



GFWC

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**GENERAL FEDERATION
OF WOMEN'S CLUBS**

2023 GFWC Writing Contest Winners

POETRY & SHORT STORY

Clubwomen Poetry Contest Winners

First Place

Carol Soliday, GFWC California

GFWC Woman's Improvement Club of Corona

Woman Rising

The sun, it rises
From behind crystal mountains
Beyond golden horizon
She lifts sleepy head from the clouded comfort of softened pillow
Should she rise...or should she linger this day away
Enveloped in secure linen shroud
Once again as in days before
God calls her beloved name
From within her warm, woven shelter
Branch lit birds sing loud and lively, melodic refrain
Time to arise in sweet gratitude
Each breathe she takes, a gift received
Enamored in strength and shield
She goes forth taking justice to scale
She carries on with each thought-out plan
Gaining each step of sacred ground, she treads
Sharing her soul's flame to lighten the way
She nourishes, lifts up fellow life's travelers
One hand, one heart at a time
With kindness and love to spare
To make a difference in this life and beyond
Fame and Power are not her measure
But her name will long be remembered
By the hearts of whom she reached and lives she helped to change
The legacy a woman rising leaves and lives on

Honorable Mention

Bridget J. Leiskau Dickler, GFWC Wisconsin

Dodgeville Federated Woman's Club

Words

I caught you words
You thought you could pass by me
Unnoticed
But I,
Have captured you
On paper
So all who read
May manipulate you.

Youth Poetry Contest Winners

First Place, Category 1 – (K, 1st, 2nd grade)

Darren Y., GFWC Wisconsin

GFWC Rhinelander Woman's Club

Foodie

I love eating and tasting
The juicy filet mignon
The slimy oysters
The gooey sea bass

I love eating and tasting
The soft donut
The cold ice cream
The chewy chicken

I love eating and tasting
The mouth-watering starfruit
The crunchy cereal
The savory strawberry pancake

I love eating and tasting
The stinky blue cheese
The sticky honey bars
The bitter green olives

I love eating and tasting

First Place, Category – (3rd, 4th, 5th grade)

Siobhan Y., GFWC New York

Syracuse Federation Formers

A Whimsical Journey on a Flying Carpet

Above the clouds, so high and free,
My magic carpet carries me.
With golden tassels, a majestic sight,
A bald eagle joins me in flight.

Glossy ravens glide, a silent band,
Their shadows sweep the whispering sand.
Ancient ruins echo tales abound,
Beneath the pyramids with tops that are round.

Whisked away with a gust of wind's art.
I danced with eagles, and with doves I dart.
Dragons roar with stories to unveil,
By moonlit lakes where nightingales wail.

A colossal monster stirs the earth's line,
As boulders rumble down the alpine.
A phoenix braves the fiery sky,
Blazing trails where legends lie.

From the boundless blue, waterfalls cascade,
A pelican's greeting is cheerfully displayed.
Oceans vast with memories swell.
Where dolphins dance and tales excel.

In a topsy-turvy land, where rues bend,
Up is down and left is right.
Night's sun glows the day's moon also beams,
Where smiles replace every frown and hopes dream.

The carpet's glow begins to wane.
As I descend to my domain.
A soft bed awaits, the journey ceases,
In my heart, whimsy never decreases.

First Place, Category 3 – (6th, 7th, 8th grade)

Bailey W., GFWC New York

GFWC Tri-Cities Women's Club

Perfection

Whatever happened to the smart girl?
The girl you turned to when you didn't know the answer?
The girl who always raised her hand?
The girl who always had the correct answers?
The girl who always finished first?
The girl who always got 100s?
That turned into high 80s and low 90s,

Who never finishes early,
Who struggles to get questions right,
Who stays quiet in the back,
Who asks everyone else for help.
She got congratulated over and over until that became the norm for her.
It stayed the same until she stopped trying.
Stopped paying attention,
stopped studying until grades got lower
and lower
And lower.
So whatever happened to that young intelligent girl?
She got buried by expectations, paper, and books until that girl got strangled by
Perfection.

