunch. Now stop passing notes! You're going to get us in trouble!



Hola Mija!

I am missing you so much! Tu Papa and I are working hard at the cannery and should save up enough soon to come home and open the store. Are you being kind to Tia Rosa? Are you doing your best in school and obeying your teachers?

Remember mi amor, tu siempre estas en mi corazón.



Mama

WAZ UP?

Nothing. Just wondering if Kate was the one who
prank called me.

I THINK it WAS HER AND SIENNA CALLING PEOPLE..

Sienna really likes you I think.

IM NOT SHUR I LIKE ANY GIRLS HERE

Did you notice Edgar's pants? Same ones he wears
every single day.

Letz See WAZ IN HIS BACKPACK!

Affirmation from the desk of Ms. Miranda

Dear Principal Ferdinand,

You are always welcome to visit my classroom.

*I would be very gratified to discuss my teaching
with you.*

Ms. Miranda

9-11

I hate this school!

Antonio and Sebastian have turned their attention to me for some reason. They try to trip me when I walk past and then snicker at each other like the idiots they are. I have to keep my backpack close to me all the time because they are just looking for an opportunity to steal or ruin something. I don't understand it. What did I ever do to them? The irony is that during today's school assembly on bullying prevention, they were busy passing notes and ignoring the presentation. Alonzo's mother, who BTW has a great smile, was the main presenter. She talked about the experiences she had as a teen being picked on by other kids. She said the girls would call her names and draw rude pictures of her, but the worst part was that they would exclude her and tell each other not to hang out with her. She said she was very lonely.

I don't really get why being excluded bothered her that much. I just want people to leave me alone. I'm used to being by myself. You can't trust other people— they usually hurt you, especially if you let them get close. Mom's enough for me, and she's never around.

I'm still worried about her, but I have decided she is just chilling somewhere with her addict friends. She had a new job and that always stresses her out. I've noticed she tends to relapse when she's under stress. She forgets about me when she is using, because her addictions are so powerful. I shouldn't take it personally, but sometimes I do. So maybe it's best for me to just go it alone.

I've got my books for company. The school librarian is letting me exceed the checkout limit because I promised to return the books on time.

Ms. Miranda and Principal Ferdinand also spoke at the Assembly today. They said our school has a "zero tolerance" for bullying. Like they can do anything about it! Kids don't bully people in front of the teachers. They are sneaky. It's like all the notes that get passed during class. The teachers hardly ever see it. They might take away a note or two that someone is blatantly passing or reading, but they almost always miss what's going on right in front of them. Kids just do what they want, picking on people, passing notes, sneaking peeks at their cell phones, and then they paste on their innocent smiles when the teacher is actually looking at them. We are all just a bunch of fakers.

9-12

Alonzo Ariel and I went next door to the museum after school today for our project on the Yakama Indians. I really like the museum, but it costs several dollars if you are going in to see the whole thing. Fortunately, they let us walk through to the Native American section and to their research archive for free. That allowed me to see more of the museum without having to pay.

There isn't as much information on the Yakama here as we would have liked. Turns out that most of that is located at another museum on the reservation.

So, today we focused on the conflicts between white settlers and the Native people. Native people moved around a lot, kind of like me. They went where the food was. Settlers wanted to settle. (Sounds pretty obvious!) Anyway, the settlers started taking the land and objected to Natives coming on "their property." They brought lots of diseases too, which killed more Native people than white people, because Natives didn't have immunities. This led to the Whitman Massacre.

The Whitmans were among the first Americans in the west, working as missionaries with the Cayuse Indians. That is, until the Cayuse children and others started dying from a Measles epidemic. Dr. Whitman seemed to be able to cure many of the white settlers who had brought the disease, so the Cayuse thought he was responsible for killing their people when he couldn't cure them. The Cayuse killed 12 people over that misunderstanding. The Cayuse who were involved got hanged, but after that whites wouldn't trust Natives.

Alonzo and I went outside to the park for a while and talked about the project. We're going to create an exhibit. He asked me questions about where I live and stuff, but I managed to turn the conversation to him instead. I deflected his questions with vague answers. I said I live on the south side of town and that my parents are gone a lot.

Most people are perfectly happy to talk about themselves if you ask good questions.

Turns out his mother is a doctor. He said she really cares about people and that's why she did our assembly. She has seen some pretty rough stuff in this town. Gang conflicts and drug use (surprise!) are a big problem, and doctors are always trying to save people from themselves. Alonzo lives in a big house on Valley View Lane. He said I should come over to swim sometime. Ha! Like that's going to happen.

Hi Kate!

Did you see how Antonio said Hi to me this morning?

Sienna 😊

Pretty sure that means he's madly in love with you.

You think so? He's always hanging around with Sebastian. They pass notes more than we do.

I would rather text. I wish teachers didn't confiscate cell phones. My mom had to come get mine from the principal last time. Now I do all my texting in the bathroom.

Haha, I just thought you had the runs!



Geria

A flower rested in a pot of soil singing softly to herself.

I am lovely. I am special. Everyone loves me.

Her lovely lavender petals were like velvet.

All who passed by admired her shape and beauty.

Sadly, they did not remember to water the flower.

Soon her song turned to thirsty sorrow,

As her petals began to darken and drop off one by one.

I sure don't want to be a potted plant!

Can We Work together on our Indian Massacker project?

You spelled massacre wrong. Yes, we can work on it together. Find some pictures showing how it went down at the Whitman Mission.

How about after school?

Meet me in the computer lab.

Edgars Working With Smarty pants ALONZO.

How come you can spell "smarty pants" but not "school"?

Dear Ms. Miranda,

Thank you for your help with the bullying assembly. I trust that we will have fewer incidents this school year as a result of your generosity with your time.

Sincerely,
Principal Ferdinand

9-15

I spent a lot of my weekend at the park reading. There are lots of trees for shade there with park benches and tables scattered around. A squirrel kept trying to get into my backpack. I don't know why, it's not like I have any food in there. My stomach lurches just thinking about it.

The weekend was hard that way because I'm trying to make the food last. At school I get something to eat. I complain about it like everyone else, but I'm really glad to get it. I just wish there was more. Sometimes I put an apple or something packaged in my backpack to take home. Maybe the squirrel could smell what used to be there.

Back in the empty apartment, now that the puke smell is gone, I sometimes catch a scent that I think is my Mom's. It's really faint, like a memory. Maybe a cross between roses and tobacco. She had this rose soap that she found at the Dollar store. She really liked it. It's gone with her, so I take that as a good sign.

It's kind of nice not having to take care of Mom, but I do hope she's okay wherever she is. I'm guessing she'll be back soon, and then we'll have to move again. I'm pretty good at copying her signature, so I took her paycheck to the check cashing place, waited until there was a really long line, and when I got to the front, I told the clerk I was cashing a check for my mother who was in the hospital. The people behind me were really impatient, so the clerk didn't make me show any ID. No problems! So, I've got enough for rent and about \$50 extra.

I bought some more Ramen noodles and looked at the shoes at Walmart, but I think I better hold on to as much of the cash as I can, because I don't know when I might find more somewhere. I've been thinking about trying to find a job, but when Mom gets back, I know we'll probably have to leave.

A homeless guy with kinky red hair, bushy red beard, and wearing a torn denim jacket asked me for money outside the store. I gave him 50 cents from the change I got when I bought the Ramen. He was grateful but also seemed irritated at the same time. He was kind of muttering to himself. I hate to let go of any of our limited funds, but I'm hoping for some good Karma, and he looked pretty down on his luck.

9-16

Alonzo's mother is taking us to the Yakama Nation Cultural Center so we can work on our Social Studies project. I need \$3 to get in, but she offered to buy us dinner there. (Yes! I'm hoping for something with meat and vegetables and dessert.) We're going on Thursday! I can't wait. She wants a note from my mother saying I can go in her car. No problem!

In Language Arts we watched scenes from a movie called "The Most Dangerous Game." It was really old, in black and white. We have already read the 1924 short story by Richard Connell. It's about this guy who gets stranded on an island where the crazy General Zaroff hunts people. The movie has a twist on the short story by adding a girl who is being hunted too. I liked the story version better when it was just the man against the hunter.

In the movie, the main character, Rainford, says, "The world is divided into two kinds of people, the hunter and the hunted. Luckily I'm a hunter, and nothing can ever change that." Then he becomes Zaroff's prey. I've been thinking about that. I don't know that it's really true that there are only two kinds of people. I've seen a lot of people I would consider "hunters," people who are always looking for others' weaknesses and going after them, like the bullies they talked about in our assembly. And, of course, there's people like me that the hunters always go after. Still, I don't think people have to be either one. There's lots of people who aren't deliberately jerks, and also people whose lives are perfect and nobody ever bothers them, like Alonzo. Still, I'm not going to just sit around while somebody is hunting me. I'll be like Rainford and figure out how to fight back.

To that end, I'm trying to get an "in" with the principal. I've noticed that Mr. Ferdinand seems really interested in Ms. Miranda. He couldn't stop looking and smiling at her through the assembly the other day, and he keeps making excuses to come watch her teaching. Ms. Miranda, for her part, sneaks glances at him and blushes. It makes me kind of wistful, but I'm not sure why.

I think I can use their obvious attraction to help me with a plan to humiliate Antonio and Sebastian. Plus, it's kind of fun doing a little match-making. The world could use a little more love, for people who actually need that kind of thing.

THIS MOVIE WOULD BE SO MUCH BETTER IF IT WAS IN COLOR.

I like this Zaroff guy and his giant body guard. He's got it all figured out.

WANT TO MESS WITH EDGAR AT LUNCH?

What do you have in mind?

MAKE IT HARD FOR HIM TO SIT ANYWHERE OR COFF ON THE FOOD.

What's coff mean?

Hi Kate!

I'm bored

Sienna 😊

Watch the movie.

It's boring.

I like it. Stop passing notes. I don't want to miss stuff.

What is there to miss? We already read the story in class.

We're supposed to compare them. Leave me alone.

You are no fun today.

9-17

I watched an interesting interaction in Math today. The other new kid, a girl named Ceria, was working a problem in front of the whole class. She doesn't talk much, so a lot of kids thought she was new from Mexico and doesn't speak English (like a lot of people in this town.) So she starts out drawing her Algebra equation on the board and breaking it down and solving it, all without saying anything. It's really clear she knows her stuff, and I'm learning from her because it was a hard equation, and then Antonio whispers really loud so that a bunch of the class can hear, "Stupid Mexican, why's she teaching the class?"

I looked around quickly to see if the teacher heard him, but then I noticed Sebastian and a couple of the other Mexican kids looking really uncomfortable. Sebastian kind of squirmed in his seat and looked at Antonio like he wanted to disappear. A kid named Eliazar looked like he was going to punch Antonio, but then Ceria turns around, and in perfect English says to the teacher, "I'm almost finished here, but Antonio has offered to do the next problem for the class." I wanted to jump up and give her a high five. Antonio just turned bright red and sunk down in his seat.

The teacher made him do the next problem. Even though I don't think the teacher heard Antonio's comment, he could have figured out what was going on. Antonio got up and struggled for a long time and finally had to have help to get the problem solved. Ceria was super polite to him when she showed him where his mistakes were, but then she said, "Estoy orgulloso de ser Mexicana, idiota." It made my day, but I'm a little worried about how Antonio might try to get back at her.

Tomorrow is the day we go to the museum and out to dinner. I've got \$3 in my backpack for the entrance fee. I gave Alonzo a note "from my Mom" giving permission for me to go. We're leaving straight from school.

I made an excuse to leave Ms. Miranda's class today to go to the office. I said I had a headache. While the secretary was out getting a thermometer, I got a chance to snoop around the principal's office. Ferdinand was out of the building. I could see an award on the wall, something about him being a chess champion. It looks like he collects chess boards too, because he had several on shelves behind his desk. There was a picture on the desk of him hugging a dog. There were tons of papers and folders and books everywhere, but most of them were about teaching and leadership. I've got some ideas about how I might use this information.

After school I hung out in the park and read for a while. I like how peaceful it is.

We Need to do SOMETHING to KNOW it all

Ceria.

You shouldn't have said she was a stupid Mexican.

SO SHE'S a SMART MEXICAN

It's like you were saying she couldn't be smart because she's Mexican.

YOU'r a SMART MEXICAN, I THINK U LIKE HER

What do you want to do to her?

We SHOOD take HER BRACLET.



Ceria

The wind was howling in the darkness.

Wild, malevolent eyes peered through the brush.

The trees bent down to swat their branches at me.

I stood tall, unstoppable. I held my light higher.

The darkness was forced to give way.

I pushed forward, creating my own path, the light always shining a few steps ahead.

Letting my light shine today.

9-18

It was really weird going to the museum and restaurant with Alonzo and his mother. Turns out their family grew up in Toppenish and are native Yakama. I don't know why Alonzo didn't tell me before. He's actually been to the big events where they have dancing, singing and gambling games. His mother was a total chatterbox. She told me all kinds of stuff about their traditions and native beliefs. She talked about how you have to care for nature because we are brothers with all living creatures. The Yakama feel especially close to the salmon for some reason. The Yakama love Mt. Adams and call it Pahto. It belongs to the Yakama Nation because of the 1855 Treaty.

She volunteered that Alonzo's dad left when he was little, and they hadn't seen him since. Alonzo told his mother that I didn't want to know all that stuff, and I could tell he felt kind of awkward. It surprised me that Alonzo didn't know his father any more than I know mine. I didn't have to say much about myself because I just kept asking Alonzo's mother questions about the Yakama people and about her life on the reservation, and she was perfectly happy to keep telling me all kinds of stuff.

She always wanted to be a doctor. When she was little she got passed from family to family because there was a lot of alcoholism and disease in her community. She saw people get help from doctors, and once, when she broke her leg falling out of a tree, a doctor was able to make it straight and heal correctly. She thought that was a pretty powerful thing to be able to do. Plus, she said the doctor was really kind and talked softly to her when she was frightened. He really had a big influence on the kind of doctor she wanted to be.

It's really cool that she followed her dream. I'm not sure what my dream is. I really enjoy writing, so being a writer would be cool, but I hear they don't make much money. I want a job where I make so much money that I can do whatever I want. I want to be in charge, a person who influences other people and who makes things happen.

We saw a lot of cool things at the museum and Alonzo took pictures while I took notes. We saw an earth lodge that a family might have stayed in. They are built partly underground. Yakama people hardly ever cut their hair and usually only if they were mourning. They were really skilled at basket making. It's pretty amazing what they could do as they lived off the land, gathering roots, hunting wild animals and fishing, making their own tools, and building

shelters. I really admire how they were so resourceful.

Dinner was great! We had salmon, which I didn't think I'd like, because I don't usually like the canned fish we have had sometimes.

It was an all you can eat buffet. I finally had to stop eating because Alonzo started commenting on how many times I had loaded up. His mother said not to worry about it. She said it did her heart good to see someone enjoying himself so much. That made me feel a bit uncomfortable. Still, I had five desserts. They were all different! There were chocolate and vanilla cakes, 2 kinds of pudding, different kinds of ice cream, and churros. I managed to sneak some churros and some crackers from the salad bar into my pockets to take home.

I was very polite when they dropped me off at the apartment. I said, "Thank you for taking me to the museum and restaurant. I had a lovely time." Alonzo kind of half smiled, and his mother said, "You are very welcome!" to me. To Alonzo she said, "You could learn a little more about polite language from Edgar," and he laughed, but not unkindly.

After that she asked if she could come in and meet my mother, but I told her that Mom was going to get back late from her airlines job, so she wasn't home yet. Then they left.

My stomach kind of hurts but it's mostly in a good way. I think I'll be dreaming about that meal for a long time.

Hi Kate!

Did you see what Antonio just did?

Sienna 😊

I have no desire to watch Antonio.

I saw him take something out of Ceria's bag.

What do you think it was?

I couldn't tell.

Affirmation from the desk of Ms. Miranda

Dear Alonzo,

I sure appreciate the way you are kind to everyone. You are well respected by others and can be a leader for good.

Your writing is a joy to read.

Ms. Miranda

9-19

After class today I asked Ms. Miranda if she knows how to play chess. She seemed kind of surprised that I asked. I think she thought I had a homework question. She said that she used to play when she was younger but hadn't had a chance for a long time. She asked if I knew how to play. I said that I thought it would be fun, but that Principal Ferdinand seems to be someone who really liked to play chess and could probably enjoy playing a game with her. She turned a little bit pink and said that she had seen his award and his collection in his office. I got right down to it and suggested she should ask him to play.

Next, I asked her if she had any pets, and she said that she had pet dog that she had had since she was very young. She said he is a golden retriever named Buddy. She said he used to love to go for walks with her, but now he mostly just cuddles up on her couch with her while she reads. She lives alone and thinks that Buddy is good protection for her house. He barks whenever someone comes around. She asked me if I had any pets and I told her I have always wanted a dog but my mother doesn't think it's a good idea. She said that dogs make wonderful friends, and then she said I should go get lunch before they ran out.

I didn't have to be told twice!

After school I went downtown to look for my Mom some more. Cal was drinking with a couple of buddies in his front yard. His house is all beat up and the lawn is completely dead. They were laughing and singing drunken songs while sitting around in lawn chairs on that dead lawn, looking like the miscreants they are. I asked Cal if he had seen my mother, and he said he heard she had skipped town and gone to the coast. He got really loud and started cursing. He said Mom owes him money, so I owe him money. He demanded I give him \$300. I laughed and told him that was never going to happen. Then I noticed a hose by the side of the house, turned it on and sprayed them. I ran like crazy before they could chase me. I could hear them tripping over their chairs, stumbling around and cursing like mad, but I was long gone before they could see where I went.

I'm worried that Cal is right about Mom being on the coast. That's really far. I don't think she would just leave without telling me, but she gets carried away sometimes. If she met someone who offered to party with her, I can see her getting in a car, traveling somewhere, and when she sobers up, not being able to get back. We don't have a phone, so she wouldn't be able to get a message to me.



Ceria

*I can't find the bracelet my mother
gave me!*

Have you seen it?

Did you see Ceria LOOKIN all over?

What did you do with her bracelet?

POOT it in SIENNAS bag

What if Sienna thinks you gave it to her as a gift?

I didnt THINK OF that

She might get mad if she finds out

yeah

Affirmation from the desk of Ms. Miranda

Dear Principal Ferdinand,

Would you please notify the custodians that one of my students, Ceria, has lost a bracelet? It is silver and has little owl charms on it. It is precious to her, a gift from her parents.

Ms. Miranda

Hi Kate!

I just found a bracelet in my book bag! Do you think it's a gift from a secret admirer? My birthday is coming up...

Sienna 😊

Maybe. I don't know why else it would be in there. Was there a note?

No. It's silver and shiny. It's got the cutest little bird charms on it.

Sounds kind of expensive. Your admirer must really like you! Are you sure it's not from your parents or something?

I'm sure it wasn't in here before school. Who do you think it could be!?

9/20

It was a crazy weekend. I'm still super exhausted. Cal showed up at my door on Saturday, yelling and pounding on the door, asking for his money and yelling he would hurt me. I pretended like I wasn't home, and the neighbor came out and threatened to call the cops, so he left. Now I'm worried he might come back and try to break in or something.

I decided to go to the park because I can think there, and it doesn't feel broken down and lonely like the apartment.

When I left, I was worried about the rent money getting stolen, so I tucked it into my backpack. The only stuff in the apartment is some clothes and a little furniture, including the couch I sleep on. I don't think anyone would take that stuff. My backpack has my library books, my school work, and my journal.

I was glad I had my jacket because it got kind of cold in the shade while I was reading. In Shakespeare's The Tempest, one of the characters says, "Hell is empty, and all the devils are here." I think about that line when I'm at school trying to hide my stuff from the jerks who want to mess with it. I've thought about that line a lot. Cal and his buddies, drug dealers, gangsters, thieves and bums, the kind of people who made my mother's life so miserable when she was growing up. The people my Mom is probably with right now. The whole world seems like it's full of devils sometimes.

The park is so peaceful. Maple trees spread shade widely across the grassy expanse. There are numerous scattered picnic tables I can sit and read and write at. I just move to another, if someone's Frisbee game gets too close. Today a couple of kids took one of the tables, pushed it up against a tree trunk and were very quickly hidden in the dense leaves while they climbed up into the branches. After they left, I tried it. It's amazing to pull yourself up into another world, hidden above with a view of all around. It felt powerful. I watched a little reddish brown dog chasing squirrels for a while and then I sat and read in the tree until it was dark outside.

When I came down, I wasn't ready to leave yet, so I slid under the trees near the museum wall and curled up with my jacket as a pillow. There's a little retaining wall for the wheelchair ramp that also encloses a small tree that hides me from view. The street lamps provide enough light for me to write in my journal. I'm going to rest here a while.

9/21

I've been trying to decide if I'm glad I was gone last night or not. I guess I am glad, because Cal and his friends probably would have hurt me instead of just destroying our place. Still, if I had been there, maybe I could have prevented it. The torn upholstery, broken chunks and shredded fragments of our couch and the bed, and the smashed tiles in the bathroom show there was a lot of rage behind the destruction. My clothes are gone. The rest of the noodles were emptied all over the kitchen. It's really bad. I don't know what I could have done to stop them, but I would have tried. The landlord is going to be really angry.

The neighbors heard the noise and called the cops. Unfortunately, whoever did it, (I'm sure it was Cal and his buddies,) took off when they heard the sirens. I could call anonymously and tell a policeman what I'm sure happened, but what if the police already think Mom and I did it? What if they find out I'm living there without Mom? I could end up in foster care or something.

I don't think I can go back there anymore.

The neighbors were really nice, said they'd tell the landlord that it wasn't us, but I can't take any chances. Plus, I probably will need the money I've been saving for rent. No way we'll get a deposit back now.

I wish I had some kind of magical power to stop bad things from happening. Sometimes I think I must be a bad person who deserves this kind of treatment. Maybe I shouldn't have been born. I'm sure my mother didn't really want a kid when she was still a kid herself.

One thing I know for sure. I've got to stop feeling sorry for myself. I learned a long time ago that self pity doesn't help anything.

Shakespeare said, "Wise men ne'er sit and wail their loss, but cheerily seek how to redress their harms." So, I'm not going to have a pity party. Instead, I'll find a way to get back at those who think they can hurt me.

I can take care of myself. I've been taking care of myself, and my mother, for as long as I can remember. I don't need anyone else.

Unfortunately, right now I do need several other things.

I need a place to stay. I need food. I might need to find a job.



Dear Ms. Miranda,

The custodians say there hasn't been any bracelets of any kind found recently. I notice that you rarely wear jewelry of any kind. Is that a preference, perhaps?

I hope you are having a lovely day.

Sincerely,

Principal Ferdinand

SIENNA AND KATE KEEP LOOKIN AT ME

That's because you're ugly.

I AM? WHAT DO U MEEN?

JK, bro. Seriously. I was just kidding. I think Sienna likes you.

SHE DOES? WHY?

How am I supposed to know what girls are thinking? Maybe she thinks you gave her that bracelet.

WE SHOOD TELL HER SUMONE ELZ DID.

9/23

I skipped school yesterday to look for a job. Alonzo's been trying to get a hold of me. We really need to finish our project. Fortunately, he just thought I was out of town when he and his mother stopped by the apartment. The neighbors apparently didn't tip them off that we aren't there anymore. They just knocked and left when there was no answer.

I've been having a hard time thinking about the school project or anything else besides my living situation.

Alonzo invited me over to his house. His mother already bought our exhibit board. We just need to type our notes up and put them on the board and make our diorama. I told him I don't have a computer at home, but I could use one at the school. He thought it would be better to do it all at his place. His mother will order pizza. I told him any night would be fine.

The park has been perfect for sleeping. My hidden spot by the museum has a lot of loose soil, so I dug a little pit, like I read that the Yakama people did, and I lined it with cardboard I found in a dumpster. It's working out just fine. I've only had to stay there two nights, but it hasn't been too cold. It's well hidden and I'm careful not to let anyone see me go in there after dark. I really do miss being able to cook stuff in a microwave, though. I also really need a shower. I bought a shirt, some pants, and some underwear at the Goodwill Thrift store, and I haven't needed to wash anything yet. I'm thinking the park restroom sink might work out as a washtub sometime.

My efforts to find a job haven't paid off yet. Everyone tells me I'm too young, and they need someone who can work during school hours. One guy said he was going to call the cops because I should be in school. I left there pretty quickly, actually jumped a wall behind the store!

I sort of wish I could drop out of school. Still, I only sort of want to drop out, because I do actually like learning about the stuff we learn about. I need to finish high school and go to college if I want to achieve my future plans. My mom could show up at any time, and would need to know where to find me. Plus, there are some halfway decent people in my class that I enjoy watching.