First Place, Category 4 – (9th, 10th, 11th 12th grade)

Dia W., GFWC Tennessee

Stone River Woman's Club

What You Can't Get Back

Certain things that are lost can't be found
Lost time
Lost days and lost vision
Lost vision is an everlasting darkness
It's a deep void of darkness that consumes me
It's something that's your greatest Enemy and your best weapon
The loss of vision that traps me and makes me feel so vulnerable
Like a mouse stuck in a maze
No matter which way you turn, you are still trapped
The loss of vision marks me, for life
The constant awareness that the world can see me
But I cannot see the world
It's something I had but was taken away
So my vision is lost and cannot be found
And that is okay'
My blindness is a part of me
And has made me who I am

Clubwoman Short Story

First Place

Marsha J. Fisher, GFWC Iowa

GFWC Adel Women's Club

Robert Story: Ch. 1

Foreshadowing is supposed to be an author's technique, but I think God invented it. The thought may cross your mind like a shadow of a need or possible event and later, around the corner of life, it appears again fully formed and roaring at you like an out-of-control locomotive. People call it coincidence, or the "fickle-finger of Fate", but I call it God's gentle sense of grace, warning us to be aware and also, His sense of Humor.

I remember the Sunday morning that we came into our church, St. Joseph's in Waterloo, with our two little girls in tow and as I genuflected before the crucifix, I looked up longingly and prayed for more substance for my faith, more depth, more Belief, with a capital "B". I had been raised in a strict Lutheran home, i.e., you went to church every Sunday unless you were "sick in bed" and I had attended Sunday School and confirmation classes as I grew up. I believed in God, but not in His honest connection to my own life. I became Catholic as a freshman at the University of Washington; I was dating a young, Catholic serviceman, but I was more impressed with the strong faith of my roommate, who in the midst of the Questioning Sixties, attended daily mass. I was interested in the connection she felt to God and her expression of it through her seeking Him out on a daily basis. I became Catholic that year and later married that "young Catholic", my husband, Mike.

We had moved back to Mike's hometown of Waterloo, Iowa. He had resumed his job at John Deere and I had completed my teacher training at the University of Northern Iowa. After having two beautiful little girls, Jane and Katie, our life had settled into a pretty complacent routine. Routine, as they say, can breed boredom and questioning of the status quo. As I gazed up at the old-fashioned, Renaissance-style crucifix, I wondered if this was "all there was" my connection to God and to His meaning for me in this life was as cloudy as a murky mud puddle. I really enjoyed my family, especially mothering the girls, cooking, sewing, and keeping house, but I felt a longing for a closer and more meaningful relationship to God.

Soon after, in the fall of 1977, I found out I was pregnant again and we were all delighted! Mike wanted a son to share in all his "expertise" in golfing, fishing and hunting and the girls really wanted to have a real baby to play with and I just loved being a mother and couldn't wait to welcome another child into the family. I secretly hoped for a boy too, since I was raised with all girls and my twin brother died soon after birth. I was looking forward to the "Boy Experience".

It was the era of "naturalizing the birth experience"...isn't that an oxymoron? Recent medical research was prolific and "profound". Breast feeding was found to be a healthier alternative to bottles, cigarettes and alcohol were found to be detrimental to the baby in utero, and "natural birth" was being touted as the way to bring your baby into the world. I was adamant about following the healthy guidelines that were recommended and I was considering a natural birth. Since I'd already had two

births, it was either very brave or very foolhardy of me. Actually, I had not had natural deliveries for the two girls. Both of them were induced labors, which were fast and furious due to the drug, Pitocin, that immediately threw my body into convulsive labor pains approximately 3-4 minutes apart at the onset. Their labors were only three and four hours before delivery. Consequently, idea of a blissful "natural birth" floated in my mind as an angelic alternative. I guess I vote for "foolhardy".

For the first time, my water broke to begin the birth process at home. I was getting out of the bathtub early in the morning, after having pains all night, and I felt that unique flood of water down my legs. We rushed to the hospital and then, waited. The doctor had been in delivery all night and had just gone home for a quick rest. The nurses weren't alarmed, after all, I was an old-hand at this, with two deliveries under my belt. Speaking of belts, they attached an external monitor (it was 1978) and waited. I did ask for the doctor repeatedly, but no doctor came until three hours later. Finally, after the nurses' shift change, an experienced nurse in delivery came in and screamed, "Get her to delivery!" and "Don't push!" to me, as apparently the baby's head had crowned and was fully visible. The "Don't push" was repeated and repeated, until finally the baby came to catch the baby... literally.

It was a boy! A beautiful, chubby-cheeked, 8 pound, 4 ounce boy with fluffy, blond chick-down for hair. Holding him in my arms that bright April morning, while looking out at the white cloud-filled sky, I prayed thankfully to the gracious God that had given us the son to complete our family. It was a moment that you read about, when your heart physically feels ready to burst with the joy that has filled it, A few moments later, as I was gazing down with rapture at Robert Willard, I saw his little body shiver.