However, the jerks that mostly surround me are too much to bear sometimes. I've read about kids in troubled countries who can't even go to school. They would be thrilled to have what I have. They'd even be fine with living in a beautiful park and picking through other people's garbage, so long as they could be in school. I think about stuff like that, and somehow, it makes my situation seem a little better. Then I think about what Alonzo has and I get envious. My life feels like crap.

Hey, SIENNA, THAT NEW GUY SHUR LIKES U.

He poot SOMETHIN IN UR bag.

I dare U to KISS HIM.

Hi Kate!

Antonio says that Edgar likes me and put something in my bag. I think he is the one who gave me the bracelet.

Sienna 😊

Who gave you the bracelet? Antonio or Edgar?

I think it was Antonio, but he says it was Edgar. He dared me to kiss him.

Who dared you? Kiss who? Antonio or Edgar?

I'm supposed to kiss Edgar. It's a dare. Antonio wants me to.

Don't be an idiot. You don't need to kiss either of them, even if one of them did give you a bracelet.



Ceria

Look at that pretty, silly girl.

She wears a bracelet made for someone else.

Little wise owls wink and blink thoughtfully.

The girl stretches out her arms and waves.

She thinks what is yours is hers.

The owls consider options.

I see her. What should I do?

Affirmation from the desk of Ms. Miranda

Dear Principal Ferdinand,

.Thank you! I hope you are having a nice day as well.

I appreciate your help with Ceria's bracelet. I'm sure it will turn up. Missing items usually do. I have a pair of earrings that are frequently hiding from me.

Ms. Miranda

9/24

I'd almost forgotten Antonio and Sebastian and my plan to take care of them, but today they crossed the line. They are always doing dumb things, taking people's stuff, saying something rude only you can hear, putting a note on someone's back, trying to trip people, you know. Anyway, today they put Sienna up to kissing me.

Yep. They dared her to French me.

I saw it coming.

Sienna was all, "No way... Absolutely not!" and whatnot. The jerks were pushing her my way, and saying, "you have to," and then she rushes over with her lips all pursed up.

I dodged her and told her, "Get away from me!" Then she started crying and Ms. Miranda came over and got all stern and asked me why I was picking on Sienna.

Everyone else is just staring and listening. Then Antonio pops up with, "He has a crush on her and he's always hiding her backpack," which is exactly what I think is going on with him.

Sienna is still crying, so Ms. Miranda asks her what is going on and she says, "Antonio's right, he's always picking on me." So, then, Ms. Miranda tells me I need to come see her at lunch, which actually sort of works into my plans, but I'm guessing she's not going to believe me over Sienna and Antonio.

Lunch time rolls around and I go to Ms. Miranda's room. I'm glad she doesn't mind my bringing my lunch with me, otherwise I won't be eating much today. I've already pocketed my breadstick for later. Anyway, Ms. Miranda says, "What really happened?" I tell her the truth. She says, "Thanks."

That's it. She actually seemed to listen. She then asked me if I would like to take the bullying problem to Principal Ferdinand. She suggests that she can talk to him herself if I would prefer. That's exactly what I would prefer. It's exactly as if she wants my plan to work. I could care less if she talks to him about the bullying. I've never had adult intervention really make bullying go away. I just want her to talk to Ferdinand. I tell her that the principal seems like a really caring person. She just looks at me like she wants to agree but isn't sure if she should be telling a student that the principal cares about people. Then she says, "The world is full of wonderful people." Ha!



Ceria

Dear Sienna,

Please give me back my bracelet that my parents gave me. Each of the little owl charms are from a time that my parents were very proud of me.

I'm not sure how you got it, but it belongs to me.

Please return it as soon as possible.

Thank you.

Hi Kate!

I'm so embarrassed! Ceria probably hates me and I know Edgar does. I want to crawl under a rock. I think Antonio took the bracelet and put it in my bag.

Sienna 😊

It will be okay. You gave Ceria the bracelet and apologized. She seemed okay about it. You told her that you thought someone gave it to you, right?

I did tell her. She already has lots of friends. I don't want all those people hating me.

Don't be paranoid. The people you should be suspicious of are Antonio and Sebastian. Plus, you totally messed with super strange Edgar.

I don't want to be worried. I just want to forget that the whole thing happened. Antonio probably thought it would be funny. He's always joking around.

Teacher is looking. Stop passing me notes, but tell me if you think Sebastian is looking at me.

Affirmation from the desk of Ms. Miranda

Dear Edgar,

Thank you for our recent conversation at lunch. I enjoy visiting with you. I am trying to watch some people more carefully. Please let me know if I can help you with anything else.

Ms. Miranda



Ceria

Dear Sienna,

Thank you for returning my bracelet. I don't blame you.

Those boys are not nice. You shouldn't believe them.

Thank you.

Hi Kate!

Ceria is so nice. She wasn't mad at all

Sienna 😊

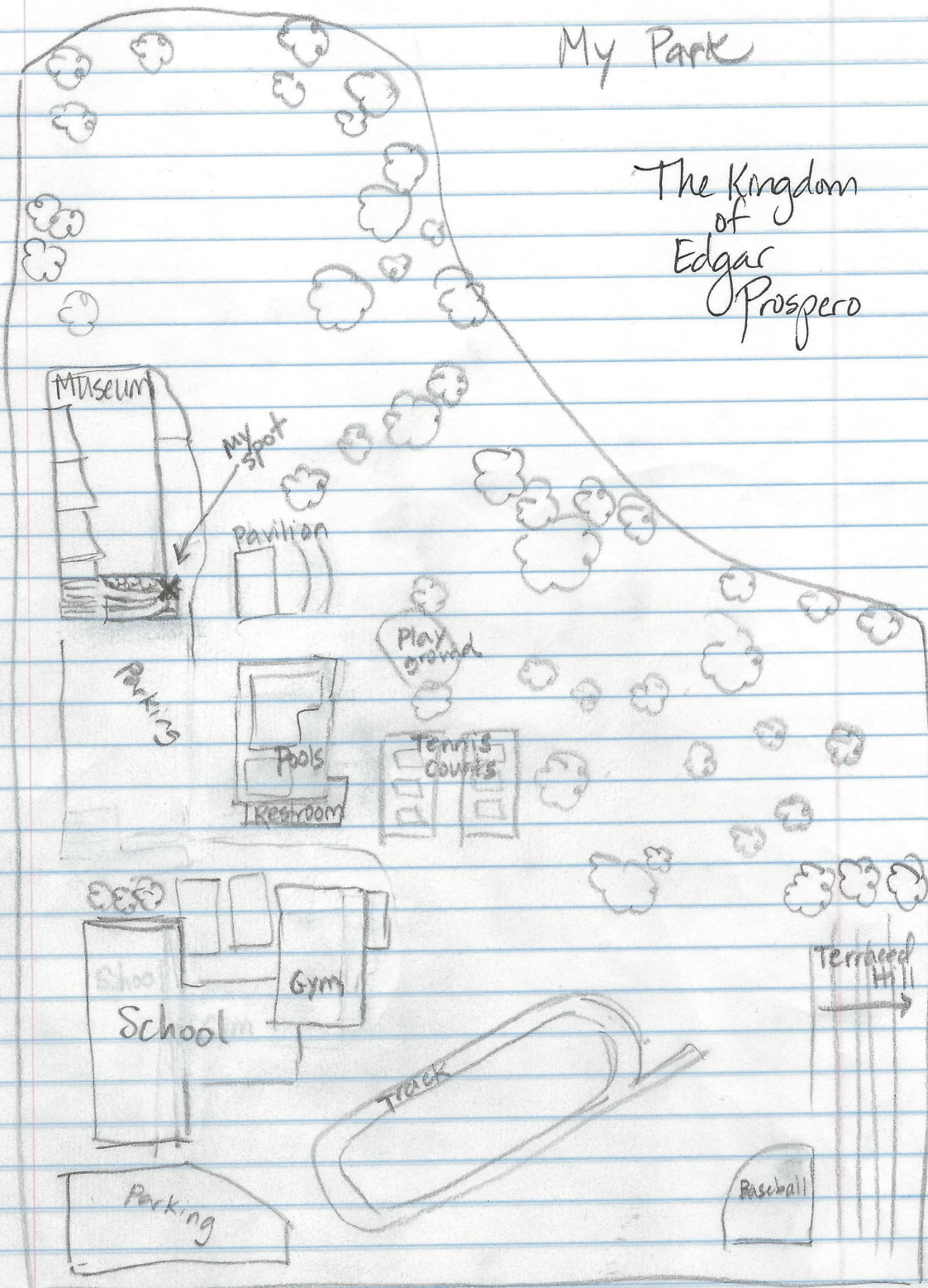
I thought that's how it would be.

She said we shouldn't believe what Antonio and Sebastian tell us.

She's probably right about that, but I think that Sebastian is mostly pretty nice.

My Park

The Kingdom
of
Edgar
Prospero



I used Google Earth to help me draw this.

9/25

Went to Alonzo's to finish the Yakama project. Our exhibit board and diorama look really good.

We decided to include several legends of the Yakama about an important coyote character named Spilyay. He is famous for being a selfish trickster. One of the stories really resonated with me, probably because it is about food disappearing.

It seems that long ago the Yakama people were not valuing the salmon that the Creator had given to them; they weren't following His rules and the teachings of their elders about not overfishing or not wasting what they did catch. They were greedy. Suddenly all of the salmon disappeared.

The people didn't know what to do. Every day they searched for the salmon. One day they found a dead fish on a river bank. They thought that if they could just revive this fish, it would lead the other salmon to return and they would never again neglect to care for them or take them for granted.

They remembered that in ancient times the people had supernatural powers and that it was possible to bring something back from the dead if they were to step over it five times. Each person in turn, tried to awaken the salmon, but to no avail.

Then they remembered a recluse named Old Man Rattlesnake. He was very ancient and lived apart from the people, but he was considered very powerful. The people sent word to Old Man Rattlesnake that they needed his help, that they had failed to revive the salmon.

While Old Man Rattlesnake was on his way, Spilyay also tried. He wanted to be the hero who brought back the salmon. He wanted others to think he had supernatural powers. He stepped over the salmon four times, but on the fifth time, he nudged the fish with his toe, and proclaimed, "It moved! I have brought back the salmon!" but the others just ignored him because they knew of his trickster ways.

Finally, Old Man Rattlesnake arrived and painfully climbed over the salmon four times, but the fifth time, he suddenly disappeared and the salmon came to life! Suddenly, the rivers were again full of salmon. The people learned their lesson. They recommitted to protect the salmon. The Yakama people, even today, are very protective of the salmon.

I've decided to try fishing in the Yakima River soon. Wish I had the right equipment. It's kind of a long walk, but I can also bathe there. I feel a little guilty about it, but I snagged some soap from the Ariel's bathroom while I was in there.

Tonight for dinner we had roast chicken and mashed potatoes with a real salad (with croutons!) and cooked carrots. Dessert was chocolate ice cream.

Too bad we finished the project. I really like Ms. Ariel and Alonzo. They treat me like a friend.

WAZ UP?

I want to punch something or someone.

Y?

I hate my stepdad. You know.

Did He do SOMETHIN agen?

Always. He is so mean. My mom is always crying. He scares my little sisters. He doesn't dare mess with me, though. All I have to do is tap my scar and he gets the message.

Dear Detective Swainy,

I am seeking information about my sister, Annabelle Miranda, who has been missing for the past 15 years. The police investigated her case when she first disappeared and said she was a runaway.

My parents both died a few years ago without ever hearing from her. She has never contacted me either. I was only ten when she left.

I am hoping that your agency can find what happened to her.

I have a few pictures and the name of a boy, D. P. Milan, with whom she may have been traveling.

Please contact me via email or call me directly if you find any leads, or if you have any questions I might be able to answer.

Thank you,

E. Miranda

Yakima, WA

Enclosures

9/29

Apparently Miranda talked to Ferdinand and Ferdinand talked to Antonio and Sebastian 'cause they have really been on my case, even worse than before. I see them whispering to their little group of followers and looking in my direction. They find opportunities to bump into me between classes— not just a mild bump, full body slam as they walk past. I'm proud to say that they haven't knocked me down yet. I have a kind of radar when they are around. The hair on the back of my neck gets tingling, and my adrenaline is pumping before they even touch me.

I've discovered that holding my temper is the best option.

At my previous schools, I would sometimes blow up at others, but that just made things worse. Bullies want a reaction and an audience. I can't prevent Antonio and Sebastian from having an audience, but I can sure deny them a reaction.

I saw the guys in the park today. Fortunately, they didn't see me. I was up in a tree watching them. Antonio was carving something into one of the park tables, and Sebastian looked like he was talking really fast about something. I couldn't quite hear what he was saying except a few heated phrases, "Sick of it!" and "If he hits her again..." I really wanted to hear more but they moved away. Antonio kept looking kind of disappointed about something.

I didn't come down from my tree until the coast was clear. In the paint on the table was a freshly slashed, A+S. Could he be anymore obvious?

Since Sienna obviously thinks he's some kind of god, it shouldn't be too much of a challenge to win her over. Still, I don't see them holding hands ever. They don't even talk to each other much. It doesn't look like there is a relationship there, yet.

My plan to get the principal and my English teacher together seems to be coming along. I saw the two of them talking in the hallway today and she kept blushing and he looked very awkward, so I walked up to them and interrupted, thanking them for helping me with my relationships at school. I told them they were a great team, making a difference for kids. They both looked a little surprised. I handed them a Starbucks card (I had painfully paid \$10 for it, but decided it was an essential expense.) I told them to go out for coffee on me. Am I a genius or what!? They both looked pleased with the idea and themselves. I feel so powerful! "By my prescience, I find my zenith doth depend upon a most auspicious star, whose influence if now I court not, but omit, my fortunes will ever after droop!"

ALONZO, CAN U do SOMETHIN For Me?

Sure, what do you need? How can I help?

I Want to FiX My gradS

I won't do your work for you, but I can help you figure out your school work.

OK. DON't tell Sebastian

Happy to help. See you after school.

**Sebastian, I'M StayIN aFter SCOOl SO
dONT Wate For Me**

In trouble again?

Yes, I Have to Meet With a teacher

OK, I'm supposed to babysit my sisters tonight anyway. My mom will be glad if I'm home sooner.

9/30

We turned in our Yakama project on Friday. I hate to admit it, but I've enjoyed working with Alonzo, and I'm actually going to miss the Ariels. Alonzo liked working with me too, I guess, because he came up today and said, "Hey, want to come over to my house tomorrow? We could go swimming or something." It took me off guard. I responded pretty much without thinking, "The project's over. I'm too busy with other stuff and don't have time to hang out with you," and I walked away. I can't imagine why he'd want to hang out with me anyway. We live in totally different worlds. I probably won't even be in this town much longer. Once Mom gets back, we'll head somewhere else.

Later in the day, Alonzo was suddenly hanging out with Antonio. They were talking and laughing together. I couldn't hear what they were saying, but they looked over my way several times. If you don't make friends, you don't have to worry about them betraying you. I guess I dodged that bullet.

I didn't make it to the lake last weekend because I was getting that Starbucks card for Principal Ferdinand and Ms. Miranda. It was a long walk in the opposite direction on a hot day. I hate getting sweaty. It's been several weeks since I was able to shower. I've been washing my clothes and my stuff in the park bathroom, but people come in and look at me funny, so I mumble, "I got some ketchup on my stuff," and I try to wash one thing at a time, so I can get in and get out quickly. I have to hide that I'm washing my underwear. I usually wad it into a ball inside my shirt. Still, it's embarrassing. Fortunately, the trees are still full of leaves and I can hang my clothes to dry up high where people don't look.

I've noticed that the leaves are changing color, though. Pretty soon they are going to fall off, and I'll only be able to hang my wet clothes in the evergreens, which are harder to climb.

I'm trying to be really resourceful like the Native Yakama we studied. They got all of their food and clothing from the environment around them. I'm using my environment to survive. People at school have no clue.

Dumpsters can be really handy. I've found that people throw out a lot of good stuff. Generally I act really casual as I check out a dumpster. I wait until no one is looking and I open half the lid (The lids are usually set up that way, in two parts.) I climb up on to the top of the closed side and pretend like I picked that place to read my book. Then I kind of peek into the open side of the dumpster to see what is salvageable. Different places have different items. Restaurants have food waste, but I have to be careful because

there are usually lots of people around. I've tried going later at night, but I don't have a flashlight and there is some pretty gross stuff in there.

I found a warm jacket in a dumpster near an auto parts store which is helping out because the nights are a little colder. The jacket has a big oil stain down the front of it, but what do I care about that? It's warm.

On Sunday I was feeling really hungry as I was walking back from Starbucks. I didn't buy anything there except the card because its crazy how much that stuff costs and I'm trying to make the cash last. Usually I can find something to eat that's free (yep, even from a dumpster) or really cheap.

I went by a church and a whole bunch of people were singing and the doors were open to this kind of lobby area where there were coffee and cookies! I could actually smell them as I walked by, and they drew me in. I'd never been in a church before. That wasn't something Mom ever did, and it hadn't ever occurred to me, but like I said, I could smell those cookies and the coffee. There wasn't anyone in the lobby. The singing was coming from nearby. I wondered if it would be stealing to get some food.

I don't feel like taking stuff out of dumpsters is stealing. People have already thrown that away. This seemed like it might be different. The cookies, and once I was in, I could see there was this red punch too, were for the singing people. On the other hand, I think that people can go to any church they want to— freedom of religion and all that. How would they even know I didn't come there all the time? Besides, they were all inside singing anyway. I quickly grabbed three cookies (more than that seemed a bit greedy) and I put them in my pocket. Then I poured myself some punch, and I was just starting to drink it when a kid came through another door. Suddenly the singing got all loud and the kid said, "Hey! Who are you?" but I was already half way down the block, so if anyone expected me to answer, they were sure as Hell disappointed. When I finally stopped running, I ate one of the cookies. They were fresh out of the oven— like a little bit of Heaven, which I guess is appropriate, since they came from a church.

I had to buy a pencil so I could finish my math homework. I really could use a knife to trim it down or else a pencil sharpener. I ground the sides of it on the pavement for a while which worked, but not well. I'm glad I've got a pen for this journal. I hope it lasts. I can't believe I've been living in this park for a whole week.

Did U See EdgarS cloze?

You mean, his clothes? Yeah. Pretty filthy, almost as bad as his shoes. He doesn't have any pride in himself. I would never go out looking like that.

ALONZO duznt care. They did there project togeter.

Did you see their project? It was really interesting. I wish our Massacre project had turned out as well as theirs did. I did like the ketchup we put all over our Lego people, though. Kate couldn't even look directly at it. She kept saying, "Ooh yuck!" but she walked past it like five times.

SUMONE SHOOD tel ALONZO that Edgar wil giv HIM FLEES.



Teria

Friends are like fruit

Round and soft— laughing happily with you

Dark and hard— watching carefully for you

Bumpy and sweet- sharing sorrows and joys in you

Smooth and bitter- providing perspectives to you

So much variety

Each having gifts they offer to the willing

There is good to be found wherever you look for it.

Saw a Scary Movie Last Nite

Which one?

The Village

I've seen that. It's the one with the creepy trees.

And the Killer Chasing people

It's like he's there and then he's not there. So scary.

Hi Kate!

Thanks for coming over last night. That movie was terrifying!

Sienna 😊

So so scary. I loved the part where she thinks she's alone in the house and then she hears the creaking on the stairs. Don't like the blood so much.

It would be fun to have some of the boys over to watch scary movies with us.

Good idea! Watch out. Teacher is looking.

Stop passing me notes.



Geria

Edgar Allen Poe, poet of

Love and Death and Madness:

Once upon a midnight dreary,

While I pondered, weak and weary...

Leave my loneliness unbroken!

Quote the Raven, "Nevermore!"

And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting...just above my chamber door.

So spooky and wonderful!

10/2

I've been trying to come up with some more ideas about how I might really get back at Antonio and Sebastian. I've become really good at climbing trees in the park. I think I could rig up some pretty scary stuff. I'm thinking I could create something that might even make them wet themselves. I'm counting on finding Halloween decorations to help me. People are starting to put them up on their homes.

My other plan is coming along nicely. I noticed Principal Ferdinand talking to Ms. Miranda in the hallway. He was carrying a load of textbooks to her classroom and she was trying to help him, but he kept playfully blocking her efforts saying, "I would rather break my back, than for you to carry anything while I am being lazy." Then he said, "I know how late you were up last night grading papers." I can tell they are spending more time together.

At school, my classmates are talking about scary movies they've seen. I've never actually been to a movie. We've never even owned a television. I like when we get to see movies and use computers at school. Still, I don't feel deprived. I've always had a library card and I've never had enough time for all of the books I want to read or reread. It makes it hard to relate to people, though. They all have shared movie and video game experiences. I don't know anybody like me.

People think they love being scared. They watch a horror show and their hearts pound, and they want to cover their eyes or run out of the room, but they're fascinated by what they are seeing, so they can't look away. When it's over, they all talk about how thrilling it was. Whatever. They don't really know what it's like to be scared.

They don't know what it's like to wonder if your mother is going to wake up or if you'll get to eat that day.

They don't know what it's like to wonder if you'll be sneaking out in the night because you don't have enough money for the rent and then wonder where you'll sleep next.

They don't know what it's like to wonder if the people who put you up are dangerous. To wake up and see them in your room. To feel unsafe.

Real fear isn't fun. Real fear is knowing something is going to hurt and knowing you can't stop it from happening to you. Being brave is facing fear, but it's not fun. Taking control of my life feels comforting, but it hasn't taken any of the fear away. I still don't know where my mother is. I still don't know how long I can wait. For now, my plans and my park will have to suffice.

10/3

Tonight I'm going to find a spot near the river to sleep and tomorrow I'm going fishing. I decided that my face is becoming too familiar to folks at the park and I'm afraid they will get suspicious. The same people go there everyday. For example, there's the early morning dog walkers and joggers. One nosy boxer in particular is always trying to sniff me out. Fortunately, his owner is an absent minded looking lady who is always having trouble with her headphones and music. When her dog stops, she takes that opportunity to figure out what she wants to do next on her phone and doesn't even look at what the dog is up to. He gets really close.

After I get out of school and head to my usual spots, the people who live close to the park come for different activities. Parents with young children head for the playground equipment, some teenagers play ultimate Frisbee almost every day, there's this super fit jogger lady who comes through the park in the morning and again in the evening, the museum workers have their usual shifts and events, and several times a week a fitness club shows up to do their exercises and run together... Anyway, my point is, they could figure out that I'm there a lot and possibly figure out I am living there, so I want to get that out of their heads by finding other spots to change it up a bit.

I buried my cardboard lined pit under lots of leaves and I don't think anyone will discover it. I carry everything else in my backpack, so there isn't much evidence.

My big problem at school is that people are really interested in my pack. I've taken to wearing it all the time which makes sitting in shallow chairs really awkward. The bullies want to take it and hide it, but also people ask me why it's so full. They tell me it looks heavy and ask what I'm carrying around. I usually say books. I do have books in there, so I'm being honest. I always carry my favorites, Shakespeare plays. I've got them at yard sales or Goodwill over the last few years. I like that they're complicated and from an earlier time when people talked differently. I like that I understand them when lots of other people don't. I like that Shakespeare invented thousands of words and that his writing gets quoted all the time.

I also make lots of trips to libraries. The librarians are getting to know me. Besides being somewhere I can hang out without anyone wondering why I'm there, it's also got computers and desks, which allows me to do homework and look things up. I can't even remember the first time I went to a library. I must have been pretty little. No matter where we've lived, I always find the library. My mother likes libraries too.

I haven't thought about Mom for a while. It's twisted that I like not having to worry all the time about her, but I also really hope she is okay and comes back soon.



Dear Ms. Miranda,

Thank you for the home-made cookies. They were very nice. You are also very nice.

Sincerely,

Principal Ferdinand

HOWS it HANGIN?

Just fine. I like the general lack of drama lately.

Are you stil intrested in Kate?

Here comes some of that drama again.

JUST WONDRING

Wonder all you like. Let's see if we can get Sierra to kiss you this time.

10/5

I'm still sorting out what happened this weekend, so I'm going to tell what I remember and go from there.

Friday after school I started walking north. There is a little lake near the freeway that I was headed to. Mom took me there this summer when she went to meet Cal. We went swimming and had a little picnic near the water. There were people there fishing. It's a man-made lake surrounded by trees and a pathway. It's fed by a little creek and it's close to the river where an asphalt path follows along its length for miles. I know that there are people who live down by the river. I've seen tents out there and even campfires. I was really hoping that I could find discarded fishing line, tree branches and hopefully a snarled hook caught on something along the lake's edge to create my own fishing pole. I'm dying for some real food, and I know native people caught salmon out of the river with their own tools, so I wanted to try it for myself. I'd never been fishing before, but how hard could it be?

After I'd been walking about a mile, I was in neighborhoods I didn't recognize. There was lots of traffic and I wasn't sure which way to head to get to the lake. I stopped at a convenience store and asked the clerk which way to go to get there, and he asked me, "Which lake?" which I didn't have an answer for, since I don't know the name. There was a bearded guy in a baseball cap nearby, though, who said, "You probably want Myron Lake, it's not very far from here. You just continue up the street out front for about a mile west and you'll see a sign that takes you across the railroad tracks. I could give you a ride, if you like." I immediately stammered a brief, "Thanks, but no," and headed out the door. It seemed like he slowed down a little and stared at me when he passed me a few minutes later in a red SUV. The uncomfortable feeling I got should have made me change my plans, but I continued on my way.

Once I crossed the tracks and saw the lake, I was relieved to see that there were still people fishing there. That gave me hope that I might actually catch something. I immediately started searching the bushes around the water for fishing line. I was rewarded with tangled line abandoned by some careless fisherman. Then I realized why he left it behind. It was thoroughly caught in the thorny shrubs at the water's edge. I yanked at it for a while and then I patiently tried to disentangle it, and I finally kicked the bush a few times, but I couldn't get the line free. I could tell that I really needed a knife, although that would make the line shorter than I wanted.

The other fisherman around the lake had real poles with line that wound up and unwound as they cast it out towards the water. I guess I was making something of a spectacle of myself because people started looking my way.

I really hate to draw attention to myself, so I walked away from the tangled line and started revising my plan. I thought that maybe I could use my shirt as a net at the creek that fed into the lake, so I headed over to the little creek. There was lots of garbage around the bushes and trees in that area. Clearly people didn't take care of it the way they did the lake and pathway. The bushes were really close around the creek, and I had a hard time getting down to it. Once I got there, my pants were torn a little from the bushes and I could see that the creek was really shallow and there weren't going to be any fish there. I was really disappointed.

Suddenly, above me on the pathway, the bearded guy from the convenience store called down to me, "Lose something?" I wasn't sure what to say or do. While I hesitated to answer, he started to come down to where I was! I said, "Don't come down here. I just thought I saw something interesting. I was just leaving." He stopped for a minute, and then said, "No, let me give you a hand. It's kind of steep. I noticed you tore your pants getting down there." This guy was way too helpful! I had alarm bells going off in my head. "Get away from me!" I thought. Still, I managed to just say, "No thanks! I'm fine, really," and headed up the hill in the other direction. He tried to follow me, but the bushes were difficult for him to get through too. Once I gained the pathway, I started running away from him. He made a start to chase me and called out, "Stop! I just want to talk," but I wasn't about to talk to him about anything. I left him far behind as I ran up the path, and determined to leave the lake area and cross the freeway to go to the river where there would be less people.

The pathway along which I hurried was paved, but to both sides of me were trees and bushes forming a channel that I hoped would empty into more open spaces. Here and there were spaces I could have stepped off the pathway to the lakeshore, presumably to fish, if I had anything that would work for that! Usually, these little alcoves had people in them, fishermen tending their lines, teenagers kissing... As I left the lake and briskly hurried along the path, bicyclists and joggers occasionally passed me, and I overtook people walking slowly. For the most part, however, I was very alone in this wooded area, following my path first along another little lake, then under the freeway bridge, then past another lake. I had traveled at least two more miles before I found what I was hoping for, solitude by the river. There were small, dirt pathways off the main paved path. I didn't take the first ones, waiting for a small one that looked little used. The one I took was overgrown some, but it led me to a small clearing near the river that was secluded on all sides. I was very visible from the other side of the river, but as far I could tell, there was no one on the other side watching me. The opposite bank is bordered by brushy hillside and no path, much less accessible to people. I could see the river was moving way too fast for fishing. I would probably be going hungry for the weekend unless I made my way back to civilization, but I wasn't willing to do that yet. I decided to set up a camp.

I dragged fallen tree limbs and began creating a shelter, kind of a lean-to with the limbs propped against tree trunks. There were plenty of downed branches and twigs but I couldn't find much to plug holes. For the first time, I really wished I had some kind of blanket. I can tell that my jacket is not going to be enough as the weather gets colder. A blanket is hard to conceal, though.

Once I had the shelter roughly made, I started to look for stones to create a fire pit. Fire is a conundrum. If I want to be warm, or if I catch something to cook, I'll need one. But, fires create smoke, and smoke might lead someone to investigate.

It was still early enough that I decided to scout for food. I went to the river's edge and tried to see if any fish were visible close to shore. I couldn't see any, and the water looked really deep as it rushed by. Next, I looked for plants that might be edible. I know dandelions are edible, but I couldn't find any.

I've heard that tree bark can be boiled to make tea, so I decided I would try that, but it meant I'd definitely be starting a fire. Since I had a cigarette lighter in my backpack, that was pretty easy. At least starting some leaves and small twigs on fire was easy. It just wouldn't stay lit. Every time I put a bigger chunk of wood on the starter fire, it would go out.

I tried different things, but finally tore some pages from my school note book and wadded them up into balls, which I put under dry twigs. This time, the flames caught the twigs and when I put a smallish chunk of wood on it, the wood began to catch the flames and blacken. I was afraid of smothering it, like I had its predecessors, so I only added a few more twigs and smaller sticks. I managed to keep it going, but the smoke it was putting out made me look around anxiously.

Still, I had got it going. I let it continue to burn, adding the dry wood I had collected. I was feeling pretty powerful about my accomplishment, when out of nowhere, this skinny, twitchy guy appears. He's pushing his way through the brush muttering to himself. He's using lots of swear words peppered with "careless" and "stupid." He immediately stamps on my fire and orders me to get some river water to pour over my now smashed but glowing remnants of fleeting glory. As I rush to fill my hat with water, he says, "I'm Reaper. Who the Hell are you?"

As I dribble water over my rapidly dying fire, I take a good look at the guy. He's wearing layers of filthy clothes and his long hair and scraggly beard are equally grubby. His skin is darkly tanned and leathery looking and his ears are huge and stick out from under his gross hair. One of his front teeth appears to be broken. Then I realize that what I took for strange shoes are actually his impossibly dirty bare feet. I probably would have been afraid— after all, his appearance and crazy name are pretty intense— except that I was so bewildered by his attack on my happy little fire.

I still hadn't answered the guy with my name, and he's working himself up with another round of curses, so I cut him off with my quickly created fake name. "Duke, my name is Duke. Why'd you kill my fire?"

"What are you, some kind of damned baby? You'll burn everything down the way you was screwing up that fire!" and he continued to cuss me up and down.

I didn't even try to explain. I just started gathering my stuff so I could get out of there and away from this crazy elf man. Then he says, "Slow down, there. Don't be leaving just yet. You don't know what the hell you're doing. I got lots to tell you, so sit down right there, right now. Listen to Reaper and you might just learn something."

Okay. This was kind of creepy, but for some reason, a lot less so than when the baseball cap guy back at the lake was trying to help me. This Reaper guy seemed to be the real deal— authentic somehow. Something about that other guy had rung false, and, therefore, unpredictable.

So, I sat down. I said, "Tell me what I was doing wrong." He immediately began this animated description of a time someone's river camp started a fire and burned a wide area. He talked about the frightened creatures that live in the brush and trees and said even fish are affected by fires on the riverbank. He showed me that I needed to create a sort of stone fire pit with a wall to keep a fire from burning down into the ground and/or moving out to catch nearby dead brush. He told me to never use paper as a fire starter because it creates feather light embers that can catch in the breeze and fly away into other areas.

Turns out Reaper had been living out by the river for years. His camp was really close but much more concealed, but he wasn't going to show it to me. While we were talking, my stomach made this loud rumbling noise. To my surprise, he offered me a peanut butter sandwich, which he pulled out of his shirt pocket. I was so hungry, I didn't even care that it was warm and somewhat dirty. He said that there were certain church people who frequently came out to the pathway and handed out sandwiches to the people who camped near the river. I managed to thank him for the sandwich as I gobbled it down. He said that I should never start a fire unless I had a good reason. He wondered what I thought I was going to cook and didn't seem surprised that I didn't have anything. I was too embarrassed to say that I was going to try to make bark tea.

He nodded at my heavy backpack, and then he said, "Go home, kid. Whatever you're running away from isn't bad enough for you to be living out here." I wasn't about to tell him why I was there, so, I just said, "I'm not planning to live here. I just want to camp out for the night is all." He looked at me with his head tipped to one side, like he didn't believe me. Then he started swearing and muttering again and disappeared back the way he had come.

I decided he was harmless and I could stay where I was. It was starting to get dark and a bit cold, so I pulled out my jacket. I decided I wasn't going to call attention to myself again with a fire, plus it made more sense to try to sleep and get up early, so I could be on my way in the morning. I had decided that I needed to go to the city library and look up edible plants and survival skills. The next time I came down to the river I wanted to be able to teach someone else a thing or two. I wasn't afraid of Reaper. He was just a harmless tramp who wanted to protect his own home from inexperienced idiots like me.

I created a nest for myself by moving rocks and sticks and creating a bed of leaves within my shelter. I curled into a ball and wrapped my jacket around myself. I put my backpack under my head. Books actually make a decent pillow, and I drifted off to sleep to the sound of frogs singing, crickets chirping, and the river dancing by.

At some point in the night I was awakened by a loud noise. It sounded like someone dragging something heavy through the brush towards the river. Whoever it was sounded large and menacing and close by. I sat up straight and hugged my backpack in front of me. I figured it was the closest thing I had to a weapon because I didn't have time to look for a big stick. There was a decent amount of moonlight, although not a full moon, for seeing into my clearing. The noise grew louder and a large figure appeared low to the ground, like a large dog with short legs. It was huge and crawled quickly towards me. I gasped, but it didn't slow or stop as it passed me and slid gracefully into the river. I had no idea that beavers were so large! I'd seen them in pictures, but the real thing was much more impressive.

Of course, I couldn't sleep for a while after that. I stared out into the night, wondering what else might be lurking in the shadows. After a while, I noticed that one of the trees in the clearing had a face, eyes and a nose and a gaping mouth that appeared to be howling in pain and frustration. It stared at me, willing me to help it. The shadows of the night were playing tricks on me, so I closed my eyes and tried to imagine peacefulness back into my camp. I opened my eyes again, and the face was still there, echoing my fears about my missing mother and my uncertain future. I fell back asleep but dreamed that my mother was calling to me to help her. Cal was chasing her and there was a giant beaver with Antonio's head, and wearing a baseball cap, trying to drag me to the river to drown me. I couldn't help myself, and I couldn't help her. I awoke with my heart pounding. Light was just beginning to take away the shadows of the night. It peaked over and through the trees. The tree that had personified my fears was now just a series of knotholes with a broken branch nose. It seemed comical in the growing daylight.

I decided to pack up and head back to town. I thought perhaps I would find a dumpster with something useful before the rest of the world was awake. Maybe I'd even use one of my precious dollars to buy a sausage biscuit at McDonalds. My stomach grumbled its approval of that idea.

I spent Saturday morning at the library reading up on edible plants of the Pacific Northwest and found that there wasn't much to fill one's stomach. There is a librarian who is getting to know me. His name is odd, Gonzolo. He wears a nametag so that's how I know it. He has helped me find reference books, like the ones on edible plants, and he helped me before on my Yakama research. He laughed at me one of the times I was curled up in a comfy chair reading Shakespeare. He said that he doesn't get many junior high boys reading Shakespeare. They mostly like Captain Underpants.

I started thinking that I should rethink my plans about finding food in nature and instead focus on what foods I could buy cheaply that don't require refrigeration or much preparation on the weekends. Reaper's peanut butter sandwich was lingering deliciously in my memory. I also started thinking about jobs I could do. It occurred to me that people sometimes need help with yardwork, but then I realized I don't have any tools and wondered if people would loan me theirs while I did the work. I thought maybe old people would be the most likely to require help.

Around noon I went to one of the neighborhoods near my park and started knocking on doors asking if anyone had odd jobs or yard work they would like done. I created a cover story that I was trying to raise money for a trip to Washington DC because I thought they might be more approving of helping me out for something like that.

Most houses just said, "No thanks," but one older lady told me that she had a garage she needed cleaned. It was filled with empty boxes that needed recycling, so I took them apart and flattened them, and I filled her recycle bin until it overflowed. I straightened her stuff on the shelves and swept out the garage. All in all, it took me a couple of hours, but wasn't too hard. I knocked on her door again to tell her the work was done, and she came out and inspected my work. She said I had done a good job and handed me fifteen dollars. Hooray! I made money on my own today.

I celebrated by going to the Stop 'n Go Market and buying a jar of peanut butter and a loaf of bread. Feeling extravagant, but justified, I also bought a soda and an ice cream bar. It felt good to have accomplished so much, and it was nice to be back in my own park again.

After eating five sandwiches at a park table, I climbed a tree to read. I was really into a book about three modern day kids fighting ancient Greek villains when I heard a familiar voice below me. It was Cal! He was talking to one of the same jerks I had sprayed with water that one day at his house. I was fearful that they might notice me in the tree, and I pulled my hood down to hide my face. I tried to look absorbed in my book in case they looked up.

Cal and his friend were talking about some guy named Stephen who they thought could help them with some deal they were planning. Apparently this Stephen guy was going to be able to help them get a job done and they were going to work for him. I couldn't tell what the job was, but I figured it was something sketchy. I wouldn't put anything past those guys. They moved on without looking up, and I was relieved.

I really wonder where my Mom is. I wonder again if I should call the police and have them start looking for her, but if I do, I know they will send me to a foster home. She would probably get in trouble, and if they found something illegal, could even go to prison. That's happened to her so-called friends before. One of the reasons we've moved around so much is because it helps us avoid the police. Mom may have her problems, but she's my mom. Even if they do find her, they would probably decide she'd abandoned me and put me in foster care anyway.

It's just been the two of us my whole life. When I was little, things were a bit more stable. Mom worked as a housekeeper and got to bring me with her. I even helped her, as much as a little kid can. We had an apartment but not much furniture that I remember. We would go to the library, and my Mom taught me to read before I even started school. My favorite memories of Mom are us reading together in our little place. That was before Mom made friends who were users. I was probably in second grade when we had to move for the first time. Mom wasn't home when I got there after school. That was the first time. I sat on the steps waiting for her. I had a book I was really excited about, The Wizard of Oz, (never seen the movie!) I didn't panic or anything. I just got lost in the story. When she finally showed up, I was almost done with the book and excited to tell her about the witch melting and all, but she told me we were leaving, grabbed clothes and shoved them in a backpack and we were in a car headed to another town with some of her new friends.

Mom always tried to keep me away from the other users. She told me hundreds of times not to get mixed up with them or try the stuff they were doing. She said she wished she had never started and that now there was no way to stop. Sometimes she forgot she wanted to keep me away from them. She seemed to forget a lot of things. But drugs don't interest me. I love freedom.

That's when I started taking care of her. When she was working, I made sure she knew what her work schedule was. I always made sure she was eating something, made sure she remembered me. Each time we went to a new place she said it would be a fresh start. She would enroll me in school. She would try to stay clean and usually found a job. She promised things would be different than before, and we always found the library first thing. We made things work until it stopped working, she missed too many shifts, or people started worrying about me, or we couldn't pay the bills, and then we moved on.

Cal came into our lives a couple of years ago.

At first, he was super helpful when we moved to Yakima. He drove Mom places she needed to go and helped us find our way around. She helped him too. He had trouble with reading and speaking correctly, so she gave him suggestions that helped him clean up his language and not sound so much like the dumb ass he is. She got another housekeeping job and paid for things.

Then Cal started getting controlling. He wanted to have all of Mom's time. He gave her drugs and gradually she became less of herself. It wasn't until he hit me one day because he wanted to "show who was boss" that Mom decided we had to move again. We snuck out of his house. We were supposed to be getting away from him.

It didn't work out that way. Once we got to our new place, she called him from a pay phone. She needed to use. She was all tearful and apologetic to me, lying and saying this was the last time, but I knew that the drugs had a hold of her. I really hoped it would work out, but she was lost to them again.

I know there is such a thing as rehab. I know that it costs a lot of money. I thought that maybe someday I could get her help, but now I wonder if she will ever come back from the coast or wherever she's gone. I think the drugs have made her forget about me. I'm really hoping that she will come to herself somehow and come back and find me. I know if I leave town looking for her, she won't know how to find me. I've got to stay put.

Anyway, I was thinking about all those things after I saw Cal. I couldn't put my mind back into my books and it was getting dark. I wasn't focused. I wasn't paying attention when I headed to my hidden spot by the museum, so when the jogger lady stopped and asked me what I was looking for, I was really surprised.

I said, "Nothing," when I probably should have just made something up, like lost keys or something. I walked away towards the school. Her eyes followed me so I had to keep going. I walked around the block several times until I was sure she was done with her run and gone home before I went back and, cautiously, this time, found my cardboard bed and settled in for the night.

On Sunday morning, I got up before anyone was near the park and had peanut butter on bread for breakfast and wrote this journal entry. It's time I got to work on my plans for Antonio and Sebastian; Alonzo too, if he crosses me.

August 8, 2016

Evelyn Miranda
111 North 27th Avenue
Yakima, WA 98902

RE: Annabelle Miranda

Dear Ms. Miranda,

Please be advised that I have been pursuing court records and conducting interviews regarding the whereabouts of your sister, Annabelle. I was unable to locate D. P. Milan, but his brother indicated that he was living somewhere in Washington state, had an alcohol addiction, and no fixed address. The brother said that D.P. and your sister were not together, nor had they been for quite some time, although there is a possibility that they were married in Las Vegas. He was unaware of her location. The last time he knew she was with D.P. appears to have been when they ran away together fifteen years ago. He had a postcard from Vegas. The brother said that the two were using assumed names. Later contacts (occurring years apart) indicated D.P. was alone. D.P. had been arrested a couple of times for public intoxication and disorderly conduct. D.P. has not contacted his brother for at least five years.

I showed pictures of Annabelle to various corrections officers who were actively on duty during the first years when she first left the area, but no one recalled her. I will continue to expand my search to regions surrounding. She does not match the description of any Jane Doe bodies that have been recovered in the last fifteen years.

Please let me know if you have any other leads for me to pursue. Until I hear from you, I will continue in the course I have indicated.

Sincerely,

Detective Swainy

Replace the picture with



our own drawing.

Come help us

Close Down the Pool!

Party at Alonzo Atriel's

5409 Valley View Drive

October 10

6-10 PM

There will be swimming and lots of refreshments!

You can bring your pets who like to swim.

10/6

Today at school Alonzo invited the entire English class to a "closing down the pool" party at his house. Just before winter, the Ariels have to drain their pool so it won't freeze. They have this tradition where they invite all of Alonzo's friends over. They can even bring their pets to swim in the pool, if they want to, because it's getting drained. The kids are all talking about it. I guess lots of them have known Alonzo all through school. That's what happens where your family stays put, I guess. The party is on Friday. I won't be going, of course.

In Math today, I couldn't concentrate. It's not like the work is hard, but it does require thinking. I just kept staring at the problem. Not something I usually do. I'm not sure where my mind was, but I obviously wasn't making any progress solving it when I noticed Ceria looking at me. She mouthed, "Need any help?" to me. I know she was talking about the Math problem, but somehow, her question caught me off guard. Of course I need help! I really need help! I need someone to find my mother and help her. I need to make money so I don't have to live in the park in a cardboard shelter or next to the river in my jacket. Winter is coming, for Heaven sake!

I pulled it together, of course. She might have caught a glimpse of a tear in one of my eyes, but I shook my head "no" with a confident smirk and pretended to have a cold, coughing and sniffing loudly enough for the teacher to bring me some Kleenex. Ceria smiled at me like she understood, but there's no way she did. No way anyone could really understand how truly isolated I am.

I got right on that Math problem, though. I was almost the first one finished with the whole set of problems, and I made a big deal of turning the page in and settling into reading my book.

Later in the day, I found Principal Ferdinand and asked if he had a few minutes to spare. He said, "Sure," and led me into his office. He said, "What's up, Buddy?" which made me smile. We're not really buddies at all, but I could tell my principal wants to be my pal.

I told him that I was thinking about becoming a teacher as a possible future career and was hoping to interview him and one of my favorite teachers, Ms. Miranda. He smiled when I said this and asked why she is a favorite, so I went on and on about how nice and caring she is and how she loves reading and writing like I do. I also casually mentioned that I am hoping that both of them might be willing to write me recommendation letters for future employers. He smiled and said, "Sure thing, but it's a long time until you'll be needing one of those!" I just sat back and said, "No, I'd really like to be able to have some letters now. I've got plans. I could use them for my current job search." He laughed, "Sure thing!"

Hi Kate!

You should see the cute swimsuit I am planning to wear to Alonzo's party. Everyone is going to think I'm super sexy.

Sienna 😊

What's it look like?

It's a red two piece. The top has a twist in it and the bottom ties on the side, but it mostly covers my butt. 😊

I think my suit is cute, but my parents would never let me out of the house in something like yours. I can't wait to see you in it! Friday!

I got Edgar good today

When? What did you do?

**I TOLE ALONZO HE WAS SAYIN RUDE STUF
ABOUT HIS MOTHER**

When did you see Alonzo?

AFTER SCOOOL. ALONZO WAS MAD

I'm surprised he believed you. I thought he was friends with him.

LOSER DON'T HAVE FRIENDS

10/7

Cardboard does a pretty good job of keeping me warm and dry enough. I never would have guessed how good an insulator it is. It doesn't protect me from everything, though. Last night and today it's off and on raining. Not a lot. Still, I got a bit wet. My cardboard got really damp but not soaked. Being wet is a problem. When I'm wet, I'm colder and I have trouble sleeping. My jacket really doesn't cut it under those circumstances. I need something waterproof. I had about \$200 in my backpack left from the rent money this morning, but I had to spend about \$20 today. I've been super careful, but I still hate to see it go down. Since I earned money cleaning that garage, I'm beginning to think that maybe I can spend a little of what I have on things I need, like a knife. I'm also going to buy a roll of plastic sheeting. That seems like a really practical thing to have and wouldn't take up too much space in my pack. I have more options if an occasional job or two brings in some extra money. When Mom gets back, we will need as much as we can to start fresh somewhere new. I really can't wait to leave this town, but on the other hand, I want to at least stay until Halloween. I'm plotting my comeuppance for Antonio and Sebastian.

That reminds me why I'm really hungry at the moment. Today the jerks managed to ruin my food and my day at the same time. It was a pretty slick play for two guys not known for subtlety and finesse. At lunch time, I always sit by myself, but as I was walking towards the tables, one of them came by close on my left and as I clutched my pack and food closer to my body, said to no one in particular, "Look at that, Alonzo and CERIA are holding hands." When I looked over to see the nice kids (as I think of them) in an animated conversation on the other side of the room but not actually holding hands, my focus diverted not from the bully on my left, but the bully at my back, whom I had previously been unaware of. Antonio rapidly flanked me and pushed my tray up into my chest. Both of them disappeared into the tables before I realized what had happened and school turkey gravy and mashed potatoes were running down the front of my shirt and pants and dripping onto my shoes. I can't believe they got me! I'm usually so careful.

The mess created a huge dilemma for me. I really don't have spare clothes and if I try to wash stuff in the sink, it gets wet. Wet stuff doesn't dry when the weather is uncooperative, like it is today. I wiped off my clothes as best I could in the boys restroom. I confess that I ate some of it off my shirt since no one else was in there. Then I walked out of the school. I know parents are supposed to check you out of the office officially and all that, but my situation being what it is, I just went AWOL. I didn't have something to change into, so I walked six blocks to the Goodwill. The cashier girl, her hair in a sideways ponytail, looked at me and frowned but didn't stop me from trying on a pair of jeans and a T-shirt. She didn't even care that I was wearing them when I paid. I carefully rolled up my soiled things. I had to take them to the park sink and clean them, my shoes too. Like I said, stuff doesn't dry well when it's overcast and there is scattered rain, like today. I'm chilled to the bones.

"What freezings I have felt, what dark days seen!" Sonnet 97



Teria

Return

Her eyes are dancing back and forth

Her heart yearns to see the face of one so long away

Why is it so hard to see?

Her eyes feel the sea tide as it rises to obscure her vision

Is her presence a dream?