Then, I felt the quiver throughout his body and in my mind, God again provided His holy "foreshadowing" as I thought to myself, "Something is wrong". I tried to stuff that thought down and simply said to the nurse. "I saw him shiver and felt it, could you check and see if he's o.k, or if he's cold." The next time I saw Robby, he had a small tube coming out his nose that was taped to the side of his cheek. He was on a half dose of Phenobarbital to prevent seizures. Gratefully, Robby never suffered from another seizure, but the shadow of dread in the back of my mind cast a pall of concern over the original jubilant joy I had felt. He was only on the medication for a day or so and the G. P that we had at the time, Dr. Jauch, didn't seem too concerned, since he said he'd had a "difficult delivery"- Again, my concern resurfaced when the breast feeding process was so difficult for Robby that the hospital called in a "La Leche League" nurse. Since I had nursed both of the girls, I'd had some experience, but tried all her suggestions. Nothing seemed to get Rob to latch on and suck. I went home with the idea that I'd keep trying, but had little success. The "foreshadow" danced around in the back of my mind.

The next few weeks and then months flew by, with our family adjusting to the cries of the new little one in the house and my trying to accommodate the schedule of a husband, a first-grader, a preschooler and new baby. I knew that there were some very different behaviors that I was noticing with Robby. He screamed and arched his back when I tried to put him on his tummy, as the girls had always napped. His head always seemed to tilt to the right side and he didn't seem to be as attentive to little movements around him as the girls were. I had asked the family doctor at his two month check-up about his head tilt and he said that he had probably stretched a muscle in his neck during the delivery and not to worry. His lack of muscle tone started to bother me. He couldn't push up with his forearms or hold his head up even a little bit. Finally, it was almost time for his four month check-up, and I had decided that if Dr. Jauch didn't recommend seeing a pediatrician, I was going to ask for a referral. The shadow was

starting to become a menacing figure that was haunting my daily thoughts.

The day had arrived and when I went into the doctor's examination room, I had rehearsed my reasons and readied my request for a second opinion. Dr. Jauch came in and in a few minutes explained that he had requested a neurological pediatrician to come for the appointment also to check Robby over. Dr. LePoidivin gave a brief, but thorough examination and promptly diagnosed Robbie as neuromuscular issues and referred us to the Early Development Intervention Department of our local hospital.

I raced home with the baby, and after putting him down for a nap, went down to the basement to find my educational textbooks. I found "Education of the Exceptional Child" and thumbing through the index, found the phrase I was looking for "neuromuscular issues" and flipped to the pages that described having quadriplegic cerebral palsy. This is another example of God giving me "heads up". When the physical therapist came to call at her first home visit, she was surprised to hear me voice the words she had been dreading to tell me.

Fast forward almost 46 years and Robert has become an interesting adult, with a motorized wheelchair, a part-time job at the local Hy-Vee grocery, a fanatical Alabama Tide fan, and an advocate for people with disabilities to be reckoned with. He has been on television multiple times, been written about in local and national news for his effective lobbying to make buildings accessible to people in wheelchairs. God does have a plan. It may be a journey that we cannot imagine, through some tough hills and low valleys, but with the hope ahead of us to be closer to the person we are being guided to become.

Pray for the faith, pray for the strength, pray for the harmony, but always remember the love. This is the beginning of a never-ending story of grace given to our son, Rob, to our family of four children and to my husband, Mike and myself.

Honorable Mention

Pat Huffman, GFWC California

GFWC Federated East Valley Woman's Club

Magical Moss

There was a section of the backyard of my grandmother's home that was just magical. Tall sturdy walnut trees shaded the ground in front on an old chicken coop turned storage shed. The ancient timbers of the shed were muted shades of gray weathered by years of rain and sun filtered through the thick canopy of leaves of those mature sentinels. A respite in summer, it was somewhat mystical, quiet but with a serenade of birdsong from the highest stems. Squirrels could also be heard harvesting walnuts as they ran up the trunks and along the branches. The ground was covered by layers of mulch from decades of "leaf fall" allowed to lie where they landed. The mulch nourished the soil and many wild things grew. Spots of shade that never saw sun were damp and covered with a variety of mosses the tendrils of which stretched and curled reaching toward air and light. Their small hair-like stems were so soft to the touch. Sponge-like but delicate their one-celled leaves so uniquely designed to absorb water many times their own weight. I have always loved mosses. Their simple organisms captured my imagination and I half expected to see tiny fairies peeking out of the green mysterious mounds.

A haphazard path of stepping stones created a walkway to the door of the shed. Bordering the path in a random column camellia bushes displayed their floral beauty and a variety of wildflowers and flowering weeds grew in an arbitrary manner. It was always such fun to go out to the shed as there were many decades of discarded items stored there. The old door was kept closed by a rusted spring that gave an eerie "screeek" when opened. As you entered the shed dust motes drifted lazily in the filtered sunlight. An old trunk here, a rusty can there filled with gadgets, misshapen piles of treasures of the past hidden under musty, ancient tarps. An exploration of the multi-roomed structure always resulted in riches of family history; old toys or books, letters, a college magazine, and unfinished quilt, just to name a few. Arms piled high with the "trove" of the day you retreated back over the well worn floorboards to the entry, pushed your way out of the door, past the spring with the "screeek"; once again encountering the garden, the path and the moss. Stooping to brush my fingertips one last time over the tendrils and peeking once more just in case a fairy appeared I said a quick goodbye for now until the next time.

When my widowed grandmother moved some years later my husband and I made a last visit to the shed to collect some final items. It has been many years since that time and the garden and the shed long gone. I have often mused how so much of history is only surface deep and demolition down to the topsoil erases that history. But the garden and the shed have not been erased from my memory and whenever I see moss a bit of the magic is kindled once again.

Youth Short Story Contest Winners

First Place, Category 1 – (K, 1st, 2nd grade)

Penny C., GFW New York

Woman's Cub of Peekskill and Cortlandt

The Big Project and the Big Problems

Belle woke up early. She could hear her mom calling her. Belle sighed. She was the oldest of six kids. There was Vanessa, who was four, and Hannah, who was three. Then there was Addie, who was six; Lily, who was five; and Nicky who was seven. Anyway, Belle could hear Hannah chanting "Breakfast! Breakfast!" Belle sighed again. Sometimes it was hard being the oldest of six.

She hurried downstairs. Belle said hello to her mom and dad and picked up six plates of eggs and bacon. She put down five plates; one for each kid. Then she served herself and began to wolf down her food. Just three minutes later, she cleared her plate and put it on the counter. As she looked at the clock, Belle's eyes nearly popped out. "Oops!" She cried out. "I'd better head out if I want to make it to class in time!"

Belle grabbed her bag, which was shaped like a unicorn with glitter sprinkled all over it. She waved goodbye to her family as she raced out the door. Belle ran on the sidewalk and across the street to the open doors of the school. She ran inside and down the hall, passing other girls and boys. Belle flung open her classroom door just as the bell rang.

"Why, hello, Belle, no need to rush," said her teacher Miss Layla. Belle panted and slowly unpacked her bag. Belle worked her way through reading and writing completing tasks until it was time for her favorite subject: art.

Today Miss Layla said, "Children, please sketch out your idea for your art show painting." Stephanie raised her hand. "Do we have to sketch our ideas," she asked, "or can we read instead?" "Unless you don't want your painting to be in the art show?!" Aaron cried out. Miss Layla glared at him, then said, "Yes. That was my answer." Aaron sank down in his seat while Stephanie began to draw. So did the rest of the class.

During Art, Miss Layla checked her emails. She started to read one from the principal. It said to go to the assembly room. So Miss Layla lined up her class and took them to the assembly room. It was very loud and crowded in the assembly room. Belle put her arm around her best friend Gracie and they sat down together.

Everyone was chatting. So, to get their attention, Principal yelled, "Hello, my fellow students!" Everyone stopped talking all at once. "I know you've been busy with classes, but I had to interrupt to inform you of this!" He paused to catch his breath. "This year we will have a poster contest!!" "Anyone wanting to sign up, come here after school." Belle clutched Gracie and said, "I'm going to enter." "Oh, you'll win." Gracie said. Belle grinned. Belle used a school phone to

tell her mom she would be walking home due to signing up. Belle lined up with the other kids to sign up. She scribbled her name in cursive and trotted quickly out of the room. Soon Belle arrived at her home.

As soon as she put down her bag, Lily ran up to her. "Please can you read to me?" Lily was desperate. So Belle read to her until dinner. Again she served everyone. But when she took a bite of pasta, Belle started to talk about the contest.