Longing, longing, longing for love so long separated.

Please let it be soon!

Edgar LeFT

We really got him good today.

HeS SUCH a LOSer

I thought he was going to hit me.

He SHOOD FiNd a diFFrent SCOOl

He is really weird.

Hi Kate!

Did you see what happened at lunch today?!

Sienna 😊

You mean the almost fight?

I don't think it was ever going to be a fight. It was pretty mean of those guys to make Edgar's lunch spill all over him. He doesn't deserve the way they treat him.

It is really mean. Should we tell a teacher or something?

Maybe. Edgar didn't come back to school after lunch. I think he went home.

Let's ask Ceria what she thinks.

10/8

I made a friend today.

Not a phrase I'm particularly comfortable with. Still, I like his smile and his enthusiasm because he obviously likes me, a lot.

It happened like this. I was doing homework in the park, an essay on who was the most crucial member of the Lewis and Clark expedition. I was really focused on my work, so I didn't notice him much at first. He was hanging around my table, checking things out, but then he jumps up on the table and licks my face!

He barks at me, jumps off the table, grabs a stick between his teeth and starts to run away, but then he quickly stops, clearly looks back at me, beckoning me to follow. I stood up and he ran back and pushed the stick into my hands. It was obvious he wanted me to throw the stick to him. I said, "Okay, go long," and off he ran. I threw the stick in his direction and even though I was off by several yards, he lept for it, grabbed it, and came tearing back to shove it in my hands again. I looked around to see if there was some owner who might be coming to rescue me, but there wasn't anybody nearby. I looked down at the little guy, basically a small, skinny, brown dog with short hair and big ears. He wasn't wearing a collar.

I went ahead and prepared to throw the stick again, and he was racing ahead of it like he knew where it was going to go before I even launched it. It flew up in an arc and he again intercepted it, leaping gracefully up and running back to me almost as soon as he landed. We kept this up for a while. I didn't like how gooey the stick became and found another one and then another one. When I decided I'd had enough, he looked disappointed, and barked a few times, but when I sat down and put pen to paper, he flopped down on the ground beside me and promptly fell asleep.

Over an hour later when I finished writing, he was still there snoozing. I opened my pack to make myself a peanut butter sandwich, and like lightning, he jumped on the table again, looking at me hopefully. This was a real dilemma. It seemed rude not to give him anything, but I have to preserve my food. His eyes watched my every move. They followed the plastic knife as I spread the peanut butter on the bread and as I lifted the sandwich to my mouth for each bite. He didn't bark or attempt to take any. He started to drool and swallowed hard a few times, but he patiently watched as I ate each greedy bite. When I got to the last bite, I couldn't hold out any longer and tossed it to him. The happy smile I got after he gulped it down in one swallow was reward enough. I scratched his neck under his chin and thought how nice it might be if he hung around a while.

When my friend continued to hang out while I read, I started thinking about names for him. Does this mean I'm going to keep him? I guess it's really up to him. I don't have a leash, or a kennel, or even a rope. He can go where he wants, but I found myself hoping he might want to stay with me. I decided to name him Spirit. It sounds right and he's pretty spirited. I asked him, "Is it okay if I call you Spirit?" and he gave me that goofy smile, so I decided it's settled.

Then I saw two guys walking rapidly toward me. It was Cal and another one of his buddies. I didn't have time to get away, but then Spirit stood up and started growling deep in his throat. It was a bit of a surprise because he seems like such a happy go lucky kind of dog, but I really appreciated it at the time because it slowed them down. Cal stopped a few yards away looking at Spirit warily and asked, "Did you tell your mother I want my money?" His friend kept looking at Spirit and backing up a few steps. I think he might actually have been sweating as he held his hands in front of him as if for protection. I told him that I hadn't seen my mother since before the last time I saw him.

I realized that I probably shouldn't have mentioned that time because I had left him soaking wet and swearing vengeance. It wasn't something I wanted him to remember particularly. Still, he was my most clear link to learning more about where my mother might be. I asked him if he had heard from her, maybe she was going to pay him what she owed him? He seemed surprised that I didn't know where she was. He said, "Call off your dog. We aren't going to hurt you." I put my hand on Spirit's head and said, "It's okay Spirit," but that didn't seem to be enough to put him into a more trustful mood. He barked sharply and growled again in their direction.

I said, "Sorry, He just doesn't seem to like you two." Then I said something that was also a mistake. "Hey, if you hear anything about my mother and let me know, I'll give you twenty bucks." It seemed reasonable at the time. He might hear something. He only seems to care about money. I was desperate for news about where my mother might be and how she is doing. The mention of money, however, led him to say, "If you've got money, you should be paying your mother's bills. I'll take that twenty now and whatever else you have," but when he took a step forward. Spirit came out from under the table and jumped in front of me. This time his growls turned to full on, open-mouth, teeth bared, frothy, angry barking.

Cal's friend said, "Let's get out of here!" and started sprinting back the direction from which they had come. Cal reluctantly started to follow, but said, "I'm not done with you kid. I want my money," and then he left too.

I decided to buy some dogfood. Spirit followed me to the store, waited for me outside while I bought the smallest amount of dry dog food I could, and walked with me back to the park. As he was eating, I decided that whether I planned to keep him or not, he has clearly decided to keep me.



Ceria

Bullies

Hunting for control over others

The Isolated

Seeking sanctuary inside themselves

Friends

In search of service, constructing circles of solace

Which ultimately have the greatest power?

Numbers are what are needed here.

Hi Kate!

I feel better after talking to Ceria. She really is nice.

Sienna 😊

She really seems to notice what's going on around here, like she's known all of us longer than she has.

She thinks that friendship is the answer to everything.

I like the idea of being a good influence, but I'm not sure it's that easy.

If I was one of the kids who got picked on, I think I'd never come to school.

10/9

Not so rough a night last night. Spirit snuggled in close to me and we stayed warm together on and under my cardboard shelter. I suspect I smell a bit doggy as a result, but tomorrow, Spirit and I are going down to Myron Lake, and we are going to get clean. I am going to find a store that sells plastic sheeting and small plastic sealable tubs. My backpack is just too full and I have figured out that if I bury the bottom half of the plastic tubs in my secret sleeping spot, I can store my extra clothes, the dogfood, and books in them, put the lids on and bury them in leaves during the day and no one will be the wiser. Then my backpack won't be so full.

Today was a great day except that I worried all day that Spirit would be gone when I got out of school. When I went in, Spirit looked like he was going to follow me right through the front doors. I told him, "Just wait for me. I have to stay here and you can't come in. It's like the store, only it's going to take longer. Just wait in the park, and I promise I'll be back."

Classes went better than usual. We've started reading, Call of the Wild, and because of Spirit, I'm really into it. I'm going to treat Spirit like a partner and friend.

I dominated our class discussion, something I don't usually do, but I was feeling super passionate about the topic. I supported the idea that love is more likely to inspire loyalty and obedience than fear. It was interesting to hear Sebastian rail about how fear also forces obedience and submission. He said, it even creates a weird loyalty that looks like love because the abused keeps thinking that his obedience is somehow going to keep the person he fears from hurting him. It was kind of weird actually. It seems like he was starting to argue against himself towards the end, like he said the abused animal also realizes that his obedience isn't really going to stop him from being abused. Anyway, most people agreed with my side of the debate for a change. I looked out the window a couple of times and could see Spirit napping near my spot by the museum.

Ms. Miranda handed me a manila envelope with a recommendation letter inside. She said she and Principal Ferdinand had written their letters together so that they could share ideas in order to write more persuasively and with more detail. She said that I could get my letter from the principal when I had a free moment. I thanked her effusively and she seemed pleased.

Lunch was cheese zombies and tomato soup with an apple. Apples are the perfect food. They can be easily slipped into a backpack, stay there for hours without being badly damaged. There is no fear of spoilage or leakage. They are something I try to acquire for weekend eating. They are also extremely tasty with peanut butter. I can usually snag an extra apple or two if I'm quick. Also, other kids tend to throw them away (Crazy people!) and I can always retrieve abandoned food from fuller garbage cans when no one is looking.

When I went looking for the principal later in his office, I asked him if he had put my letter on school letterhead. I had noticed that Ms. Miranda had actually used her own letterhead for her letter. I told him that I was hoping it would be official looking. He seemed a little startled, but agreed that was a good idea. Just as I had hoped, he opened a drawer in his desk and pulled out some school letterhead. I made sure to note the drawer where it was located. Then he put the paper in his printer, located the letter file on his computer and printed out a copy of the letter on the official school paper. Then he signed the letter and handed it to me. I thanked him excessively and headed out the door to find my dog.

Spirit was actually waiting for me in the park near our secret shelter. He seemed overjoyed to see me, so we played fetch the stick/s for a very long time and then I shared another peanut butter sandwich with him. It turns out that he likes apples too— best with peanut butter, like me.

I climbed a tree, and while Spirit seemed a little put out at first, walking around the base of the tree and barking every few minutes, he finally started chasing flies and settled down to chew on sticks while I read.

The letters that Miranda and Ferdinand wrote for me are pretty awesome. They say really nice stuff about me. If I were an employer, I would totally want to hire myself. I want to keep the letters safe because I will definitely use them in my job searching.

I started thinking about Alonzo's party on Friday. I thought about how funny it was that when I was invited, I didn't have a pet, but now I sort of did. A lot of kids were bringing theirs to the party because they could swim in the pool. I wondered what it would be like. There would probably be a lot of kids laughing and talking. I wondered if their pets would get along okay. I guessed there would be lots of food. I haven't ever been to a party. I've read about them of course. It seems like parties always had food, like it was the main point. Sometimes there was music and dancing.

I am really finding myself curious about what it will be like. Of course, I won't be going. I'm headed to the lake and to the store near the lake. Of course, the Ariel's actually live up the hill above the store, only a half mile or so away. It might not hurt to check out the party, but not stay. I wouldn't mind seeing Alonzo's mother again. She seemed genuinely nice. The others wouldn't expect me to come. They might stare at me. I'm not one of them.

I keep finding myself reexamining the invitation that I haven't thrown away.

Evelyn Miranda

Jefferson Junior High School
3130 Museum Drive
Yakima, WA 98902

October 6. 2014

To Whom It May Concern,

I have come to know Edgar Prospero during this school year. He is an exceptional student, highly organized and responsible, loves reading and is a skilled writer. He is one of the most talented, self-assured and positive young people I have the privilege of knowing.

He loves to challenge himself and often does more than is asked when given an assignment. I know I can count on him to give his best efforts and create work of excellent quality. For example, he created an exceptional State History project about our local Native American tribe, going above and beyond to research their history and to present it in an interesting and skilled way. He is friendly and compassionate while maintaining high standards for himself and others.

The staff at Jefferson all agree that he is one of their hardest working and skilled students. He earns high marks in all of his classes and is one of the best writers I have had the privilege of teaching.

Edgar encourages others to work hard and to seek quality as he has. This makes him an excellent team member as he collaborates and works effectively to create excellent products. He is skilled at discussion and is able to articulately explain his perspectives while considering the thoughts and ideas of others. He helps others be successful. He pushes himself more than most students, always striving to do his best.

You will find him to be a reliable, excellent worker. I wish him success in all of his endeavors.

Sincerely,

Evelyn Miranda

Affirmation from the desk of Ms. Miranda

Dear Principal Ferdinand,

Each day after school I see Edgar Prospero in the park. Usually he's reading or writing. I wonder why he doesn't go home? I'm concerned that we are having such a hard time contacting the mother. Yesterday he was playing with a dog and seemed really happy. At school he usually seems really tense, although today he was really excited to participate in our discussion on Call of the Wild. It was nice to see him unwind himself and look relaxed. I really do hope he is being cared for. We should check into his home life and make sure this isn't a case of neglect. What do you think?

Ms. Miranda



Dear Ms. Miranda,

It's wonderful the way you care for your students. There probably isn't anything to be concerned about. He does well in school, stays out of trouble and has good attendance, for the most part. He's such an interesting and engaging young man! To alleviate your fears, I will continue my efforts to contact the mother.

Sincerely,

Principal Ferdinand

WHAT'S RONG?

Everything.

Y?

Kate won't talk to me. Plus, home is crap right now.

HOW YOU NO SHE WONT TALK TO YOU?

She is ignoring me. I try to be funny and she just refuses to look at me. I can't get her to smile at all. I don't know what I did.

YOU PELLY LIKE HER

I don't want her to treat me like this.

WE DON'T NEED GURLS TREETIN US BAD

I just don't understand why she's being this way. Plus she and Sierra are being super sweet to that weirdo, Edgar. She ignores me and then is all interested him. What's with that?



Hola Mija!

Tu Papa and I are on our way to nuestro hogar and to you, our querida niña! We are ready to open la tienda. We have purchased many articulos para vender, and will be ready to open in una semana or sooner. Thank you for helping your Tia clean la tienda, so we will be ready! We will see you muy pronto!

Remember mi amor, tu siempre estas en mi corazón.



Mama

10/11

I'm finally taking a few minutes to write about the weekend. Wow! It was crazy!

Spirit seemed as excited as I was about setting off from the park. I was a bit afraid for him, as we were walking along some pretty busy streets for quite a long way. He's an energetic dog at the park, always running off at terrific speeds and tearing back to me when we are playing. I've been relieved that no one seems to be looking for him, no lost dog posters, no worried looking stranger smiling suddenly as he spots my friend and prepares to take him away.

Spirit actually seemed to understand the danger of cars. He stuck very close to me as we walked companionably towards the department store. I decided it was the most likely place to find the rolled sheets of plastic and containers I wanted to buy. It hadn't occurred to me that I would now have another set of awkward sized items to carry along with my overstuffed backpack. I was quite encumbered when I emerged from the store. Spirit, was waiting for me. I had hurried, of course. Somehow I expect him to disappear from my life as quickly as he entered it. For now, though, he seems to be willing, even eager, to follow me anywhere.

I decided to go directly to the lake and scout a spot for bathing and possibly even spending the night. I'm glad we've been having warm weather lately. Since the lake is pretty close to the store, it wasn't long before we arrived there and walked its perimeter. I was worried about encountering baseball cap guy, but he was not around.

We found one area that had low hanging trees reaching thirstily towards the water that was pretty far from the trailhead. I decided I could safely bathe with just my underwear on. Spirit wasn't at all as self-conscious as I was as he splashed and barked happily. Fortunately, the far end of the park doesn't have many visitors and I stayed in the bushes until I could cover myself with water. It was really cold, but as long as I kept moving I was okay. It only went to above my belly button, which was a relief because I don't really know how to swim. I can dog paddle a little, like Spirit, but I stayed very close to shore. I remembered the piece of soap I had procured from the Ariels and scrubbed myself top to bottom and even washed my hair with it. I've always had hair that was a bit longer than other boys, but it was getting pretty long. I had started tying it with a rubber band I found at school. Friday, however, I had scissors.

I borrowed some school scissors out of the supplies cupboard and haven't returned them yet. I slogged through the water plants back to my backpack and found the scissors. I started hacking at my hair just below the rubber band. I realized once the ponytail was gone that it was now shorter in the back than in the front because I had pulled the front hairs toward the back for the ponytail, so then I started trimming the front and side hairs with these fairly dull scissors to about the length of the back. I had to do all of this by feel since I didn't have a mirror. I did my best, but I was sure it didn't look really great. I had a vague idea that maybe I could find a mirror and straighten it up later.

When I got out of the water, I dried myself with leaves and my cleaner clothes. All of a sudden, as I got dressed, I started to itch. I noticed red splotches on my legs.

I remembered from my reading about survival and edible plants that there was poison oak and poison ivy plants in the area. I looked around the bushes where I had gotten undressed and realized that they were hiding multiple poison oak plants. The happy start to my evening was abruptly changed as I realized how uncomfortable I was going to be for the next few days. What a fool I am!

Once I was dressed and had repacked my belongings, I called Spirit, who reluctantly left chasing a squirrel to follow me down the pathway. I was hoping to find a spot to leave my purchases and to set up for a camp. It was at that moment that I decided that I wanted to go to Alonzo's party after all. It occurred to me I could ask Ms. Ariel if she would be willing to loan me some medicine for the poison oak.

I found a relatively covered area with nothing poisonous where I hid the plastic containers in which I had placed my dirty clothes. I realized that I needed to wash them before I used them again, not just because they needed it, but because they were possibly covered with poison oak oil and might give me more rashes in new areas. The spot looked like it might provide us shelter that night after dark. I was going to rig the sheets of plastic to act as a covering on the ground and above us after we returned from the party. It wouldn't be as nice as my cardboard and leaves at the museum, but it would do for a night or two. I have a feeling that folks who live around the park need to see that I'm not there all the time. Although people are often at the lake, I'm guessing I can stay hidden until after dark when they've all gone home.

We left our new campsite and headed for the Ariel's house shortly after the sun went down. I was already fairly late for the party, but I thought that probably didn't matter since it wasn't like there was going to be some kind of agenda and I didn't want to stay long anyway.

As we walked up the steep road that led to their neighborhood, I started feeling my heart pounding, not just from the climb, but from my thoughts. I began questioning whether it was a good idea or not to go to this party. Sure, they would have food, which sounded awesome. Sure, I was invited like everybody else. Sure, Ms. Ariel would seem happy to see me. But... who else might be there? How would they react to my presence? Would they laugh at my haircut? Would they or their pets be mean to Spirit?

Approaching the house, I could see lights through the windows. I stopped and waited by the curb. I'm not sure what I was waiting for. Spirit whined a little. He was restless and didn't understand my hesitation. I was shivering a little. Even in my jacket, it's just not warm enough. The Ariels' home looked so comfortable. I'm not sure why it was so hard to knock on the door.

Suddenly the door opened and Ms. Ariel was saying cheerfully, "Edgar! I thought that was you! Come in, please!" I felt like I was being swept up by warmth and light and happiness, and all of a sudden, it was too much. I couldn't go forward or I would be crying. I don't know what came over me.

What saved me was Alonzo. A few steps behind his mother, he said, "Oh, it's you," like he was actually unpleasantly surprised to see me. This I was used to from the others. It cleared my head actually. "Yeah, thanks for inviting me. I brought my dog."

"I didn't know you had a dog," he said. When he said the word, "dog," it was a like a signal to Spirit who ran over and jumped on him, attempting to lick his face. "The rest of the kids and their pets are out back," he said as he scratched Spirit around the ears.

I wasn't all that anxious to see any of the rest of them actually. I thought about my own need to scratch my incredibly itchy legs and probably too abruptly asked, "Do you have any medicine for poison oak? I was down by the lake earlier and think I got some on me." Ms. Ariel said, "I'm sure I do," and asked to see my leg. I showed her the rash and she nodded and left the room, leaving me awkwardly standing facing Alonzo.

Spirit came back to me and looked at us expectantly. "So, how's your party going so far?" I asked. "Fine," he said, but I'm pretty sure he was also thinking, "until you got here." I don't know why he is suddenly so chilly towards me. No big surprise, though. Kids usually follow the lead of the jerks in school. Nobody wants to be paired with a loser. That might hurt their credit score somehow.

He invited me into the kitchen where there were multiple refreshments laid out on the counters and table. This was more like it! There were chips and cheese and ham and cut fruit and pretzels and cookies and brownies and bowls of candy and whole cans of soda pop in giant bowls of ice! I'm sure I missed something. It was amazing. "I'll just leave you to it," he said, "The door to the backyard is over there." Then he left. I grabbed a plate and tried to figure out how not to be greedy. I put pretzels in my pocket for later, and I tossed some ham chunks to Spirit who was pretty happy about the turn of events.

Ms. Ariel came in when I had my plate fully loaded. She smiled as she looked at my plate and handed me a tube of some kind of cream. She said, "Keep it, we've got another. Enjoy your snacks. The kids are out back. There are five dogs last I counted." At that point I felt obligated to head outside to the pool.

There were only a few kids in the pool, but all five dogs were playing in the water. Spirit immediately defected and launched himself into the water.

The other kids were clustered in groups when I stepped through the door. A few girls were in the pool. Probably to show off their swimsuits was my first thought.

Ceria and a group of her friends smiled at me genuinely in greeting, but the usual jerks acted like a skunk had unwittingly walked into their picnic. Well, if that was the way it was going to be, I could be a skunk, no problem. Skunks get left alone, exactly what I wanted. I walked away from their groups and found a lawn chair where I could watch the dogs in the water and snack on my delicious refreshments. I had already decided which plate items were going into my pack for later and had set them to one side of the plate while I dug into the other side.

Spirit was having the time of his life paddling around with his new buddies.

"What are you staring at?" said Sebastian as he strode over, with Alonzo following anxiously behind. I chose to ignore him as usual, knowing I was the skunk at the party and his job was to stay out of my way.

"You looking at Kate?" he said. I continued to eat my snacks and ignore him. I was, of course, not even looking in the girls' direction. I kept my focus on the dogs enjoying themselves in what I now decided must be a comfortably warm pool. Most of the other kids were in swimsuits and had towels draped over their shoulders. I could have skipped my bath in the lake and come here, but since I don't own a swimsuit, that wouldn't have worked out well. Start a scandal maybe. I smiled at that thought.

Suddenly Sebastian was right in my face. Alonzo appeared to be grabbing his arm to pull him back, but Sebastian said, "What are you doing here, anyway. No one wants you here. Go home to your whore mother!"

Not exactly sure what happened next, but whatever it was exploded out of me. Next thing I know, my paper plate is upside down on the ground and Sebastian and Alonzo are in the pool where I had pushed them, pretty hard I'm guessing. I called Spirit, and he hopped out of the pool, and we left the party by the back gate. I could hear kids talking loudly and angrily and thought I heard the frightened voice of one of the girls asking, "Is he okay?" before I ran out into the darkness, down the hill, and to the lake. The first fat drops of rain and the rush of wind from an incoming storm swept over me as I found our hidden shelter.

Everything was just as I'd left it. No one was around. I quickly unrolled the plastic and created a kind of covering suspended weakly from knots tied around the skinny trees. Spirit looked at me as if he was surprised and a little skeptical of my plan for the night. He was pleased to get a handful of dog food. The little bit of ham hadn't been a meal. I regretted dropping my plate at the Ariels, but what was done was done.

Saturday morning was rather abrupt because the night before it had been so long. The rain came down in gusting sheets all night, and although the plastic protected us for a while, it also collected rain water successfully until the knots came loose on one side and poured water down my back, drenching me. From that point on, water and a chilly wind buffeted us with very little respite. To add to my wretchedness, my mind kept replaying Sebastian's hurtful words and my violent actions. I deserved to feel miserable. But, why would Sebastian say such a terrible thing about her? I have worked so hard to control everything, to orchestrate my carefully calculated plan, and now I had let my self-control crack and acted recklessly, reacting when I should only have been acting thoughtfully.

With light came a firm resolve to tighten up my defenses. I needed to stop worrying about my mother and worry about myself. There was no sign that she was coming back soon or ever. I needed to find a better shelter, something indoors. The restrooms at the park had hand driers which would be mildly useful for drying out my wet clothing today. The restrooms could be a dry shelter for sleeping except that they were always locked at night. There was no where to hide when the parks people came to lock the doors.

Then I thought about the school. Unfortunately, there were alarms and motion sensors throughout the buildings except when it was being patrolled by the school custodians. Still, it would make a good place to shelter in. I was familiar with what it had to offer. Maybe I could learn the key code the teachers used to turn off the alarms.

I'd only been in the museum that one time for the Yakama project. I guessed that they probably had motion sensors and alarms. I hadn't ever seen any security people on the outside, but maybe there were some who worked on the inside. I kind of liked the idea of sheltering in a museum. I could sleep in the covered pioneer wagon on display or in one of the other historical exhibits. Maybe I could do a little reconnaissance and discover what my options might be there.

Overall, I felt that I had been doing okay, living on my own. I could acquire a tent and create a camp like Reaper, but that would mean dropping out of school. I just didn't want that to happen. School was going to be how I came out of all of this. I am going to have a real life someday and finishing school is the key.

I put the itch cream on my rashes, and it seems to dull the itch a bit as long as I don't move. Being wet really makes it seem impossible to deal with properly. My wet clothes rub on the rash and make it itch ten times more. The sun came out a bit and I moved my stuff to one of the benches near the water. Spirit came and sat next to me. I had planned to stay at the Lake Saturday night too, but the museum wall affords more protection than what we found last night. We can't leave until after dark because of the extra stuff I'm hauling. If people see me with more than just a backpack, they'll be suspicious. It's frustrating biding my time like this.