Everyone listened. Mom nodded her head politely, and dad tapped his chin. When Belle was done sharing, Mom burst out, "Oh, honey! This is a great idea!" "I'm glad you signed up!" Dad added. Belle said, "And I am going to use every minute of tomorrow working on it!" she stood up and left the kitchen.

Belle changed and went to bed super early that night. She had a big deal ahead of her. The next morning, Belle was the first up and about. She was even way ahead of the time everyone had to be up. It was 5:01!

Belle rubbed the sleepiness out of her eyes and grabbed a big blank poster and opened her door, trying not to wake Addie, who slept with her and was still sleeping. Belle was closing the door when she heard a clatter. Oh no! Was someone up before her? They might have her do chores! Ohhhh no. It was Mom.

"Oh, good morning, sweetie," she said. "here to do your chores early? Good girl!" "Oh, no, Mom, I-" "Great! Here's your list!" Mom kissed Belle and left.

Belle sadly set down her paper and swept the floor, dusted the counter, opened the shades, fed the cat, and put out plates at each spot so Mom could place food on them.

Soon it was time for breakfast and everyone was sitting and chewing. "So, how have you been doing on your poster?" Dad asked. "Not good." Belle replied sadly. "I haven't started." "Oh, too bad," said Nicky, who didn't notice this was a big deal. "Yes, too bad." Lily echoed. "Mmhm." Belle agreed. She took her paper and marched upstairs.

Belle put up a sign that said KEEP OUT on her bedroom door. Two minutes later, Addie and Nicky came into the room. "Ugh!" Belle yelled. "What are you doing here?! Didn't you see my sign?!" "We're here to buddy read." Addie said. "And it's her room too." Nicky added. "Okaaaay." Belle said reluctantly. But then Vanessa started clashing cymbals together. And Lily started throwing a fit. And Hannah started rapping on Belle's door.

Finally Belle thrust open her door, flinging Hannah aside. "FAMILY MEETING!" Belle roared. Everyone rushed to the living room.

"Listen," she began, "I can't draw my poster when Mom gives me chores and Addie and Nicky buddy read loudly in my room and Vanessa clashes cymbals and Lily throws a fit and Hannah starts rapping on my door. I need my space!" "It's my room too!" Addie said loudly and innocently. "Now honey, please let me and your sister talk." Mom told her strictly. Then she turned to Belle. "Oh, honey, I see," she began. "But I've never thought of it that way." Mom added. Then she gathered her kids. Then- "I'M SORRY!" "Thank you!" Belle yelled back.

The next day Belle rolled up her poster and went to the contest assembly with her mom and dad. A babysitter was watching over her sisters and her brother.

On the car ride, Dad leaned over in his seat and said, "I'm proud of you, kiddo." Belle smiled. At the assembly Belle gave her poster to Principal and took her seat.

"I see that all posters are wonderful," he began. "But the winner is...Belle BI!" Belle beamed as she took her trophy. "Thank you." Belle whispered. Winning was truly pure glory.

The End.

First Place, Category – (3rd, 4th, 5th grade)

Rachel S., GFWC New Jersey

Woman's Club of Upper Saddle River

Matzoh Ball Soup

As I followed my nose into Grandma's kitchen on the first night of Passover, I realized that the wonderful aroma coming from it was the delightful smell of homemade matzoh ball soup. When I stepped into the kitchen, I saw my Grandma standing near the stove, cutting carrots and celery.

At that time, my mom walked in and asked if she could help make the matzoh balls when it was time. "Can I help, too" I chimed in. "Of course you can, Rachel," Granma responded.

As I left the kitchen, I began to jump up and down! I had always loved making matzoh balls with my family. When it was finally time to make the matzoh balls, I could barely contain myself from screaming. After I washed my hands and made sure they were dry, I stuck my fingers into the gooey mixture. It felt like sticky slime. But I knew it was going to be delicious after it was cooked.

We made little balls of the wet, cement-like mush and plopped them into a pot full of boiling hot soup. When the last matzoh ball was finished, the three of us went to the bathroom and washed our hands. We waited as patiently as we could for the matzoh balls to cook. The anticipation was killing me! I could hardly wait for it to be ready.

Soon, the delicious smell of matzoh ball soup began to waft through the house, making my mouth water. I could not wait to have just one little taste and to feel the warm liquid slide down my throat and into my belly.