Despite the miserable cold, one thing is burning a hot and painful hole in me. I really need to do something to hurt Sebastian and Antonio. I mean, really mess them up, show them I'm a force to be reckoned with, not someone they can push around. My original plan to get them is well under way. My matchmaking with the principal and my English teacher, and my plans for the park and for Halloween are started, but I NEED to fully implement them. Payback is going to make my life a whole lot brighter.

Spirit is whimpering a bit. It may not be raining anymore, but he's cold and tired too. We miss our park. It's time to go back. School's going to be tough on Monday. I'm guessing things will be worse than ever.

10/12

Got in late enough Saturday night that the park was empty except for some teenage partiers who didn't even see me slip into my hidden spot near the museum. I half buried my containers with the clothes in them and then later in the morning after the park guys unlocked the restrooms, I washed stuff in the bathroom sink. No one came in. Sunday is always pretty quiet until around lunch time. Hand dryers just don't do the job of drying clothes. I don't have a good solution. The trees are getting bare enough that I'm not really able to hide my clothes while they are drying up in the branches, plus the sun isn't coming out from behind the clouds every day.

While washing my pants, I noticed that my fingernails and toenails are amazingly long and dirty even after my bath yesterday. I trimmed the nails down with my knife and scrubbed them with soap, and they looked a lot better. Then I took a critical look at my terrible hair cut in the awful metal restroom mirror. At first it was kind of hard to make out much, since metal doesn't provide the clearest reflection. I kept polishing it with my wet T-shirt. As far as I could tell, my haircut is really bad, as expected.

I always haul my backpack everywhere with me, but it was great being able to leave a few things behind hidden under the leaves. I was able to lighten my load considerably. Now I just have the essentials in my pack, a book or two, my dwindling money supply, school assignments and notes, my jacket, this journal, and pens and pencils.

I am feeling better about what happened at the Ariel's Friday. I shouldn't have reacted the way I did, but at least they know that I don't appreciate being pushed around. I'll apologize to Alonzo, but there's no way I'm going to apologize to Sebastian. He's got more coming to him.

WHY U Say STUFF to edgar?

IDK. Maybe because he was looking at Kate. When I got to the party I was pretty angry already. My stepdad hit my mother again. I said I was calling the police, but she said, "It's okay." She always says, "It's okay." Meanwhile my sisters are crying and I'm walking out the door to a party.

EVERYONES Mad at HIM NOW.

He really messed up Alonzo. He's a jerk.

HAV U got a THING For Kate?



Teria

Solitary, Cut off.

Who can say where the blame lies?

He flings his arms wide and pushes against the cold,

He flings his arms wide and pushes against the warmth,

Then he pulls himself into an ever tighter circle, smaller and smaller.

Unwelcome Light will press itself into fissures.

The more damaged and broken, the more spaces to fill.

Time will tell.

10/13

Awful, terrible day.

I am an awful, terrible person.

After I got to school today, as I was walking through the halls to my first class, people were staring at me, pointing and whispering. It was kind of surreal. No one spoke to me, just shook their heads and looked away when I looked directly at them.

I walked into my homeroom, and plopped myself into a chair, just like everyday, but today, the homeroom teacher came right over and said I was needed in the office.

I picked up my stuff and walked slowly to the office, wondering what it would be about; Had they heard from my mother at last? Did someone report where I was living, and I was about to be assigned to foster care? Did they see my terrible haircut and decide they needed to fix it? Were they going to complain about Spirit hanging out near the school doors?

Some of these questions made me want to run out the front doors and get far away. Curiosity, however, got the best of me.

The secretary asked me to wait and said the principal wanted to see me, but he was waiting on our school counselor. I should say right now that our counselor, Mr. Lilligard, is a short balding man, who tends to speak with long expectant pauses like he thinks you should interrupt him or something. This also alarmed me because the counselor is usually called in for serious problems like truancy or death in the family or stuff that could involve courtrooms and big life changes. I have worked hard at not getting to know any school's counselor.

Principal Ferdinand called me into his office before the counselor arrived. He had me sit down and started asking me polite questions about my school work, which he had heard is exceptional, of course. I felt like we were engaged in small talk, something I excel in, and the smaller the better.

When Mr. Lilligard walked in, he shut the door to the office. More alarm bells going off in my head. Then he said, "Well I guess you know why you've been invited here this morning..." "No!" I think to myself, "No, I really don't," but, of course, I just wait.

Principal Ferdinand nodded his head and said, "You know you need to be completely honest with us." I'm thinking desperately, "Which lie, which dishonesty is he talking about?" But then he says, "We just want to know what exactly happened from your perspective."

Okay. At that point, I felt that maybe the situation could be salvaged. Maybe this was about the bullying. I said, "What exactly do you want to know about it?"

The principal said, "How did Alonzo hit his head? We're not accusing you of anything, but we want you to tell us what happened from your point of view."

I sat up and I guess both men could see the surprise on my face because they turned to each other as if sharing thoughts, before the counselor said, "You must know that Alonzo is in the hospital..."

What!? I shook my head and must have whispered, "no," because then the principal told me what he knew about Alonzo's situation. Apparently Alonzo hit his head at the party when he fell into the pool; he clipped the edge of the pool as he went in and got knocked out. The other kids in the pool immediately went to help him and pull him out of the water. He was transported to the hospital in an ambulance and was currently under observation for a concussion. Neither the principal nor the counselor mentioned my culpability.

"Tell us what happened..."

I told them about coming to the party late, about getting some food, sitting down, and watching the dogs in the water. "Go on..." the counselor nudged. I said that Sebastian was acting aggressively and said something rude about my mother so I pushed him into the water. I knew Alonzo had gone in too, but I thought it was because he was too close to Sebastian. "I didn't expect him to go in too," I said miserably, "and then I left the party. I didn't stick around."

Principal Ferdinand said, "We've been trying to call your mother about this, but the phone seems to be disconnected."

"Uh, we're between phones right now," I said.

They told me that they were investigating what had happened exactly and would get back to me and then excused me to go to class.

I briefly thought about bolting for the door, but decided it was still possible to get through the day. I probably should have escaped, but then it was always going to be like walking a gauntlet if I ever wanted to return. It was much like a gauntlet already.

The students in my homeroom class followed me with their eyes. Some faces showed curiosity, but most were full of animosity. Eyes narrowed, lips curled. I thought I heard a whisper or two, "Jerk!" I wasn't surprised. Pretty much everybody loves Alonzo. He really is a nice guy. They blamed me that he is in the hospital, but then I blame me too.

The rest of the day was just like that. Everyone was clearly angry with me. People were shoving me in the hallway, but that's not necessarily that unusual. There wasn't too much of the bullying because teachers were extra vigilant, but even they seemed unsure of me. They acted as if they didn't know who I was, like I had shown myself to be this unexpected serial killer or something.

Ceria looked at me as if she was terribly sad.

It was a complete relief to leave school, and all of the glaring eyes, and climb a tree in the park. Spirit was a bit put out at first. He kept leaping at the trunk and then sat down whining and guarded my tree while I quietly cried into my jacket.

Affirmation from the desk of Ms. Miranda

Dear Principal Ferdinand,

I am quite concerned about Edgar. Some girls reported to me recently that he is being repeatedly targeted by two of our eighth grade boys. Now I hear that he was involved in that incident at the Ariel's home, the one where the son was injured. Apparently Sebastian called Edgar's mother names prior to Edgar's attack. The mother's phone is disconnected and the address listed on school records is for an empty apartment. Will you see if you can find out more?

Ms. Miranda

Edgar – U beter WACH out!

Me and Sebastian r COMIN aFter U

NObode LIKeS U aFter WHat U did

WACH UR back!

Alonzo,

I'm so very sorry you got hurt. I really didn't mean to do it. I don't know what came over me. I was mad at Sebastian, not you. You and your mother have been so kind to me, and I would never want to do anything to your family. Please tell your mother I'm sorry. I'm so glad you are better and back at school. Please forgive me. I'll try and make it up to you somehow.

Edgar Prospero

Sebastian and Antonio,

Please leave Edgar alone. He doesn't do anything to you. Why are you so mean to him? He never meant to hurt us. It's time you stopped being such jerks. It doesn't make you cool. People might be afraid of you, but that doesn't really make them your friends. You are both really fun guys at heart, so let up on Edgar. I don't think his life is fun at all.

Alonzo Ariel

10/15

Alonzo came to school today.

He was really quiet. He looked over at me a few times, but I couldn't tell what he was thinking. He didn't look mad at me like I expected.

The other kids were all over him; asking if he was hurting at all, running over to get him any supplies he needed, telling him they were glad he was back etc. I listened for his answers to their questions, but I didn't try to talk to him. There were just so many people around.

Antonio has been sending me threatening notes. The other kids seem all too eager to pass them on to me. He and Sebastian are constantly looking my way and then talking to each other. Sebastian wanted to meet me after school today in the park, but I'll talk about that later.

I wanted to apologize to Alonzo, so I waited for Social Studies class when I sit near him. I had written a note beforehand and had carefully folded it up a bunch of times. I slipped it to him at the start of class. Rather than read it, he tucked it into his pocket. I had to content myself that I had delivered it.

I'm glad he's okay.

There has been such wild speculation about his condition. No one really seemed to have the inside information, so it was all wild rumors. I was probably the most interested in knowing the truth, but I was dependent on overhearing what others were saying because the only way people talked to me was to establish that they didn't like me.

Even Ceria's friends, who used to be kind of nice to me, were determined to let me know that I was exiled.

It's enough to know that Alonzo is okay.

I would love to be forgiven and go back to being invisible.

Miss Miranda has been kind of nice to me. She told me yesterday that Alonzo was going to be okay, to just be patient. It made me wonder if she realized that I didn't mean to hurt him. Still, she is really pushing me for some way to contact my mother. There are conferences scheduled in a few weeks and she seems to think that it's a bad thing the school can't get in touch with her. I told the school secretary we moved and didn't have a phone yet, but they want my mom to come in. They don't know how much I'd like that too, for a change.

Anyway, at the end of the school day, I was trying to figure out the best way to deal with Sebastian. I saw Alonzo showing him a note. I can't even express how much it hurt that he could share my note with my enemy. Then I realized. There was a possible way out of all of this shame and hurt and to make up, in a way, for hurting Alonzo. I walked up to Sebastian and said, "Sure, meet me in the park after school."

He arrived with a bunch of friends including Antonio, but not Alonzo. I told him that I didn't really want to fight with him, but that I realized he wasn't going to feel better until he took a swing at me, so to go ahead.

He seemed surprised, but didn't hesitate as he punched me hard in the stomach. The wind left me and I fell to the ground. Kids started yelling, "Fight! Fight!" Then Spirit came tearing through the group of kids to stand near me, hackles raised, barking and snapping, so they stepped back. Then Principal Ferdinand arrived and made everyone leave. It was kind of anti-climactic actually.

He sat on the park bench next to me for a while. I wouldn't tell him who had punched me, but I think he knew. He wanted to give me a ride home so he could talk to my mother, he said. I told him that she wasn't home, but he insisted on driving me. I thought about the streets I've walked as I've looked for odd jobs and remembered a house that never had anyone home. I had him drive me and Spirit there, and sure enough he had to make sure no one was there by knocking on the door. I told him I only had a key to get in the back and said, goodbye. I headed around the house, then lowered Spirit over the neighbor's fence and climbed it while out of his line of vision, then watched through the slats as he drove away. Then we scooted out of there before someone came to chase us off with a shotgun.

My gut hurts. I'm probably going to have an ugly bruise, but maybe it was worth it.

After we got back to the park that evening, Spirit and I shared a peanut butter sandwich on our last bit of bread. I was just about to head to the store with him to buy another loaf when Cal appeared.

He said, "I thought I might find you here, and your little dog too." I thought that was kind of funny because it reminded me of The Wizard of Oz when the witch says that part about the dog, but then he grabbed my backpack. Spirit was barking and jumping on him, but he started walking away fast while rifling through my stuff. I chased him, and he threw my school stuff including my journal out on the ground. As I struggled to gather up my things, he tossed me the backpack. He said, "This is all I wanted anyway," as he held up my precious remaining dollars. He kicked at Spirit as he got in his car, but missed, and I grabbed my dog, as Cal peeled out of the parking lot.

The zipper on my backpack was broken, but I had most of my belongings.

I've been so careful with money in order to preserve it. I know how to find food if I need it. I know how to find small jobs in order to take care of a few things. I still have a place to stay and my cover story is holding.

This was a bad day, but I was not defeated.

Somehow I knew that I had done all I could. It would have to be enough.

Alonzo was okay. Spirit is okay. That's enough.

THAT WAS WERD THE WAY EDGAR LET U HIT HIM

I didn't like it. I thought I'd feel better, but I only felt like somehow I was just like my jerk stepdad.

YOU R NOT ANYTHIN LIKE HIM

I don't know. Maybe Alonzo's right. I don't like people being afraid of me. I don't want my sisters looking at me the way they look at my stepdad.



Teria

Fed up with fighting.

Let's form an army against war,

Band ourselves together,

Stop the barrage of words that wound,

Bind up the damage and heal each other,

Find the good in everyone and discover we're all family,

Bury our anger and hurt in the ground, deep and forever abandoned.

It's time for a change.

Edgar,

I just want you to know that I forgive you for knocking me into the pool. I'm sorry that you had a bad time at my party. Sebastian should never have said what he did about your mother! I don't know what his issue is, but I've known him since kindergarten and he isn't really a bad guy when you get to know him.

I was upset with you for a few days because of something someone told me, but I realize now that it wasn't true. I shouldn't have listened to them. I could have been nicer to you, so I hope you can forgive me too.

Let's do another project together. The last one was really fun.

Alonzo Ariel

Hi Kate!

I'm bored

Sienna 😊

Pay attention to the teacher.

He's boring. Math is boring.

I like it. Stop passing notes. I don't want to miss stuff.

What is there to miss? It's the same thing we did yesterday and will do tomorrow.

No it's not. Pay attention.

You are no fun today.

10/17

Just as I hoped, things have calmed down at school. Sebastian seemed surprised that he wasn't called into the office for fighting, so he must have figured out that I didn't report him. Antonio is sullen and rude as usual, but seems less overtly threatening. They made fun of my broken backpack which might make it easier for them to steal stuff out of it, but I keep it close, so I'm not too worried.

The best part of yesterday, however, was that Alonzo gave me a note. He forgave me and said that he had been given some incorrect information and felt bad that he hadn't been kinder to me. He said it was inexcusable (my word) that Sebastian said what he did about my mother. I still tried to stay out of his and others' way today, but it felt good to know that he, at least, didn't hate me.

The second best thing was that we took our tests on The Call of the Wild and I got 100%, which apparently was the only perfect score in the class. It was such a good book. I hated what Buck had to go through, but I thought it was awesome that he was able to become completely free. I've noticed that when I overcome challenges I feel stronger and more powerful. I wonder how I'd feel if I never had any challenges. Sometimes I think that my experiences are the price I'm paying to be free.

The third best thing about yesterday is that I found a yard work job, picking weeds for one of the people who lives near my fake house. They pay \$5 an hour, which isn't much, but there's lots of weeds and the guy who is paying me didn't mind if Spirit came along. He actually seemed thrilled to have me do the work for him while he was inside playing video games. I made \$10, enough for bread and dog food for another week. After I made our purchases, Spirit and I went around the back of the store to check out the dumpster. I like this one because it's hidden from view and I've found a couple useful things and some decent food in there a few times.

I was hoping to find a big garbage bag or two that wasn't gross.

I found one that was full of shredded paper, so it was clean— score!

I also found something else I've been looking for: Halloween decorations. I wonder why they are throwing them out before Halloween, but no complaints from me. I was hoping for spiders and there were a bunch. I was hoping for spider webs, nope. There were some scary faces— witches and Frankenstein, which I might use. I was planning on using my money to buy some sheets and fishing line and some other stuff, but I'm thinking I might be able to find what I need by using white plastic bags and fishing line discarded by the lake. I hid the stuff in my partially buried containers. They are getting stuffed too. On the plus side, there are lots of fallen leaves to cover them with.

10/17

Today wasn't as awesome as yesterday, when everything seemed to be looking up.

I guess I woke up on the wrong side of the cardboard. It was a super cold night.

I have to wear my jacket all the time now and it's not very warm against the cold. I need something more, especially to sleep. The wind gets me the worst, and plastic helps protect from that a bit, but holds the damp in. Spirit and I are warm enough using the cardboard and where our bodies touch at night, but the rest of me gets cold where the cardboard doesn't overlap. It seems like my clothes are always a little damp. I'm getting really tired at school because I'm not sleeping well. I actually fell asleep in history watching a movie. It was dark and comfortable.

I've been checking out possibilities for indoor sleeping in the school, but haven't solved the problem of alarms and custodians. There is a couch in the art room that seems promising.

I caught people trying to see inside my backpack, and I'm unsure about what they might be planning. I borrowed some safety pins from Ms. Miranda to close up the pack a bit. It worked okay. I asked her how her life is going and she said that her dog is not doing so well. She's really sad about that. I told her that I have a dog named Spirit, and she said that she'd seen me with him in the park. Thinking about her dog troubles got me thinking about how easy it would be for Spirit to get sick or lost or dognapped. It made me really anxious thinking about it and how attached I've become to him.

Those worries followed me throughout school.

When I was in English, I looked out of the windows so I could see Spirit. He was chasing flies under the trees. I wonder if there are still such things as dog catchers? Is it possible someone will come after Spirit for not being in a yard or something?

During last period, I finished my work early so I had time to write in my journal. I probably won't have time for a while to write again.

Today after school I'm heading out to the Greenway and see if I can find Reaper. I'm hoping he'll have some suggestions on how to stay warm in the winter.

Hi Kate!

Did you see that Edgar has clothes in his backpack? He also has a roll of plastic and food in there.

Sienna 😊

Maybe he has to change clothes later. And maybe he is planning to bury a body tonight and needs a snack.

Don't you think it's weird how it looks like he carries a suitcase with him every day? Plus he usually wears the same clothes all the time. His shoes are the worst. I don't think his family has any money.

I never thought about it. It does look like he cut his own hair with school scissors.

Have you ever seen him anywhere but in the park? His dog is always there too.

Strange. Now really, we should pay attention to the teacher.

10/19

As planned, Friday I left right after school to head to the Greenway. When I walked out of the school doors closest to the park, Spirit was right there waiting for me. It was a definite relief. My worries had been getting the best of me, but there he was excited to see me, wagging his curled tail and dancing around my legs.

I had brought the necessities in my backpack— plastic sheeting, water bottle, knife, some food, my matches, etc. so I didn't have to try to access my cache by the museum where someone might see me in the light of day.

It was somewhat overcast, and I didn't like the look of the dark clouds moving in. We walked quickly, but it took over an hour and a half to get to the Greenway path where I had camped one night. I went to where I thought Reaper had his tent, but it wasn't there. Staying close to the river and off the path, I started picking my way around bushes and boulders. I called to Spirit to stay close to me because I didn't want him falling in the water.

We had a lot of trouble moving upstream, which I thought was the direction Reaper and any other campers might go, mainly because there was so much impassable vegetation the other direction. We persevered despite my fear of poison oak and were rewarded, just as I was about to turn around, by finding an encampment with three men sitting on logs talking.

Spirit stayed close to me, a ready growl in his throat, when I asked the men if they knew a guy named Reaper. I was surprised when all three started laughing. One of them, a guy with overly bushy brown eyebrows said, "Whatja lookin for him for?" I said he was a friend of mine, and they laughed even harder. "Reaper don't have no friends!" Spirit gave two sharp barks in response.

I stubbornly repeated my question, "Do you know where he might be?" and eyebrow guy said, "Try other side of the road there, not by river. He's been over there last while." I thanked them and started searching the other side of the pathway. Miraculously, ten minutes later I spotted him stooped over brushing dirt off his scrawny behind. "Hi!" I said, "remember me?"

"Your name is Duke," he said, reminding me that I had given him a fake name. "I said, "Yeah, that's right. I was looking for you. You gave me some good advice last time we met."

"Course I did. You were about to burn the %*#! forest down."

"I was hoping you could give me some pointers on how to stay warm at night outdoors," I said.

"Get yourself a #!*%! sleeping bag, and learn how to light a decent fire!" He swore a few more times. "Honestly kid, why don't you just go home? If I had a home, that's where I'd be, and that's a *%!# fact!"

He probably read something into the look on my face, and while Spirit sniffed interestedly at something on his pants leg, he said, "You quit foster care or something?"

I said, "Something like that. I'm actually just biding my time until my Mom gets back." That was more than I wanted to say and I bit back the rest of the story about her problems and Cal. I'm guessing he had problems of his own, living out here as he was.

He gestured to me to follow him, and we'd only gone a few yards before he pushed aside some willow tree branches and led me to his camp area. He gestured to me to sit down on a log. It was such a relief to actually tell someone the truth, even if it wasn't all of it. He handed me another peanut butter sandwich. This one was in a baggy, and I silently thanked the generous missionary people who kept up his pantry.

"Kid," he said, "You can't live down here like us river rats. It's too dangerous. Not everyone out here can be trusted. There's some violent and terrible folks living out here, but most of 'em are just out of their heads with crazy or the crazy need to use something." I glanced at the numerous bottles littering his camp. "Now, don't you go judging me, or them either. I curse the day I had my first drink. Most of the folks here were just looking for something to take their mind off their troubles or just have a little fun, but the stuff got into their heads, and it's just not possible to stop anymore. It's our own prison. We can't stop, though we put ourselves and the people who once loved us through hell. We've done things we never thought we'd do. You wouldn't believe the hold it has." Oh I can.

I explained that I had found a place in town but was worried about folks finding me out. He said, "Maybe it would be better if they did."

He was no help at all. He was telling me stuff I already knew! I realized then, that he had nothing to teach me. He was living a broken life. He was in a prison, his own hell of his own, or his addiction's making. I was free. I would keep going. I thanked him politely, gave him back his sandwich, lying that I had just eaten, and Spirit and I left. "Thanks," I said over my shoulder, as we headed back to the path.

As we walked back towards town, I thought about the desperate lives being lived down by the river, downtown, probably everywhere. Where was my mother!? How could she choose a life of slavery over the life she could be living, that we could both be living? Was it really something like Reaper said, something she couldn't control in her head? It made me mad to think about her choosing this life for us. I was so mad at her! Really angry. Then I realized that she probably was never coming back.

Spirit and I trudged sadly back to town. It was dark already. When we got to the school, I could see the gym was being used for a volleyball game. I snuck Spirit in with me and quickly made my way underneath the bleachers. We were semi-hidden behind and beneath the seats where a few cheering parents were encouraging their daughters to greater effort, "Slam that ball!" "You can do it Kate!" (I recognized that name.) The collective oohs, sighs, and periodic cheers formed a peaceful white noise and soon I fell asleep with my back against the wall.

I awakened to Spirit rooting around in my backpack. All was darkness around us. He had managed to widen a hole between safety pins apparently, and had torn a hole in the bag of dog food, and now was contentedly munching on the dinner I had neglected to give him. It occurred to me that the darkness meant that everyone had not only left, but the motion sensor alarms were likely to be turned on now and the building was locked. That meant Spirit and I had to stay put under the bleachers, or we would likely set them off. Great! A night inside. This was something I had been hoping to do, and now I had stumbled into it. Too bad I needed to pee pretty bad. There was a bathroom just down the hall, but I didn't dare risk it. I let Spirit pee on the gym floor at the far side of the bleachers, but couldn't bring myself to do it too. Then I saw the trash someone had set down close to the opening where we had entered. There was a soda cup and napkins! I didn't set off the alarm when I retrieved it and happily relieved myself into the cup. I used the napkins to take care of Spirit's mess and put it all as far from me as possible. Then Spirit and I had the first full night's sleep I've had in quite some time.

When morning came, I realized that to get Spirit and me out from under the bleachers, we would most likely set off an alarm. Since it was now a Saturday, it was unlikely that anyone would be coming into the school. We would either have to stay put until Monday or just take our chances. Taking our chances seemed like the best bet, but I was somewhat unwilling to leave the shelter of the gym. Spirit decided for me. He wanted to go exploring.

The minute he came out from under the bleachers, the alarm began to sound.

I said, "Come on, Spirit!" and we raced to the door to the outside. I pushed it open and hurried out into the park, ducking under my hood but hoping no cameras were watching. No one was nearby to see us come through the door. We started walking slowly and innocently as soon as we were away from the school building. I pulled out my book to read at one of the park picnic tables and watched from a distance, seemingly disinterestedly, as school officials arrived to check out the alarm. Principal Ferdinand was there. He and the man from the school district office were shaking their heads as they came out shortly after the alarm had been silenced. The district guy drove away, but Ferdinand stayed. He walked around the building and just when I thought he was going to get in his car and leave, he looked over and saw me watching him. He made a beeline for me.

My heart was racing, but I knew it was best to stay cool. "Hi!" I said, familiarly. "Hello," he said, "Did you see anyone messing around by the gym earlier?"

"No," I said. "The alarm just started going off. I was out here reading at my favorite picnic table. I love the fresh air, you know."

"Strange," he said, that's all, just "strange," and then he sat down next to me. "Uh Oh," I thought, but then he said, "Nice dog, you've got here. I've seen him around the school quite a bit. He seems very loyal." I told him that Spirit was a great dog and that he had only recently come into my life. I decided it was okay to tell him about how Spirit was a stray that had just decided to stick around. The principal got very quiet for a moment and said, "Ms. Miranda's dog passed away last night. I know you and she are friends, and I'm sure she would be glad of any extra kindness you and the other students might show her for the next little while."

I was surprised that Ferdinand would share something like that with me, but it seemed like he knew I would care. He told me that he really appreciated the coffee card I had given him and Ms. Miranda to share. He said they had had a nice time swapping dog stories while drinking their coffee together. They had also recently started playing chess together. He was teaching Ms. Miranda the finer points of the game. He reminded me that we should play together sometime, and I thought he was probably just being polite. I hope so anyway! Then he left.

It occurred to me that it made me sad to think that Ms. Miranda was unhappy. She has been very kind to me. I was glad that I had been able to do a little match-making with those two. Then I remembered why I had done it. The letters! It was time to get going on that part of my scheme. But first, I had a weekend of looking for odd jobs. I need money!

I was able to coax a few people to let me do some work for them. One lady with a pet pygmy goat asked me to shovel out its pen. For that I got ten bucks!

I also cleaned out some rain gutters and raked leaves.

The nice old lady who had me clean her garage asked if I could mow her lawn. She had a lawn mower I could use. It was my first time mowing a lawn, but it was pretty easy to figure out, although the mower was hard to start at first. Then she remembered that she wanted to get her car washed and gave me buckets of water, soap and sponges. I hosed it off with a garden hose when I was done soaping it up.

Spirit got a bit tired of watching me work, but had fun jumping at the water drops when I made it rain on her.

By the end of the day on Saturday I had earned \$40.00.

Today, I went and bought myself a backpack from the Goodwill to replace my broken one. It was previously used by someone named Gordon, I know because he wrote his name in large letters on the front pocket. Who cares? I will call my backpack Gordon from now on. I was sad to throw away my old one because it's been kind of a friend and companion, even before mom left. I've worked so hard to protect it from the kids who kept trying to steal it. It seemed kind of disloyal to just throw it away and replace it with Gordon. In the end, I just took Halloween decorations out of my overburdened plastic containers, filled the pack and put it under some leaves with my other stuff. It's been repurposed.

I also bought myself an old down jacket and a used Mariner's hat. Gordon was getting rather bulgy at that point.

Then I went to the library. Gonzolo was glad to see me. He recommended some books on the history of the valley, but this time I just wanted something to escape to. I thought maybe the Harry Potter books would be a good choice, but then I remembered how huge they are. I wish I could afford an electronic reading device. I could have hundreds of books at a time. I decided to check out some paperback mysteries. Agatha Christie books are really great. The library has shorter hours on Sunday, but I didn't mind because I don't like leaving Spirit outside waiting. He's not allowed in, so I'm not spending time hanging out to read. Reading and writing outdoors makes my fingers cold. I wish I had thought to buy some cheap gloves.

I was hoping Spirit and I could figure out how to get back into the school gym tonight but everything was locked up tight. We headed over to the Park restrooms just before the guy came to lock them up, to see if they were an option. I even stood on the toilet seat and held Spirit in my arms when he came in to lock up. He seemed to know we were there anyway. "Come on out!" he called, so we left.

Sienna, I think you're right about Edgar!

What do you mean?

I mean, I think he might be homeless. I was at my volleyball game Friday and I swear he came into the gym and never left. He and his dog kind of disappeared. I didn't see where they went.

You probably just didn't see him leave.

I don't know. When the game was over I walked around the gym kind of looking, but Sebastian came to the game and he and I were talking, so I couldn't keep looking around.

Sebastian was there!?! Did he come to see you? What did he say?!"

HOW WAS your WEEKEND?

Good. I went to see Kate in her volleyball game. They won.

U R SPENDIN LOTS OF TIME WITH HER

I like her. She's nice. Smart too.

**I FEEL LIKE U DON'T WANT TO SPEND TIME
WITH ME SO MUCH ANYMORE**

I'm sorry. You are always busy after school lately. We'll do something fun soon. Let me know when you have time.

Affirmation from the desk of Ms. Miranda

Dear Antonio,

You are making good progress in your writing. I am so pleased to see your grades improving as you turn in your assignments. Your spelling is getting better as you pay more attention to editing. Bravo!

Remember, please don't pass notes in class. Sebastian needs to know what's going on too.

Ms. Miranda

October 21, 2016

Evelyn Miranda
111 North 27th Avenue
Yakima, WA 98902

RE: Annabelle Miranda

Dear Ms. Miranda,

Please be advised that I have found some information about the recent whereabouts of your sister, Annabelle.

Ten years ago she was employed in housekeeping in Ellensburg, a town that is about 35 miles from her last known location. It seems she had a child with her. She has been using an assumed name. I will send you the birth certificate with her other name and the name of her child.

I feel that I am making good progress and may soon be able to locate her and your nephew.

Sincerely,

Detective Swainy

10/21

Two days in a row now, I've been called into the office. The first time was about a trespasser they are looking for. The second time was about why my mother hasn't responded to any of their contacts.

Apparently there was a video camera pointed at the gym doors and when they reviewed the footage from Saturday morning, they saw a guy in a hooded jacket with a dog that looked like mine running in the direction of the park. The guy's face was obscured so they couldn't be certain, but it seems like a real coincidence. Also, the custodian found what Ferdinand awkwardly referred to as a "cup of urine" in the gym. I guess he smelled it because otherwise it probably just looked like Mountain Dew.

I acted as surprised as I could, but admitted nothing. I tried not to lie directly. "That's an interesting theory, but as I told you, I didn't see anyone while I was sitting in the park. Spirit runs all over the park. He might have seen someone but didn't bark" etc. Ferdinand is really suspicious, but he obviously didn't want to outright accuse me.

The next day he called me in because he went by "my house" and knocked again, but nobody answered. I told him truthfully, I think, that my mother is out of town, and I have been spending a lot of time at the park.

I can't even get a fake note to Ms. Miranda about conferences because I need to keep everyone thinking that Mom is off working out of town. They seem appalled that she would leave me alone to take care of myself, but are waiting to take that up with her when she gets back. I reassured them that I know how to fend for myself and not to worry. They are reluctant to call anyone because they can see that I am not in any way being abused or feeling neglected. "Neglect isn't provable, yet..." Mr. Lilligard said ominously.

I looked at the principal's desk a few times to see if the drawer I need is one that locks or not. I want to finish my revenge plans soon.

I can tell that I'm not going to be able to keep this all up much longer. I need to deflect their interest from me to some other problem.

I got thinking about that and I have a plan that fits in nicely with my Halloween plans. I decided it was time to pass some notes of my own to certain kids in class. They are always passing notes; why shouldn't I?

I walked past the office several times after my meeting with Ferdinand, but there was always someone there. I need a time when others are out.

I'm trying to keep up with my school assignments but it's really hard to write outside. I fell a little behind in Math, just with the homework. I'm doing okay on the tests.

Ceria invited me to work on a new project with her and some friends. I think she feels bad for me because I'm usually alone. She really is a super nice girl. What she doesn't realize is that I'm not lonely being alone. Friends are complications. I wish I could afford them, but I really can't. Still, I'm an asset to any group because I see things other people don't, and I'm not going to lie, I'm a pretty decent writer. We are supposed to create a poster that shows how current events are connected to historical events and draw parallels describing how people respond to problems similarly to how they have in the past. I told her I'd be okay with helping them with that. I'm not sure how I'm going to do it, though.

I need computer time, which means the library, which means Spirit has to wait outside for me downtown. He seems to know the neighborhoods around the park and school and keeps himself pretty safe. People actually seem to know him. They smile and wave at him like he's been friendly with them when I'm not around. Downtown is different. There are busier streets, lots of strangers, and I worry that he might get picked up by someone.

I worry about him. I don't want to lose him. For example, when I got out of school today, Spirit wasn't waiting for me. I walked all around the school grounds. Usually there are a group of kids petting him or making a fuss over him when I get out of school, but he wasn't out there. I was getting kind of panicky when I saw him by the museum. I walked over as he ran towards me, and I picked him up immediately. He started barking and I set him down. He started running back towards the museum, so I followed. I finally saw what the problem was. There were maintenance workers fixing some plumbing near my hidden spot. Spirit was barking at them, protecting our territory, I guess. All I could do was hope they wouldn't notice my stuff. They worked for over an hour. Then they left.

Spirit and I shared a peanut butter sandwich under a park light while I read a newspaper I liberated from a recycle bin outside a house next to the park. I've done that before when I wanted to know what was happening in the world. I noticed a news report about some burglaries on the Ariel's street. I wonder if they've had any problems with that. Done writing. Fingers are frozen. I'm going to bed.

Hey Antonio,

How come you are always watching Sebastian all the time?

Don't you trust him?

Are you thinking he's tired of being your friend and likes Kate better?

I hope you get it sorted out with him.

A friend

Sebastian,

Did Antonio tell you that he wants to be more than just friends?

I think he really likes you more than you know.

A friend

Hi Sienna,

Your friend Kate seems to really like Sebastian, but he might already be taken. Maybe you should warn her.

A friend

Hi Kate,

I know you really like Sebastian, but don't you think he would be a better match for your friend, Sienna? She doesn't always tell you everything.

A friend



Geria

Our greatest desire is connection.

Our greatest fear is disconnection. Or is it?

Others link us to the greater circle in a chain of union.

We detach because to be vulnerable is too bare.

Joining, tying and uniting means we might be held too tight,

Our liberty squeezed out of us, until we are reborn naked in the world.

Let's make connection comfortable.

10/23

My notes certainly stirred up some trouble. Antonio and Sebastian won't talk to each other. Sienna and Kate are red-faced furious.

The other students seem perplexed.

Alonzo looks at me suspiciously, while Gordon and I keep our secrets. One of those secrets (Hooray!) is that I was finally able to sneak into the principal's office and not only acquire some of that letterhead I've been wanting, but envelopes too.

During the hullabaloo when the counselor was trying to sort out the girl drama, the custodian was trying to keep the floors clean, the teachers were trying to keep the students from leaving class, the secretary was trying to help the principal, and the principal was trying to catch a goat running through the halls, I managed to find the office empty.

I was sitting innocently in an office chair when the flustered secretary returned to report that the principal had the goat and she was going to call Animal Control. It was opportune that I actually knew which house near the park had a pet pygmy goat, one that must have escaped, so that they could get it back to its owner.

I asked for some tape rolls for a school project and then hurried back to class. The large box I had carried into school with my "project supplies" was now empty, so I flattened it and put it in Ms. Miranda's recycle bin. I had been very careful to avoid cameras this time.

Ceria and I talked about current events in the middle east and the roots of the conflict which went way back to biblical times. We decided to focus on a story from ancient history about two brothers, Abraham's sons, Ishmael and Isaac, and their descendants' battles over a "promised land." We compared them to Romulus and Remus fighting over ancient Rome, and brothers who fought on opposite sides during the American Civil War, and modern day brothers fighting over towns and cities in the middle east. It was fun working with Ceria. She didn't expect me to do all the work for her. Her other friends are really nice and we had a good time working together.

After school, Ms. Miranda was trying to catch me before I left. She caught up to me just as I greeted Spirit. She asked me about my dog, and I remembered that hers had just died. I told her about Spirit's loyalty and sense of fun, and then I told her I had heard about her dog Buddy, and that I was sorry for her loss. She didn't get all weepy like I was half afraid she would. She just said she missed him a great deal. Then she asked if she could walk home with me to meet my mother in person.

I had a hard time coming up with an excuse this time. I used the same old, "She's out of town but will be back this weekend," but then she said she wanted to come by and make sure I had enough food at the house. She said she was concerned about my safety. I told her that I wasn't "headed home, but to the library, and that my mom doesn't want me to invite strangers over, even teachers probably fit in that category-Sorry."

Spirit and I hurried off to the library, where I quickly returned some books. We wandered a bit after that, casually peering into dumpsters— I'd love to find a sleeping bag or wool blanket. We found some leftover pizza in a box and shared it. Sometimes I think of other people as Muggles. (In the Harry Potter books by J.K. Rowling, there are people who have magic and live in our world with Muggles, non-magical people, who aren't supposed to know about the magic.) I can't let people know about my secret world. I am super careful when we are trolling for dumpster supplies.

I didn't find anything to make my sleeping arrangement any warmer, but I've been doing okay with my down coat and two pairs of pants. The cardboard makes a huge difference as a wind break and insulator. However, when it was finally getting dark, and I got back to the museum and carefully headed into our corner, there was already someone there!

"Hey! I said, that's my spot," The guy poked his head out, red hair and a bushy beard. It was my good Karma guy, the one I gave some change to way back when. The guy said, "Not tonight, it's not." Whoa. This was not good Karma. I was really taken aback. I said, "Look, I've been staying here for almost a month. That's my stuff buried there, and that's my cardboard." He said, "I'm here. I'm comfortable. I don't think you want to arm wrestle for it. I'm not going to take your stuff. Just go find another spot tonight. I'll go somewhere else tomorrow."

He made it sound almost reasonable. Spirit meanwhile was flipping his lid. He was spinning around and barking like a maniac. Mr. No-longer Good Karma said, "Could you take your mutt with you. He's going to wake the neighbors and get us both arrested. Do you want that?"

I called Spirit and we left. Spirit seemed really confused. He kept looking back and growling until we were out of sight of the museum. Find somewhere else? I didn't have a clue. Then I thought about "my" house. The one that I had identified to the principal. So far, no one came to the door anytime we knocked. Maybe it was empty, the owners gone somewhere. The yard was in good condition, but maybe they had a service. I determined that this plan had merit, so off we went. I was just trying the front door knob when the owner pulled into his driveway. He was in a big truck pulling a trailer. Spirit and I again jumped over the back fence for the second time in a week and ran down the alley.

We walked most of the night trying to stay out of sight. Finally, Spirit had had enough. He just sat down and wouldn't walk any farther.

We found some bushes in an alley behind a garbage can that afforded a little protection from prying eyes, so we could lie down and try to sleep. We probably got an hour or two of cold, troubled sleep before a pair of headlights and the sound of a car heading down the alley told me it was time to move on. I picked up Spirit and started wending my way back towards my park, my museum, my school.

I spotted a police cruiser before he spotted us and ducked behind a parked car. He must not have seen me because he continued on, occasionally shining his light into dark places. I was grateful that he missed us.

When dawn came, I decided I couldn't go to school today. Not only was I exhausted, but there would be the relentless questions and concerns. I was taking a sick day. Spirit and I waited near the park restrooms for the day to begin. When the guy unlocked it at 7:15 AM, he just glanced at me and left. I figured I'd spend part of the morning in here. I could sleep on the floor next to the toilet. Not many people use these bathrooms.

I fed Spirit some dog food and had just drifted off to sleep when I heard him barking just outside the door. I ignored it for a few minutes until I heard Spirit yelp sharply and go silent. I was up and out of there in less than a second. Standing by the bathroom door was Red Hair Karma guy who had stolen my bed. He had obviously just kicked my dog. Spirit lay motionless on the ground. I ran over and picked him up gently. I wanted to kill this man, who said stupidly, "I was just trying to get him to be quiet." Spirit lay still in my arms but was breathing.

I didn't know what to do.

I thought of the one person who might be able to help me and started running to Alonzo's house. Alonzo's mother was a doctor. She would know what to do.

I ran and ran. It's probably two miles to Alonzo's house from the school. Cars passed me, and at least one person yelled for me to stop, but I kept on going. Spirit was whimpering in my arms. His little heart was pounding, I could feel it hammering away against my chest.

It was still early enough in the morning that the Ariels should be getting ready to take Alonzo to school. I don't know how long it actually took to get there, but it felt like forever.

I pounded on the door and cried, "Help me, please! Please, help me!"

Alonzo's mother answered the door. She quickly asked, "What happened?" when she saw my stricken face and my dog in my arms. I told her that Spirit had been kicked but I didn't know where or how he was hurt. She told me that he was probably bleeding internally, so we needed to get him to a veterinarian right away. She had me tip his head lower than his body and then yelled to Alonzo, "We're going to the vet right now! I'm taking the car. Do you want to walk to school or come with us?" Alonzo appeared in the doorway. "I'm coming too."

We climbed in the car and they didn't scold me for not buckling up. Alonzo gently caressed Spirit's head as we drove and I didn't know what to say. Ms. Ariel got on her cell phone and the vet was waiting for us at the door. I whispered to her that I didn't have any money to pay, but she brushed my words off lightly and said not to worry.

We sat in the lobby of the vet's office while Ms. Ariel and the vet took Spirit back into his surgery room. I was exhausted and afraid, and I started to cry. I hated crying in front of another kid, but when I looked over at Alonzo, he was crying too!

We probably looked like a couple of idiots, crying there in the lobby.

After a few minutes I got my composure back and thanked him for helping me. He said, "I really hope your dog is okay." Ms. Ariel came back in and said the vet had found the source of the problem and was repairing the damage. She asked if we were willing to go to school now, but I said, "I'd rather wait." Surprisingly, both the Ariels decided to wait with me.

When the veterinarian, an older gentleman with kind eyes, came out finally, he told me that Spirit was going to be just fine, but that he needed several days of rest and care. He had stitches that would need tending, and he had to be prevented from being active for a while. The vet wanted to keep him sedated for a bit so he would need to stay over at the vets for at least the weekend. I was so grateful, I kept shaking his hand and saying, "Thank you, so much. Thank you." He smiled kindly and said, "That's what I do." When I told him that I couldn't pay him yet, but that I would, he just said, "We'll work something out." Then he and Ms. Ariel went back into his office for a chat.

Alonzo and I noticed that we had missed all of first and second periods and we both started laughing. Then Ms. Ariel came out and said, "All right, Edgar, how can we get a hold of your mother? I assume she's out of town again because she didn't bring you herself."

Maybe it was because I was so exhausted from lack of sleep, my mad dash to the Ariels, and my fear for Spirit, but I finally decided that Ms. Ariel could be trusted with the truth about my mother's disappearance. Without looking at Alonzo, I told her that I hadn't seen my mother for several weeks and didn't know where she was. She seemed to already have an idea about my mother's life style before she left. I mentioned Cal and what he had said about the coast.

Ms. Ariel looked at me thoughtfully and then said, "I'm going to try to track her down. I know some folks who may be able to help. First, I need to take you boys to school." She looked pointedly at me and said, "I'll see you after school."

I fell asleep in every class for the rest of the day, but people mostly left me alone.

At one point, I heard Ceria say sharply, "Stop that!" and I woke up to see Antonio sheepishly backing away from Gordon, which I had slung over the back of my desk chair.

During my last period, computer class, I found time to type my long anticipated letters. I made sure no one was looking over my shoulder as I carefully typed the words I was longing to say. I felt a little shiver of foreboding and excitement as I put the school letterhead into the printer and sent my documents to print. Then I erased my electronic copies, put the letters in the envelope and sealed and addressed them.

I will drop them in the school office outbox when I leave for the day.

Ms. Ariel wants to talk to me. I've been putting it off by writing in my journal, but I guess it's time to go.



Hola Mija!

Don't forget to bring tus amigos to help decorate la tienda on Monday. We replaced the decoraciones that someone accidentally threw in the dumpster. Tia Rosa is making tamales and we'll feed anyone who helps.



Tu siempre estas en mi corazón.

Mama

ITS NOT AS FUN bugging edgar as it UST 2 b

Oh, you're talking to me again?

I NEVER Stoped.

You are my best brother. I could always tell you everything.

STILL CAN. Sory, I Made you Mad or WHatever.

No problem. Just be cool like you used to be. I like girls.

I really like Kate, and she hates bullies.

We need to stop picking on people. I think I might be a bully sometimes and I don't want to be.



JEFFERSON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

HOME OF THE PATRIOTS

Replace image!

October 22, 2014

OFFICIAL NOTICE

To the parents of Antonio DeMilan,

I regret to inform you that your son, Antonio is being expelled from Jefferson Junior High School. Not only has he been a loathsome rudesby and cream-faced loon, he is a boil on the otherwise lovely face of Jefferson Junior High School. It is time to remove him.

Please do not bother to contact the school. We have already withdrawn his records and ask that you send him to another school, preferably reform school, a military style program where they might whip him into some semblance of a human being.

We are sorry that your child has become such an ass. We are certain that you yourselves are unhappy about this sad turn of events. We are sure he was a perfectly normal and sweet child once upon a time.

Good luck in your future endeavors as you seek to reform your perfidious, ridiculous, smarmy, bully of a son.

Sincerely,

Principal Ferdinand Naples

10/25

Spirit is going to be okay. I have a place to stay. That was all I could think about yesterday.

Even though I was a bit worried about talking to Ms. Ariel about my mother. It was such a relief to tell someone, finally. Ms. Ariel said that she has connections with folks in Social Services and with the police department and can look for information before we tell the school or anyone else that I am "living unaccompanied." Ms. Ariel offered to have me stay with her and Alonzo for a while until "we get this sorted out." I said, "No, but thank you," until she reminded me that Spirit needs to recover, and she is home part of the day while I would be at school.

I'm glad that I have a place to stay that is warm and has a shower and washing machine. I'm glad Spirit has a place to come to so he can get better. The vet said he can come home later today.

Still, I'm uncomfortable with this arrangement. I was taking care of myself. I still don't want to end up in foster care. How do I know I can really trust the Ariels? Alonzo has been pals with my tormentors. They still don't know that I don't have a home to go back to.

They offered to take me to my place to get more of my stuff, but I told them I'd make do with what I have or pick it up after school some time. It would be quite the shock for them if I showed them where I've been sleeping. I do hope that Red-haired Bad Karma guy didn't steal the rest of my stuff.

They have a spare bedroom, so I now have my own room with a bed. I even have a writing desk and a soft reading chair. I would probably never come out of it, except it feels rude to completely exile myself from the Ariels. The room has kind of an ocean theme, sea green walls, a bedspread with boat anchors, and a mariner's wheel hanging on the wall. I wonder if my mother is really at the coast. I feel like something bad must have happened or she would have tried to contact me by now.

On one of my brief forays out of the bedroom today, I offered to help with taking out garbage or some other household chore. Ms. Ariel asked if I would get some boxes out of the attic. She has three containers of Halloween decorations she said she would like help hanging up. I enjoyed climbing the stairs to her attic. There's a trap door with a rope hanging down from the ceiling and when you pull the rope, the door swings open and it has steps on it that you can climb to get up to the attic. It has springs that make it easy to close back up. Genius!

Anyway, the attic was full of stuff. There was one little window at one end, but I was able to turn on a light and locate the correct items stacked with other containers labeled with various holidays. I pulled out the plastic bins marked "Halloween" that she wanted and dragged them down the stairs.

We opened the bins together and she told me which items she wanted put up and where. Alonzo found a CD of scary sounds to play when the trick or treaters come to the door. He played it while we were working. In the daylight, the sound effects were just kind of out of place and funny. We hung a string of pumpkin lights on the porch and suspended some stringy fake spider webs and a large fabric tarantula in the corner. We put pumpkin cut outs in the windows. Halloween is about a week away, and we got the place fully prepared.

When we were done, there were still quite a few unused items in the bins. I really want to use them for my park prank, but I didn't feel comfortable asking if I could have them. How would I explain why anyway?

While we were working, I mentioned that I thought the mechanism for the attic stairway was pretty cool. I was curious how to make something like it for a project I am working on. Alonzo said, "You can borrow our laptop if you need to Google it or watch a YouTube video. It's a pretty new laptop. We had to replace the one that got stolen a week ago." "You got robbed?" I asked. "Yeah," he said a little uncomfortably. "It happened while I was in the hospital with my concussion." Suddenly, I was reminded of what I had done. I apologized again, but he just kind of brushed off my apology. "That's just water under the bridge, or in the pool, I guess I should say."

I like Alonzo. He makes me laugh, and he's comfortable to hang out with.

Ceria called to see if Alonzo wanted to come to a small party she has planned on Monday. She was happy to hear that I was at Alonzo's house and invited me too. We are going to help decorate her parents' new store for Halloween. It's not too far from the school, so we can just walk over.