Finally, Grandma called us in for dinner. We took our places around the old dining room table and waited for the soup to be placed in front of us. The walls of the room were covered with family pictures. I liked being surrounded by all the lovely memories of past holidays.

On this holiday, which was Passover, I sat between my mom and Grandma. Soon, my mom placed the steaming, hot bowl of soup in front of me. It was swimming with bits of vegetables – my favorite – and the matzoh balls looked fluffy and soft. The steam curled into the air around me and made my nose wet.

As I lifted my spoon to take the first bite, I paused and thought about all the generations who had come before me, and how they had eaten the same soup as I was about to eat. And I opened my mouth for the first bite, I thought about how I would do the same with my children and grandchildren one day.

Finally, I took a bite.

The soup tasted of memory, future, and love.

First Place, Category 3 – (6th, 7th, 8th grade)

Evalynn N., GFWC Wisconsin

GFWC Woman's Club of Pewaukee

Bound for Barbados

PART I

Burt Flat was in a big hurry. Everything seemed to be going wrong. First, his alarm clock didn't go off, then his toaster broke so he couldn't have his regular, quick, and easy, warm peanut butter and butter sandwich. All he wanted to do was get to the airport and not miss his flight to Barbados. "I am so late!" he exclaimed as he started his car. He peeled out of his driveway, upsetting some garbage cans, and raced toward the airport.

When he arrived at the airport there was a long line of people at baggage check-in, and he stood there for 45 minutes waiting in line. After he finally got his bag checked, he ran to the security checkpoint, but it wasn't any better there. He got sent back to the ticketing counter twice; once for a misspelling on his ticket, the other for one of his carry-ons being too big. He was quite out of breath by the time he got through there, but he had no time to waste; he needed to find his gate!

"Gate number 15 now boarding," blared over the speaker in the airport. *That's me!* Thought Burt as his eyes scanned the gate numbers. *There! Gate 15!* He ran to it, noticing that there was no one else in line. "Am I too late?" Burt asked the ticket agent as she took his ticket. "No, you just made it," she answered as she opened the door and Burt tore through the gateway.

The flight attendants were just closing the plane door when Burt cried out, "Wait for me!" The attendants looked at each other uneasily. "You are on this flight?" asked one with a French accent. "Yes, I'm Burt Flat," gasped Burt, quite out of breath.

"Well, Mr. Flat, you see, this is a full flight and we do not have any more seating options available," said the French flight attendant.

Burt groaned, "But I *NEED* to get to Barbados!"

"Well, if you are up to it, I suppose you could take up an overhead bin," said the attendant looking rather uncomfortable.

"I'll take anything!" cried a desperate Burt.

Finally, they let him on the plane, and he and his bag took up residence in an overhead storage bin. *What a nightmare!* Thought a half-relieved, half-angry Burt as he drifted off to sleep and dreamed of sunny Barbados, its warm sandy beaches, and how he was going to spend his vacation.

PART II

When Burt woke up, he realized that he desperately needed to use the facilities. He quietly climbed down out of the storage bin and walked toward the restroom. There was a line formed already and he was the third person from the front. The lady in front of him turned around and started talking to him, "Hi, I'm Sarah Chaplan. I don't believe I have seen you before."

Now I would like to take some time to divulge some important information before we go on. Burt had been asleep for a long time. He had slept right through the plane's arrival in Barbados, the departure of all the passengers and crew (the flight

attendants had forgotten about him entirely), and the arrival of new passengers, who were none other than U.S. Senators and their assistants. The plane had already taken off and was in-route to Burbank, and poor Burt was totally unaware.

“Hi Sarah, I’m Burt Flat. You probably haven’t seen me because I am in the upper cabinet,” replied Burt nonchalantly, wishing this line would hurry along. Sarah was impressed. She thought Burt meant he was a member of the official Cabinet and one of the President’s closest advisors. Trying to think of something to say to this VIP she asked, “So, what are your thoughts on this crisis?”

Now, Sarah was referring to the famine in Hawaii, the crisis the senators were trying to resolve. Unfortunately, Burt thought she was referring to the overbooked airlines, so he replied, “Oh, it’s just dreadful! All I’ve been thinking about are the islands and the food. This whole situation right now is completely unacceptable ...” As Burt went on, Sarah was enthralled. His passion for their work was inspiring. She believed that at times he was speaking in metaphors, when in fact, he was just talking about his vacation. Burt continued, “... If I was in charge, I would make sure this was resolved right away!” By then it was Sarah’s turn to use the bathroom, so she said, “It was a pleasure talking to you, Mr. Flat. You certainly have some insightful ideas!”

After Burt used the restroom, he crept back up into his overhead bin and soon forgot their conversation. Meanwhile, Sarah Chaplan pondered Mr. Flat’s words for the rest of the flight. She began telling others about his ideas and soon the plane was buzzing with excitement right until they landed in Burbank.

PART III

This time, Burt was awake when the plane landed. As he stepped off the plane, the pilot said, “Welcome to Burbank, I hope you enjoyed the flight.” Burt froze in his tracks. “What did you just say?” bemoaned Burt, looking pale, “D-d-did you just say Burbank?!?”

“Yes,” the pilot answered looking confused.

“But this flight was going to Barbados!” Burt blurted out.

Now the pilot looked totally baffled, “Sir, you must have been dreaming. Yes, this plane went to Barbados, where you came on board to travel to Burbank, where we are now.”

Suddenly, Burt realized what had happened. He raced through the airport, but all the ticket counters were closed. Big signs saying ‘Airline Strike’ were posted everywhere. He had to think fast. Why wasn’t his travel agent answering his phone?!? Burt decided to find a bus. He was in luck, they had a bus that would take him to Boston, where he could board a boat to Barbados and possibly salvage some of his vacation.

While waiting for a bus, a reporter a reporter came up to him and asked, “May I interview you for the nightly news?” To which Burt replied, “Sure.”

“What are your thoughts on this horrible crisis everyone is talking about?” the reporter inquired.

Now Burt was under the impression that the question referred to the airline strike, so he replied, “When you think about these tropical locations, we tend to just think about the sand beneath our feet and the warm sun up above, but we don’t really think about what it takes to get there. If nothing is coming in or out and helpless people are left stranded with no hope for what they need, something must change.”

“What do you think that change should be, Mr. ...I’m sorry I forgot to get your name.”

“My name’s Burt Flat. I have some ideas, so I am getting on a bus to Boston to go put them into action.”

“Do you mean to tell me that you, Burt Flat, think that you can solve this problem?”

“I’m telling you that I will not stop until I do!”

The reporter was impressed. “Wow, Mr. Flat, you sound like you could run for President.”

“I’m definitely running!” Burt shouted as he ran off to catch his bus.

PART IV

Finally, Burt boarded his bus and didn’t give another thought to the reporter or the interview. His head filled again with dreams of warm, sunny Barbados, and the relaxation he desperately needed.

Now, as Burt was riding cross-country, his interview was being viewed by millions of people, including Sarah Chaplan. “Hey that’s Burt Flat! He was on our plane and shared many interesting and insightful ideas. I agree with the reporter, he would make a great president,” she shared with anyone who was listening. Thus began a grassroots campaign for Burt Flat. In no time at all, Burt’s face was everywhere. ‘*Vote for Burt*’ became a popular phrase along with ‘*My Burt is Flat out the best.*’

The bus had many stops, so it took a week to get to Boston, which is how a ‘Burt for President’ campaign had time to spread like wildfire through television and the internet. Whenever Burt’s bus stopped, he was swamped by people who asked for a photo and his autograph. Burt just thought people were friendly and he didn’t understand why they were making such a fuss about a little news interview. He was too busy worrying about his trip to Barbados to notice much else.

PART V

When the bus finally arrived in Boston, Burt was greeted by hundreds of people who were screaming what sounded like his name. If he hadn’t been in such a hurry, he might have noticed the signs, the pins, and the t-shirts saying ‘Vote for Burt’ on them. He also might have noticed that he was walking on a red carpet while being escorted by policemen, and that the vehicle which he got into that was taking him to the docks was a limo. The most important thing that he could have noticed was that it was ELECTION DAY! You know, the presidential election that HE was a candidate in! But he didn’t know that. The only thoughts going through Burt’s mind were ‘*I just HAVE to get to Barbados!*’

When he arrived at the docks, he had even more bad news waiting for him. “I’m sorry sir,” said the nasally ticket clerk, “but your boat has been delayed.”

“What?!?” exclaimed Burt, “Delayed for how long?”

“Um, it looks like two days.”

Burt groaned.

“We can offer you a hotel room,” said the clerk, trying to be helpful.