I was so busy with the Ariels today that I forgot about my weed pulling job. The guy was expecting me to come back over today. I'll have to check in with him tomorrow. It's too late to go now. Pizza for dinner and then we're heading out to pick up Spirit!

10/26

Spirit's back and not quite full of spirit as yet. He has to stay sedated a bit, and he's wearing this funny Shakespeare collar to keep him from licking his stitches. He keeps looking out the window, like staying inside is an insult to his free range nature.

I went to church with the Ariels today. It seemed like what I should do. Oddly enough, it turned out to be that little church I got some cookies from one Sunday while wandering the town. They do sing a lot of songs. It's fun, though. They display the lyrics on a projector screen. There's actually a little band that plays, and Alonzo is their guitarist. It's all very soothing as they study scriptures and talk about what the words and phrases mean. They sang and talked about a loving Heavenly Being who looks out for everyone. I wonder if that could be true. Is there a God watching over my mother or me? The pastor said that God doesn't cause our problems but lets them happen so we can learn something. Church gave me some ideas to ponder and some cookies to eat. The kid that caught me last time looked at me like he couldn't remember where he knew me from. I'm okay with that.

After church, I told the Ariels that I wasn't far from where I had some yard jobs I needed to do. I asked if it would be okay with Ms. Ariel if I went and checked in with my clients (sounds a bit pretentious there!) and just walked to their house afterwards. She seemed a bit reluctant, like she wanted to chauffeur me around some more, but gave in when I said I didn't know how long it might take, and I was hoping that Spirit wouldn't be alone too long.

After I checked with my weed guy and the nice old lady, I told them I'd be by after school on Monday to take care of their yards. They were sympathetic about my not coming yesterday when I told them my dog had been hurt and needed vet care. I stopped at the park and found my extra clothes. Everything was as I had left it. I shoved some clothes into Gordon and then walked back to the Ariel's house.

It wasn't even an hour since I'd been dropped off. When I arrived, there was a police cruiser in the driveway. I froze. Why were the police there? Did it have something to do with my mother? With me? I was afraid to go in, but decided to be cool.

Turns out I had nothing to worry about. The officer was there to talk to them about the burglary. It seems they had picked up some suspects. They were showing Ms. Ariel a picture of Cal. I was really startled and must have made some sound, because the officer immediately turned around and said, "Do you know this guy?" I wasn't sure what to say. Cal could get me in real trouble if he knew that I was talking about him. Still, I said, "Yes, his name is Cal, and I can tell you where he lives."

Hi Kate,

It's not cool the way you got all mad at me for nothing.

Sienna 😊

I'm sorry. I thought you were lying to me.

Who do you think sent those notes?

I don't know. Someone who likes drama, I guess. It was kind of mean.

I don't know why someone would want to be mean to us. I'm sorry too. I don't like it when we fight.

We never actually fight fight, but I don't like how it feels when we aren't talking.

Best friends again?.

Of course, best friends forever.

Sebastian,

It's totally uncool the way you picked on Edgar.

I think you are better than that.

A friend

Antonio,

It's uncool the way you pick on other kids who are weaker than you. Knock it off.

We are watching and we want it to stop.

**U shuldnt treet
peepke the way
U do!**

I've had enough of watching you pick on other kids. I felt so bad when you got food all over Edgar and he had to leave school. You can be such jerks. I'm going to tell a teacher every time I see it from now on!

So stop!

My sister gets picked on by bullies and I wish someone would stand up to them.

I hate you guys sometimes.

You can be so mean.

I'm going to be braver and tell.

JerK

YOU are bad persons.

10/28

Surprising news at school today! Turns out our principal and English teacher eloped over the weekend. They took Monday off of school but came back Tuesday because of Parent Conferences. Ferdinand and Miranda married! I felt like a proud father—my match making had turned out to be even more successful than I had anticipated.

Our Monday substitute in English was pathetic. She arrived late and carrying a giant soda cup with a straw. She wore a leopard print miniskirt and long boots and had an overabundance of makeup including fake eyelashes. Not only was she extra tall as a result of the 4 inch stiletto heels on her boots, her hair was a towering blond beehive. She wrote her name in giant cursive letters, Miss Trincula. She immediately handed us coloring pages with Disney characters and invited us to color them while she taught us about poetry. No matter that no one had colored pencils except Kate. It looked like Miss Trincula was ignoring the plans that Ms. Miranda, now Mrs. Ferdinand, had left us, so I asked her if that was what we were supposed to be covering, and she said cheerily, "Oh, your teacher won't mind if we do something different!"

"That's not true," said Sebastian, rather bravely, I thought.

"Who said that?" asked Trincula. "He did," said Antonio, pointing at me.

"I am in charge of this class," she said as she began to write on the board. "If I need any help from you, I'll ask for it. Now shut it!"

She told us that since Halloween was coming, she had chosen a spooky poem to read and talk about. The poem she wanted to cover was called, "The Tell Tale Heart" by Edgar Allen Poe.

"That's actually not a poem. It's a short story," I said.

"You mustn't correct your teacher," she scolded, "It's both a story and a poem."

"That's not true," said Antonio. She turned on me with a furious look. "Stop correcting me!" I tried to protest that I wasn't the only one, but she instructed me to put my head down on the table.

Then she told us all to read the story silently to ourselves out of our Literature text so that she could watch cat videos on her cell phone. She didn't even bother to mute the sound. I figured she had forgotten about me but I tried to read with my head down anyway. It was kind of relaxing.

One of the most suspenseful stories of all time, and I read it to the sound of perky and adorable kittens meowing and cheerful music warbling. Every now and then we could hear the sound of her sucking her soda noisily through the straw or giggling at kitten antics. Note passing and cell phone use were soon the main class activity.

Ten minutes before the end of class, she said, "Oh my! Look at the time. Well, what did you think of the poem?"

To my delight, the entire class responded, "It's not a poem; it's a short story."

She glared at me like I'd put them up to it.

Ceria, ever helpful, said, "I thought the story was rather exciting. It was obvious that the guy was crazy. He was definitely protesting too much about that."

Miss Trincula said, "Really, you think so? What about that mysterious eyeball?"

Soon the class was merrily arguing, and when the bell rang to switch classes, no one heard it. I picked up my stuff and left. I didn't even look back when she said, "Where is that troublesome boy going?"

After school I went to my customers' houses and pulled weeds, mowed lawns and moved a wood pile. \$20.00 of very needed cash. I went to the store and bought more dogfood. Gordon was bulging when I arrived back at the Ariel's.

The next day at school, Miss Miranda/Mrs. Ferdinand and our principal were back. They said they couldn't miss Parent Conferences. Seriously?! Shortest honeymoon of all time. Classes end at noon on conference days, and students go home unless their conference is right away. That will give me some time to scout out more yard work opportunities. I need money for a few more Halloween surprise items.

Miss M/Mrs. F caught me at the end of her class which we had spent correcting misconceptions and confusion resulting from yesterday's substitute substitutions. She told me that Miss Trincula had left her a note with my name saying I had disrupted class. I didn't bother to defend myself. I just said, "It won't happen again."

She smiled at me and said she wasn't too concerned about it.

Miss Miranda looks so very happy. She smiles at her students and calls them wonderful. She says it is a new world being married. Again, seriously?! She's been married for 3 days tops.

She and Ferdinand moved into her house, not his. That gave me an idea for maybe a place to stay when Spirit and I have to leave the Ariels...

I've been thinking about what to do when this week is up. Hopefully, Miss Ariel will find my mother. I don't think it's very likely that I'll be able to go back to living with Mom because of the time she's been gone. I'm guessing they will put me in a foster home. I'd rather keep trying to make it on my own. I'm worried about what foster care could be like. I need an exit strategy. Maybe I could head to Seattle and find work there.

All of my teachers are asking me about my mother coming to conferences. Finally, I wrote a note as my Mom telling them that she has social phobia and won't be able to make it this year. She said to feel free to send notes.

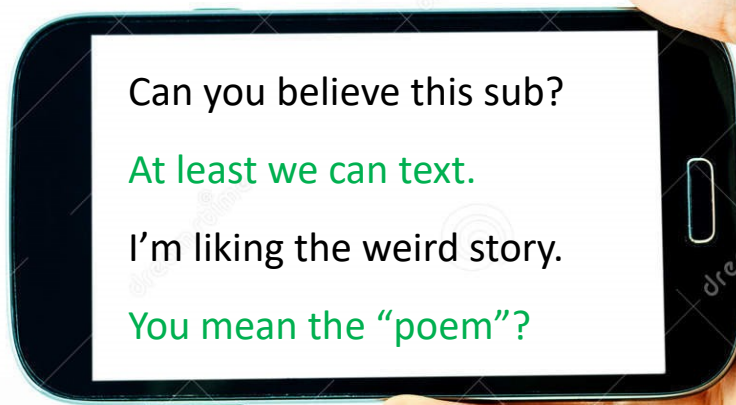
Spirit is getting his personality back. He is annoyed by the collar he has to wear. I am planning to take him on a little jaunt later.

For now, though, I better start paying attention in class and stop writing in my journal!

Later in the day, I walked home with Alonzo. He could have taken the bus, but he said he wanted to walk with me. We talked about school stuff. How Ceria is really cool and smart. How the Math teacher is always telling baseball stories from his glory days in college. How Antonio and Sebastian are always trying to steal Gordon. How Gordon got his name.

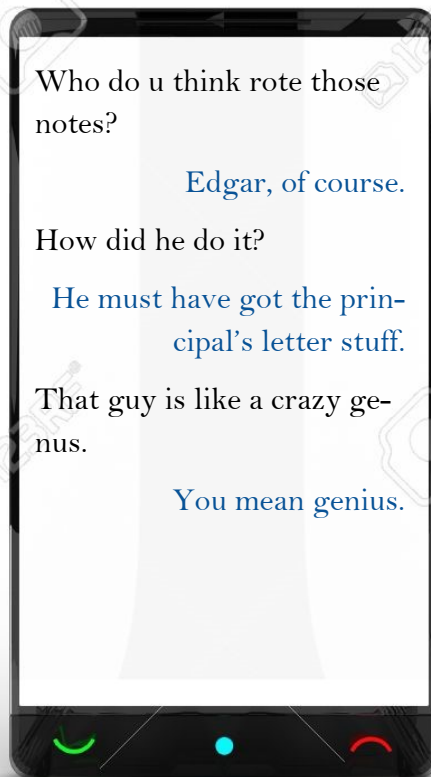
At the mention of my nemeses, I decided to tell Alonzo about my Halloween plan. Telling him was kind of a whim. He and his mother have been trustworthy and very helpful, and I decided he could know about my park prank plans (P³). He actually was really enthusiastic about the possibilities and added some ideas of his own. He wants to come take a part in it. He has some ideas about the mechanics of my plan. He says it will teach the guys a positive lesson about not messing with others. He's such an unusual kid. He makes me want to see people in a kinder light, like he does. He thinks people can truly change for the better if they are given a chance. Frankly, I don't see it the same way. I think our epic park extravaganza will be wonderful revenge.

When I got home, Miss Ariel had heard something about my mom. The police had managed to find that she had indeed gone to the coast with some friends. They were talking to the friends and would have news for us soon.



Replace images

Drawing of the sub



10/29

Serious trouble.

I got called to the office first thing this morning.

I've never seen Principal Ferdinand look so angry. He had one of my letters, the one I wrote to Antonio, I think, and was waving it around. He was speaking in phrases instead of complete sentences, "Impersonating a school administrator!" "Bullying and Harassment!" "Caused his family real distress!" "What could you have been thinking!?"

I guess I should have realized that my little letters prank would get back to the school principal, since I had forged his signature at the end of them. I kind of thought that they wouldn't realize so quickly just who had written them.

"This, in addition to the urine in the gym!" "Deceptions and lying!" "Grave disappointment." "Have to suspend you. As of today, emergency expelled."

And then this, "I need your mother to come and pick you up."

I did the only thing I know how to do when the principal's door isn't locked. I ran.

I ran out of the office and out of the school and I ran to my museum spot. I checked that the coast was clear and burrowed into my cardboard.

This was it. I had stayed in school as long as I could. I'm a junior high drop out. I had straight A's. But now, how was I ever going to get back to school?

He said I was expelled.

I can't believe I was starting to like the place and some of the people in it.

Maybe they will leave me alone now.

I've got to go back to the Ariels. I need to be with Spirit. I need to find out what's happened to my mother.

After that, though, I guess I need to move on.

Sienna! You won't believe what I just saw out the window!

What was it, Kate?

Edgar is outside. Remember, he got called to the office? I just saw him dive into a pile of leaves over by the museum. What is going on?

I don't know, but maybe we should tell someone.

Who are we supposed to tell? Do you think maybe that is where he lives? Remember, we thought he might be living at the park.

I think we should talk to Ms. Miranda.



Ceria

Halloween Fiesta

De la Tienda del la Felicidad

9:30 PM– 11:30 PM

Hope you can come!

Hi Sebastian and Antonio,

Want to meet up after trick or treating to go to Ceria's Halloween Fiesta? We could meet in the park by the school at about 9:00 pm. Look for me under the trees by the picnic tables.

Let me know if that works.

-Alonzo

10/30

When I got to the Ariel's, no one was home except Spirit. The vet said that his stitches can't be removed for at least another week and he won't be able to go outside or even remove his collar until a few days after that. I really appreciate all that the Ariels have done for me, but I just can't stay here. We sat curled up together on the couch. He whimpered while I cried a bit.

I'd felt like I'd be a burglar if I took food out of their cupboards, even though they gave me permission to "make yourself at home." I didn't mind eating meals with them because I felt like a guest. I really appreciated the comfortable room, the bed, the desk, the chair, but I hate how it makes me feel like I owe them something.

When they got home, I didn't tell them about what had happened at school.

Alonzo didn't ask me why I wasn't in classes today. He looked like he wanted me to tell him something, but I feel like I might have told him too much already.

We watched Much Ado About Nothing together after dinner. I'd read the play before and liked it, but I loved the movie. Sometime during the film, Ms. Ariel took a phone call. She went in the kitchen so she wouldn't bother us. When she came back, she looked really upset. A few minutes later she got called to the hospital for one of her patients. It must be tough to be a doctor, even though she usually makes it seem very fulfilling.

My favorite part of the movie is when a group of the characters trick Beatrice and Benedict into falling in love with one another. They find times when they know each character will overhear them and then they talk about how the other one is totally in love with them. The trickery leads them to each declare their love to the other and in the end they get married. It was pretty funny. The actors are really great. I thought about my tricking Ferdinand and Miranda and decided it was similar and different. They already were on their way to being in love, like the characters in the movie, who despite their protests about it, obviously had feelings for each other. It was different, though, because I never had to lie about anything to get them to see what they had in common.

I'm really becoming comfortable in this town, in my school, with most of these people.

Once Spirit is well enough to travel, I need to take him and head to the warmer side of the state. I've heard the Seattle Library is amazing.

Tomorrow is Halloween in the park. I pretended I wasn't feeling well and couldn't go to school today. I will spend the morning getting things together for our prank.

Ms. Ariel took my temperature and said she didn't see anything. I told her my stomach was hurting which is technically true because whenever I think about being expelled, my stomach tightens and I feel a bit panicky. She looked super reluctant to leave me at home alone, but she finally took Alonzo to school and went to work. Today is Alonzo's conference, so he will stay after school a while. He said, "See you later!" as he left for school, but he also furrowed his brow, examining me quizzically, and added, "I wish you could come."

I am going to walk down to the hardware store and pick up some springs to attach to the Halloween items we chose for the park. I think I have just about enough money left depending on how much they cost.

Alonzo said we could use their leftover decorations— there's witches and ghost cardboard cutouts, gauzy fabric, spider webs and spiders. There's several scary masks with bloody injuries. One has a hatchet in its head.

Alonzo arranged for Sebastian and Antonio to meet us in the park around 9 PM. He didn't mention me. Just said they would be surprised. They are planning to go trick-or-treating before that. I think they are a bit old for that and hope they aren't just planning to play tricks on people or steal candy from little kids.

11/1

So much has happened in the last few days.

New situation. New information.

I'll start from where I left off last week.

I did end up going to the hardware store. It was a bit of a walk from Alonzo's house, but that's no big deal to me anymore. I managed to find the springs and fishing line we needed and even had a few cents left over. I'm going to point out that at this point, I had Gordon, my jacket (not the down one,) some bread and peanut butter and those few measly cents, plus my hardware store purchases. Everything else, including my journal, my supplies, and my clothes were distributed equally between the Ariel's guest bedroom and my cache at the park.

I walked back to the Ariel's house and got there about 1:00. As I got closer, I could see several cars parked out front, and one of them was a police car. I heard Spirit barking. I took that as a warning and backed away and started running. I headed for the lake because it was closer than the park and it has lots of good hiding spots.

What was I supposed to do? There I was hiding, with no supplies for the weather and the night. I didn't really know what was going on at the Ariel's house, but I wasn't about to risk going back there, except to get Spirit. Somehow I needed to get Spirit.

I decided it was safe to sit on a park bench and consider my options.

As far as I knew, no one was actually looking for me. The police car made me think they wanted to send me to juvenile jail. It was also possible that I was headed to a foster care family. I wished I had a spy.

The Ariels weren't even supposed to be home until after Alonzo's conference. I hadn't noticed if one of the cars was theirs. Maybe the Ariels had turned me in to the authorities, but that didn't seem likely because they would have talked to me about it first I'm sure.

Maybe Principal Ferdinand had turned me over to the police over the cup of pee, or truancy or something.

Maybe they had found my mother and she was waiting for me there in the living room, but then why would the police be there?

Maybe I was being paranoid. Didn't matter. I wasn't going to lose my freedom if I could help it. I would wait things out. I would try to catch Alonzo on his own and grill him for information.

I remembered that we were supposed to do the park prank the next day. Would he still show up? I figured it was my best opportunity. I knew the Ariels would take care of Spirit for me.

I thought about trying to find Principal Ferdinand's empty house for the night, but I had no idea where it might be. I was worried about going back to the park because it was so close to the school and people knew to look for me there.

Because I had so little money, it occurred to me that I could go door to door and find some odd jobs and earn a little something. I would need money if I was going to leave town. I cautiously left the lake pathway and went to a nearby pet store. I asked if they could use a little extra help, and they told me that they already had employees for that, but they would be willing to give me an application, if I wanted a job. I said, "No thanks," and the friendly clerk frowned. She had no way of knowing I wasn't planning to stick around town.

I stopped at a house with a long driveway and a walled yard but left when their dogs started barking and lunging at their front window.

The next, and last house I stopped at was small and careworn. There were lots of weeds, so I was hopeful. The man who answered the door, however, threatened to call the police, so I left really quickly.

I went back to the lake and started building myself a shelter off the pathway and away from the carefree people fishing. I stacked leafy branches together behind two trees that were close together, as I had seen in one of my survival books. I tried to use evergreen boughs that had more dense foliage as a windbreak. I dug into the earth using bark as a make-shift shovel, so that I would have a decent depression to sleep in. I tried to insulate it with some of the boughs. By then, it was getting dark. Even with my jacket and windbreak, it was too cold to be outside. I put Gordon on my back and tried to curl up in a fetal position to conserve my core temperature.

It was a cold and miserable night. My ears, fingers and toes were numb.

In the morning I ate a peanut butter sandwich for breakfast. I already missed Ms. Ariel's vegetable omelets and fried potatoes, and I'd only been staying there for less than a week.

I decided it was safe to go to the library and didn't have any trouble walking there. I immediately began researching routes to Seattle. I decided I would hitch hike there. I really hoped Alonzo would show up at the park to tell me what was going on. I hoped he wouldn't bring the police or even his mother. I didn't want her to talk me out of my new plans.

If anyone could persuade me to stay, it would be her.

Gonzalo came over to see if he could recommend some books. He suggested the Count of Monte Cristo, which I hadn't read yet, so I checked it out. I felt bad that I would probably not be returning it on time, unless I found a job right away in Seattle and could mail it back.

I settled into a chair to read and was well in to the book, when I heard a fit of coughing and looked up to see Reaper. He winked at me and then settled into a chair to sleep. I realized that he was finding his own way of keeping out of the cold. I wondered if he even knew how to read.

Apparently, the library is a hot spot for homeless folks when the weather gets colder, because whom should I see next, but red haired Bad Karma man. I tripped him as he walked past my chair, and he looked at me briefly and tiredly before going into the newspaper room without a word.

I decided to head to the park when the library closed at 6:00 PM. Little children in costumes were visiting houses with their parents already, even though it was light outside. I saw a cute little girl dressed as a fish carrying a plastic pumpkin full of candy. She was asking her parents if they could go home yet, but the parents seemed ready to make a night out of it. They had her dump the pumpkin into a pillow case and go to the next door with it empty.

Lots of kids were dressed as the action hero from a recently released movie. So many little princess girls, but I did see one young girl dressed as the president of the United States (she had a sign on her chest) and I thought, "You go, girl!"

When I got to the park, I decided to be extra cautious. I looked all around and didn't see anything suspicious, even from the direction of the school. I decided to grab my cached supplies.

I climbed over the small wall and discovered that everything was gone. Not even my little pit was there. Someone had filled it in and raked the soil flat.

I confess that I felt seriously deflated at that point.

I decided to climb one of the trees we had planned to use for our prank and was surprised to find Alonzo already up there.

"I hoped you were coming," he grinned. "Got the fishing line?"

"I have a lot to talk with you about, but I want to save it until we've got everything ready. Okay?"

I decided that was what I wanted more than anything. I wanted to delay my world coming to an end. I wanted to put off the inevitable. Doing this one last activity with my friend was important to me.

So we got straight to work. He had found my cached supplies and had them under the picnic table. We had to climb several trees and string the fishing line between them. We had to attach the springs to the cardboard figures with duct tape and string he had brought. And we were doing our preparations trying to avoid catching the attention of anyone near the park.

Fortunately, most people were apparently home to celebrate their holiday or out in the neighborhoods with their children or friends trying to extort candy from ordinary people kind enough to comply.

It was dark before we were finished and at about 9:00 PM, Alonzo pulled out his battery operated CD player. He tested the spooky sound effects, and, as if on cue, Sebastian and Antonio appeared at the far end of the park.

I guessed we weren't going to have our little chat about police cars and me hiding out until later. Alonzo quickly ran to the next tree over and scaled it pretty quick. Our prearranged signal was the hoot of an owl.

As they approached, I could hear Sebastian laughing with Antonio about something. Antonio raised his head, like a skittish deer as he started to pass under my tree and I did my best hoot owl screech. Suddenly full blast, eerie music filled the park. I pulled the fishing line, and one by one, spiders in cobwebs dropped in front of the startled boys. Antonio let out a shriek and turned around but bumped into Sebastian. Next, Alonzo and I let the springs with witches, ghosts, and frightening masks drop around them. The springs worked perfectly as the various hideous items bounced up and down, touching them and then springing away. The boys stood almost mesmerized. Each time they took a step to get away, something would drop and cause them to change direction. They were frozen with indecision. Sebastian was swatting at them, but Antonio looked like a convicted man in front of a shooting squad. It was beautiful.

And then, Alonzo jumped out of his tree.

He was in a crazy black crow costume, covered in feathers. He had glow in the dark teeth and glow in the dark makeup that was absolutely terrifying.

"You men of sin!" he cawed, and I recognized the lines from The Tempest. I seriously thought they would pee their pants. But then they all started laughing.

I'm not going to lie; at first I was a little frustrated. I had worked and worked to make these guys truly scared, I didn't want them laughing.

But then, Alonzo, pulled out his teeth and said cheerfully, "I hope this teaches you a lesson. You guys have been jerks." I was surprised to hear Antonio say quietly, "Yeah, I know." Sebastian was still laughing when he said, "Come out of that tree, Edgar, I see you up there."

I dropped easily to the ground. "That was awesome. Incredible. You seriously had me wanting my mother!" said Sebastian. Alonzo suddenly frowned sadly.

Antonio came over to me and said solemnly, "I'm really sorry for the way we've treated you this year." I figured this was just a ploy to catch me off guard, but then he said, "The best thing you did was those crazy letters. My parents thought mine was hilarious. They didn't for one minute think I was being expelled, which surprised me. I realized at that moment that they had a higher opinion of me than I had of myself. I told them some of the stuff we pulled on you. They told me I needed to make things right. There's a difference between practical jokes and being mean. They told me I was a bully and that I needed to shape up. They think you're super funny. They want me to invite you over to dinner. They'll love this prank too. Seriously man, you're a genius!"

Sebastian said, "My stepfather was furious about the letter. He went straight to the school and insisted you be expelled. I see him mad all the time, but I don't think our principal has before. I'm super sorry you got in such big trouble. Actually, my stepdad got arrested last night for hitting us and is probably going to jail. That should give my little sisters, my Mom and me a fresh start. I'd like a fresh start with you too."

They attempted to give me a high five, but I still wasn't sure I was buying it.

Alonzo said, "Hey you guys, thanks for being such good sports. I wish I had photographed your faces. You'd be all over social media."

Antonio said, "I'm taking a picture of you right now in that geeky crow costume. You'll never live it down." He pulled out his cell phone.

Then Alonzo said, "Edgar and I need to talk about some serious stuff. Do you guys mind going ahead to the party at Ceria's?" They nodded and left.

I sat down on the picnic table beside my friend. Some things he had to tell me, I didn't know in advance, but the most important thing, I think I already knew and had for a while. Deep down, I knew my mom was dead.

Alonzo said the police found her body in Aberdeen, that's out by the Pacific Ocean. She overdosed. I don't know why I was expecting it. I really didn't want to believe it. My spirited, book-loving, fun, playful mother was gone, but then she'd been gone for a while. I can't even begin to imagine why my mother let drugs steal her away from me and from herself. If there's anything truly evil in this world. Addiction has to be it. I know she loved me, but in the end, I think she loved the drugs more. "They're sending her body back here. My church is going to do a funeral if you are willing." I felt numb in a way. I didn't feel like crying yet. I started to say, "Thank you," but he interrupted me. "There's more."

He told me that everyone knows I've been living in the park. Kids started to suspect it first, but then after the gym incident, they started spying. It wasn't until Ms. Miranda saw me head into my museum spot the day I got suspended that any of the teachers knew. "She was looking out the window and saw you. Then one of the kids in class told her what they suspected. She apparently went kind of nuts. She walked straight out of class to the principal's office. Left everyone just sitting there. Ceria tried to get them to work— Seriously, that girl is going to run a school or maybe the world some day."

Anyway, kids in other classes reported that my English teacher lit into the principal when she realized I was expelled. "Shortest marriage ever!" is what she is reported to have said. They both have been looking for me ever since, driving around town when not at the school. When Ms. Miranda was conducting Alonzo's conference, she discovered I'd been staying with the Ariels since my dog got hurt. They left school immediately to come to his house. They arrived the same time the police did to tell them about my mother. Alonzo said Ms. Miranda burst into tears at the news and punched principal Ferdinand in the arm, really hard. He actually winced.

Alonzo took a deep breath after that and said finally, "But there's one more bad thing. I want you to listen to me, and then I'm going to ask you not to run away again. It's going to be hard, but I need you to listen. The police think you helped rob our house. I don't believe it. Neither does my mom. Apparently some guy named Cal something said you are the one who told him to go to our house and rob us.

You won't even eat any of our food unless we offer it to you. I don't believe for a minute that you got that guy to rob our house, but the police say they need to question you."

Now I knew why he thought I might run, and he was right. I wanted to run.

I didn't though.

I was pretty tired of running away, of avoiding the messy business of caring about people and being cared about in return. Maybe I just wanted the warm bed and hot meal a night in jail would give me. I don't know, but I knew I didn't really want to be alone anymore.

Alonzo called his mother to tell us where she could find us.

She came immediately and started to cry when she saw me. She had brought Spirit with her. She thought I might be missing him. He jumped all over both of us as she hugged me tightly. "I'm so sorry," was all she could say, which made me cry, but then Spirit was barking like crazy and I had to hold him so he could lick my face. The stupid plastic collar made it really awkward and painful, but I let him anyway until all my tears were gone and turned to laughter.

Together we called the police so I could turn myself in.

The lady who answered the phone sounded like she was in the middle of a pretty crazy night. She hurriedly suggested I come to the station first thing in the morning.

It was getting pretty late but we couldn't go back to the Ariel's house until after an hour of park cleanup. It took forever to get the fishing line back out of the trees. Ms. Ariel kind of freaked out when she saw how high her son had climbed to attach the lines and springs.

We totally missed what was probably an epic party at Ceria's.

Mrs. Ariel said I didn't need to worry about where to stay for the next while. They were glad to have me until the courts figured out what to do with me.

The court thing was the one thing that made me want to jump ship. I had heard about foster care. I didn't want to live in someone's house who was being paid to take care of me. I wanted to be free to come and go and make my own choices. What if they didn't like my spending time at the library? What if they made me wash toilets and do all their other nasty chores like orphans in stories? What if they wouldn't let me keep Spirit? That was the big IF that had my stomach in knots.

11/2

Turns out that nobody really wanted to arrest me.

The Ariels took me down to the station. The officer in charge of the case asked me if I would be willing to talk to him, and I said, "yes." He took me into a little interview room. I wondered if he was going to do the good cop bad cop thing with another officer, but no one else came in. He didn't even ask very many questions. Basically it was, "How do you know Cal?" "Did you give him the Ariels' address?" "Why do you think he is claiming you helped him?" I answered him as honestly as I could although I can't understand why Cal would try to implicate me. I pointed out that he had stolen my money out of my backpack and it was possible he had found an invitation to a birthday party with it. Then the officer asked if I wanted to charge him with that theft as well. Turns out I did. I actually left the police station feeling pretty good. The police didn't seem interested in learning more about my living in the park. Then I remembered that they had been helping Ms. Ariel find out about my mother.

Thinking about my mother is actually kind of complicated.

Of course I feel terrible that I'm never going to see her again. Of course I wish she could be back with me. I know I will always love her.

Still, I feel like she died a long time ago. She has been lost to me so many times. The last years were the worst. I feel guilty that I couldn't get her to give up her addictions. I tried really hard, but there is only so much a kid can do. Shouldn't she have been the mom? Why didn't she just stop!? Wasn't I enough to make her quit, to stick around for? She tried so many times, but she just couldn't do it for good. And I think I did a pretty good job taking care of myself. Whatever comes next in my life, I never really counted on her being able to help me.

The Ariels' church is going to do a service for her next week since she doesn't have any family except me. I think that is really cool that they would do that for me even though I'm a stranger to almost all of them, even that kid who caught me stealing cookies. We went to that church today and saw all of them again. People kept telling me, "She's in a better place." I'm thinking, "Yep, pretty much anywhere else is a better place from where she's been."

I don't know if I believe in Heaven and all that. If God wants us to learn how to deal with the bad stuff on earth because there isn't any up there, I'm glad he lets us see a little bit of Heaven every now and then in this crummy world.

I wish Mom could have seen a few spots of Heaven in her life. It sucks so bad that I'm never going to see her again!

I can't believe how kind everyone is being. It's hard to accept so much help from people. I'm not used to it. At first I thought, "What's in it for them? What do they want from me?" But, it hasn't been like that at all. They seem to want to help just because they care. They care about me.

Weird. Most of them don't even know me.

I guess funerals are expensive, but the pastor talked to me about how I want the service to go and he has found a way for things to be paid. He told me not to worry about that part.

I told him I just want to focus on the happy parts of who my mother was. I'm going to talk about her love of reading and books and the fun we had when I was little.

We are going to read some of her favorite poems.

Shakespeare's sonnet 116 stands out for me right now, so I asked if we could read part of it.

"Love is not love,

Which alters when it alteration finds,

Or bends with the remover to remove:

Oh no! It is an ever fixed mark,

That looks on tempests and is never shaken;

It is the star to every wandering bark,

Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.

Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks

Within his bending sickle's compass come;

Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,

But bears it out even to the edge of doom."

My mom may have lost herself somewhere along the way, changed by her choices and challenges, but she loved me and was always loved by me. I really hope she finds a better life in Heaven.

On Sunday evening Principal Ferdinand and his wife, Ms. Miranda, came over to tell me I could go back to school.

Ms. Ariel had called them, of course, to tell them I had been found.

They were acting kind of weird. Ms. Miranda came in and sat down and then invited us to sit down, even though it wasn't her house. She pushed the principal forward and he self-consciously said something about me not really being expelled and misunderstandings and whatnot. I assume they acted so awkwardly because they had heard about my mom's death and my not having a permanent home.

Ms. Miranda said she was really happy to hear that I was safe and with the Ariels. She asked about Spirit's recovery and when Spirit heard his name, he ran over and jumped up on her knees. She was startled but immediately hugged him, and he rewarded her with a sloppy lick upside her face. She smiled and said, "Your dog is sure friendly!" I said, "Only to some people," and Principal Ferdinand looked nervous, until Spirit put his head on the principal's shoulder and looked into his eyes. I could tell Spirit had decided they were okay people.

I apologized for causing trouble with the letters I wrote and for taking the letterhead and envelopes out of Ferdinand's desk. Ms. Miranda said, "It's fine. No trouble caused," but stopped talking when the principal looked at her and raised an eyebrow. Then he said, "I have spoken to the families of the two young men, who received the letters, and they are not inclined to see you punished, but it was very wrong of you, and I'm pleased to see that you appreciate that you should not have taken school property. I would like to see you use your writing talent for some other kind of project. Additionally, I would like to assign you some community service, perhaps helping Ms. Miranda grade papers. As for the matter of the gymn intrusion or our goat visitor, I'm not sure that you were not involved, but I'm happy to let those incidents remain a mystery." I said I'd be happy to do whatever he asked and that grading papers sounded fair. Then he stood up, and he took Ms. Miranda by the hand and moved her towards the door. She smiled at me as the two of them left, and for a moment I thought I could see something familiar in her face, something that made me feel a little sad.

Losing mom has my emotions all over the place. I'm glad I can curl up with my journal, Spirit sleeping beside me, and just write about it.

11/3

On Monday when I got to school I could tell the rumor mill was in my business again. People had heard about Alonzo's and my prank in the park. They thought it was really cool and complained that they didn't get to see it.

They also asked me lots of questions about my living in the park. That information got around way too fast, and kids have been going over to the place where I slept to check it out. I kind of blew them off saying it was no big deal to camp out every now and then, my folks don't mind, etc.

Fortunately no one asked me about my mother having died. I think that Alonzo didn't tell anyone. I appreciate that he knows I want to keep that private.

Apparently Ceria's fiesta was as awesome as anticipated. She brought the left over cupcakes from the party. They had spiders made out of licorice strings and black licorice drops and jelly beans. Licorice is an underrated candy. It has to be because otherwise people would be singing its praises like they do chocolate. It is delicious and yet I had never had it before in my life. It also has the added benefit of coating your tongue, teeth and even lips with a greenish blackness that is quite fun to laugh at when you see it on other people. Ceria said we could use the cupcakes to celebrate Sierra's birthday, which apparently was today, because we have had to sing to her in every class.

I got thinking about the fact that I haven't actually celebrated my birthday in years. Mom and I just kind of forgot about stuff like that. I've even had trouble remembering what day it is.

After school today a bunch of the church people, including Alonzo plus me went out to the river pathway and handed out sandwiches and chips to the homeless people we could find. I told Alonzo about finding Reaper and how he had given me some tips about staying safe while staying out by the river. We didn't see him while we were handing out sandwiches, which was unfortunate because I was hoping to introduce him to Alonzo and then count how many cuss words he used.

11/4

Today Sebastian asked me to sit with him and Antonio at lunch.

Super weird, but also really interesting because Antonio wanted to talk to me about foster families. I guess he knew that my being homeless meant that I might be needing a place to stay if the Ariels wasn't going to be permanent. He told me a story that went something like this:

There was this kid who was born to a teenage mom and dad who had trouble taking care of him. In fact, the kid had been born with some health damage because of the mom's alcohol use before he was born. It caused him some learning difficulties. There was a lot of fighting and bad stuff going on in the house. Finally, the kid was like three years old when he was taken away from his parents and placed into foster care. The foster family who raised him were really great and loved him like he was their own son. He was in all their family pictures, he went on all their vacations, the mom took care of him when he was sick, and the dad made sure he was doing his school work. It wasn't always easy being a family, but the kid knew he belonged to them and they would stick with him even when it wasn't easy. They'd proved it.

Anyway, Antonio said he wanted me to know his story because he said that he knew I didn't have my own family right now, but he had lots of foster brothers and sisters and they were always scared of what their new home situation would be before they came. He wanted me to know that it didn't have to be a bad situation.

It was really cool of him to talk to me about that. He didn't have to. I really have been super worried about where I could end up. I asked him about whether his family had ever heard of foster family's taking a kid and his dog too, but he said he didn't know of any, but he'd ask his parents.

He and Sebastian are acting like nothing bad ever happened between us. I'm taking their cue on that, but I'm not really ready to completely trust them.

Ms. Miranda has been watching all of us closely, particularly me. I feel a bit uncomfortable under her scrutiny. I really do prefer flying under the radar. I'm hoping the novelty of my previous housing will wear off and people will start talking more about Kate and Sebastian holding hands under the desks or Ceria's hot pepper candy.

I thought I could help that gossip along a little by passing a few more anonymous notes, but didn't because I'm afraid Ms. Miranda will catch me.

October 31, 2016

Evelyn Miranda
111 North 27th Avenue
Yakima, WA 98902

RE: Annabelle Miranda

Dear Ms. Miranda,

Please be advised that after expanding my search to outside central Washington, I found that Annabelle worked in a variety of places under the name of Annie Prospero. The last name is the middle name of her husband, D. P. Milan, whom she married in Ellensburg, WA twelve years ago. She seems to have legally changed her name. There is no record of a divorce.

I am still attempting to find her whereabouts, as it seems she moves fairly regularly. However, I am encouraged that it is only a matter of time until we locate her. She has a son named Edgar, and we should be able to find him through school records.

I am attaching the son's birth certificate.

Sincerely,

Detective Swainy

11/5

So, school today was totally strange.

I know. I say that all the time. But seriously, this was beyond strange.

When I got to school, Principal Ferdinand had me come into his office. I had been headed to the library because I had some books to exchange, but he intercepted me and steered me to the small room with the chess awards. He asked me about the upcoming funeral for my mother and asked how I was feeling. I was worried he was going to sick the school counselor on me or something.

He asked me my mother's name and then asked me to repeat it. He pulled up my school records on his computer and then asked if my birthday was correct. I told him it was, but he still seemed like he wanted more information. He asked where I had lived when I was younger and what schools I had attended. He acted like he thought it might all be made up. I guess my numerous lies had caught up with me, and he wanted to clean up his record system, or maybe he just didn't trust me. I get that. Finally he dismissed me to my first period class a few minutes late. Then he jumped up and started to stop me going out the door, like he remembered something, but then he turned around and said to himself, "It will be okay. Let it be," and walked back into his office and quietly shut the door.

When I walked in to Ms. Miranda's classroom a few minutes tardy, she gasped and took my tardy slip like it was going to bite her. She stared at me and then we both went to our desks. She sat down at hers and bit her lip. I sat down at mine and started working on the sentence grammar identification the others were already half way done with. Every time I looked up from my assignment, she was looking at me. I could actually feel her staring at me. Other people noticed too and looked from her to me like there was some weird mystery going on. I suddenly wondered if she and Principal Ferdinand had been discussing with each other my many lies about my parents and fake house, etc. Suddenly I felt ashamed. I had grown to like these people, and they had trusted me. Now they knew how totally capable I am of being absolutely and completely dishonest.

I kept my head down for the rest of my classes. I was really glad I didn't have to do community service today. I didn't want to be alone with the adults who knew the extent of my deceptions even if they couldn't prove them.

After Alonzo and I returned to the Ariel house, I asked if they would excuse me to go to my room because I wasn't feeling well.

Spirit was annoyed to discover we weren't going for an after school walk. He obligingly licked the tears from my face, though, as I curled up in the bed the Ariels were loaning me.

I listened to the far away sound of Alonzo and his mother discussing the events of the day and laughing companionably together.

Antonio could be right. Maybe my foster family would be like a real family to me. But then I thought about how I wasn't a cute little three year old in need of love. I was a deceitful, odd, gangly, prickly, middle school boy with a dog. Nobody was looking to provide a home for me.

I wanted to put off thinking about it, but the uncertainty of my future began pulling on me and threatening me with its overwhelming weight.

Finally I jumped up and determined that I was going to take Spirit for a walk. It might clear my head. I thought I might go to the city library and see Gonzolo and return Count of Monte Cristo. I needed to check in with my yard work friends and see if they needed anything and make an appointment for the weekend. Mom's funeral wasn't until Saturday afternoon. I would keep myself busy and then my worries would just have to try and catch up with me. I thought I could outrun them.

This strategy has worked for a lot of my life. I wasn't ready to give in to self pity yet.

I ran downstairs and told the Ariels that I was planning to go out and told them my list of planned activities. Ms. Ariel pointed out that it was already dinner time and that if I wasn't feeling well, I shouldn't be running around all over town.

I didn't know how to respond to her logic, but my anxious need to be going overcame me, and I told her I would only walk Spirit around the block and be back in time for dinner, that I was feeling a bit better. Alonzo offered to join me, but I pretended like I hadn't heard him as I headed down the hill from their house towards the lake. I wanted to be alone with my frustrated energy.

It wasn't supposed to be a lie. I actually planned to walk down the hill and around the little lake and right back up the hill which is pretty much just a long walk around the block. Spirit hadn't been on that long of a trek yet, but his Shakespeare collar was off and he was feeling pretty good and anxious to be out and about. He resented the leash the Ariels made me use when I took him outside, but I reasoned that I didn't ever again want to feel the terror I had felt when he was hurt. He would just have to adapt to the leash.

When we got to the lake, there was a cold breeze blowing off of the water. I pulled my hood up over my head and pulled the strings tight to protect my face. I was moving fast with Spirit as we came around the back side of the lake. I didn't recognize the man I bumped into until it was too late.

Cal spun me around and pushed me to the ground. Spirit was jumping and biting at him, but Cal took the leash, dragged Spirit into the trees and put the loop over a secure branch, leaving Spirit to pull and strain and bark, while Cal kicked me hard in the ribs.

"Thought you'd never see me again, huh kid?" He sneered at me, "Ever heard of bail? I know it was you who told the cops about the money. Didn't tell them you owed me, did you? Let them think I stole it." He was like a wild animal, snarling. Spirit was twisting around pulling herself out of her collar.

I was on the ground whimpering. My arm was completely numb. He'd pulled something loose when he threw me to the ground. Plus I was pretty sure I now had a broken rib. He jumped on my leg, and the last thing I heard before I passed out was the sound of my ankle snapping.

I woke up in the dark. It seems Cal had dragged me into the bushes. Spirit was gone. The leash and collar were still hanging from the tree branch, but Spirit was nowhere to be seen. I tried sitting up and felt the pain shoot through me. I called out, "Spirit! Come boy!" but there was no response. I attempted to stand and found that my body wouldn't cooperate. I continued to call for Spirit and finally to call for help, and eventually, after what seemed like hours, but was probably minutes, someone came to help me. A couple of evening joggers pushed into the bushes and found me. One had a cell phone and called an ambulance. I was still calling my dog as they put me on the stretcher and carted me to the parking lot.

The Ariels met me there, and to my relief they had Spirit. They had been driving around looking for me. It had frightened them when they found Spirit alone outside their house barking, clearly agitated and wanting them to do something. He hadn't wanted to get in the car with them and whimpered pitifully as they drove to all the places I had mentioned earlier. They had called everyone they could think of, including the police and hospitals, so when the ambulance call came in, the paramedic had thoughtfully contacted Dr. Ariel that the boy they were assisting might be her missing friend. The paramedic let Spirit lick my face before they closed me into the ambulance and sped away to the hospital.

Dr. Ariel took Alonzo and Spirit to their house and left them there before coming to the hospital. She had some phone calls she needed to make since she had sent so many others in search of me. Spirit was too upset to be left alone, but wouldn't be able to go in the hospital, so Alonzo volunteered to keep him company.

I wasn't alone for long at the hospital. Police officers arrived almost immediately while the ER docs were checking my injuries. They took my statement and hurried out to apprehend Cal. I'm guessing he won't make bail this time. I assured them I would testify after he was apprehended and charged with assault.

Miranda and Ferdinand arrived before Dr. Ariel. As soon as she had called them, they rushed to the hospital. They had to wait for the ER exam and the police officers, but I could see them outside the room's glass doors. Ms. Miranda was sobbing. Seriously. Ferdinand was patting her on the back and attempting to wipe away her tears, but she was a train wreck. She kept insisting that she ought to be allowed in the room, but the ER attendants said that only family members could enter, so I was surprised when they finally let her in.

The docs had immobilized my injured leg, ankle, and my arm and were icing my torso where they had decided my rib was probably fractured. They wanted to get me in for X-rays as soon as possible, and I was having a bit of trouble breathing normally because it was painful.

Ms. Miranda rushed over and started touching my head, all the while crying, "My poor boy!" I was relieved when Dr. Ariel arrived and entered the room. She seemed startled as I was by Miranda's unusual behavior, but was quickly alerted that they were ready to move me to the X ray department.

As they pulled the gurney out of the room, Miranda cried out, "Let me go with him. I'm his aunt. He needs me."

I thought to myself. That's pretty sneaky of her to try and pull that just so she can follow me, but she really doesn't need to come. I thought it was kind of funny that a teacher could lie like that and was looking forward to telling Alonzo about it, when I caught a glimpse of her face. She was serious.

She and Dr. Ariel were in an animated conversation as I was delivered to the painful process of discovering my three broken bones (ankle, arm, rib.) While the technicians forced me into uncomfortable contortions so they could get the scans they wanted, I thought about what Miranda had said. Then I remembered that moment in the classroom when I saw the resemblance. Ms. Miranda looked like an older version of my mother back before the drugs and the gauntness took her. Wow.

11/7 Apparently there was no internal bleeding like they were concerned about, so I only had to stay in the hospital one night. It was strange being alone in that sterile room, feeling woozy from the medication, listening to monitors and wondering how I could ever fall sleep, but then abruptly awakening to nurses and other hospital staff coming in to check on this or that.

They released me from the hospital with one cast on my left ankle and foot and another on my right arm, but I couldn't use crutches because of my broken rib, so they stuck me in a wheel chair.

I came home to the Ariel's house, but I know it won't be long until I will go to live with Mr. and Mrs. Ferdinand.

It's still amazing to me that my mom had a little sister I never knew about. Aunt Miranda (really!) said that her sister Annabelle, Annie, my mother, left home when she was young, and ran away with a boy whose middle name was Prospero. She started going by Annie Prospero after I was born.

Miranda doesn't understand why Annabelle didn't return, didn't even tell her family about me. I can't be certain, but I wonder if it isn't because she felt embarrassed or confused about being a pregnant teenager or whatever else might have caused her run away, or if maybe it was that she was afraid they might take me away from her if they knew about her drug use. I guess there will always be questions about why she did the things she did.

I had hoped someday to have a grandparent, but it turns out they are all gone.

I never really thought about having a father, oddly enough. Mom always said we didn't need one, that a father would only cause us grief. After meeting a few of her boyfriends, I figured that was probably true. But it turns out I do have one of those. My father is gone, no one knows where. He's an alcoholic who became homeless years ago. For all I know, I met him down by the river.

Ms. Miranda is my aunt. She likes me a lot. She wants me to be a part of her family. I'm not sure my principal is as thrilled as she is to be acquiring a kid all of a sudden, but he's taking it in stride. Both of them love Spirit, so I have no need to worry about losing him.

The Ariels actually seem sorry to be losing me. They reassured me over and over that I'm welcome here anytime. And to tell the truth, I feel much more comfortable with the idea of staying with Alonzo and his mother.

The police called to tell us that Cal has been picked up and will be charged with assault. They believe he will be going away for a long time.

Mom's funeral is tomorrow. It's too bad that she didn't live to be reunited with her sister, but I'm going with the hope that she truly is in a better place now. The doctors said I will be able to go. I want to be able to say my goodbyes even though I know it will be hard. She will be buried in a cemetery near the high school. Some of my school mates are coming to the funeral and burial.

I don't think that my aunt is going to replace my mother. I feel like I'm always going to have an ache inside.

The time I spent on my own was challenging, but it taught me a few things. I learned that I want other people in my life. I don't want to be isolated from the rest of the world. Sure, sometimes other people are jerks, sometimes they are just complicated, but sometimes, and I think this time, people can be just what they seem, caring, loyal and reliable.

I'm curled up awkwardly in my bed with Spirit at my side.

I feel like it's kind of a happy ending (or beginning) for me.

Although, I don't know how going to live with your principal and English teacher could be considered a happy ending. Spirit likes them, so it might be okay.

I guess it's true what they say, "we are such stuff as dreams are made on..." [W. Shakespeare The Tempest A.4 S.1]