“Thank you,” said Burt weakly as he took the key from the clerk. He walked up to his room and tried to put his mind at ease. Meanwhile, across the country, millions of people were casting their votes for president and Burt Flat’s name was on the tip of every voter’s tongue. By the end of the day, he had received more than ¾ths of the electoral votes and was the clear winner, but he didn’t know that.

In the morning, after it was announced, there was a knock on the door of Burt’s hotel room. When he opened the door, he did not expect to see Secret Service agents,

and certainly did not expect them to say, “Your limousine is waiting for you, Mr. President.” Before he had time to object, he was ushered into the limo and on his way to the White House. When he arrived, he tried to tell anyone who would listen that there was some mistake, he was not the president, but they all thought he was joking. He kept trying to object until he saw an airplane hangar. “Is that mine?” he asked. “Yes, sir,” replied one of the agents.

Burt suddenly had a brilliant idea. When he was ushered into the Oval Office he was asked, “What is your first order of business as president, Mr. Flat?” To which Burt eagerly replied, “I’d like to take one of those presidential planes and go directly to Barbados!”

After being brought to Burbank, boarding a bus to Boston, being barred from his boat, and becoming president. Burt was *FINALLY* bound for Barbados!

The End (or possibly the beginning)

First Place, Category 4 – (9th, 10th, 11th 12th grade)

Tin Z., GFWC New York

Southern Saratoga County Woman's Club

The Moon Represents My Heart

I slowly move my chopsticks to the meat filling on the table in front of me, trying to mimic the graceful movements of NaiNai, my grandmother. Her hands would float through the air, as delicate and poised as a celestial fairy's. NaiNai never made unnecessary gestures with her hands, always saying; "One's face may be deceiving, but one's hands always show one's true character."

Finally, I reach the meat, scoop it, and plunk it onto the dumpling wrapper. The soy sauce the meat was covered in spilled and formed angry splotches on the table; I can hear NaiNai's voice, scolding me for my carelessness as I debate whether to clean it now or wait until later. NaiNai's nagging eventually convinces me to wipe it away. I let out a chuckle while I do so; even when she's gone, she still always has to be right. I begin to pinch the wrapper into shape, and- as I form each fold - I start to look back on my memories of NaiNai and when I first met her...

Everything is so loud in America. The girls who gossip in the comers, hidden and secretive, and the boys who gossip in the doorways, loud, brash, and inconveniencing everyone who wants to go in or out. Often, I wonder how the two groups could be so disgusted with each other when they are so obviously alike. I used to wonder what they would talk about when I first arrived, but that mystery has long since been solved. They talk of me, of the others like me, sports, who is on drugs, and who is going to commit another crime. They speak of who is suspended, politics, the next president, the next big actor, the next world war.

I know there is knowledge tucked away in that deluge of words, knowledge one would never expect to find within a high-schooler's mouth. I think of my mother and her Mahjong parlors, and how she sifts through the rushing currents of useless information to find her hidden gold. I think of how she found our current house, which was far below the general price of real estate on our side of town. An old, run-down building that sits amid the gleaming new grandeur. Sometimes, I think of myself like the house: something that doesn't belong.

I murmur my excuse-mes as I try to push through the crowd of "smart kids" and duck just in time to avoid a stray frisbee, thrown from the gym across from the entryway. Unfortunately, the boy behind me was not so lucky, and I could hear the plastic's solid slap and a sudden hush descend over the gathered crowd. I would later learn the boy was known for his fits of rage.

Panicked, I fled in an awkward half-run, desperately praying the coming eruption of the red-hot lava that colored his face would scorch anyone but me. I had barely stepped foot in school and, already, trouble has begun. Time sure was dragging her feet today.

As I step off the afternoon bus, I turn up the sound on my airpods to block out the laughing taunts coming from behind. Olivia Rodrigo and her homeschooling feel oddly fitting for today. I still catch the tail-end of some whispered jokes about my ratty shoes and threadbare sweater, but the worst is drowned out by her frustrations. It feels like social suicide every time I step outside, too, Olivia.

I take long strides down the cracked driveway that hasn't been repaired in decades leading up to my equally decrepit house. I wait, partly for the bus and its nosy passengers to draw out of sight and partly because I don't want to be confronted with what is inside. I take a deep breath of the chilly winter air, wondering if I could just stay out here. Freezing to death would be better... Waving away the thought, I resignedly reach for the rusty knob and pry my creaky door open. Before I even take a step inside, shouting already drowns out poor Olivia and her singing. Sighing, I take out my airpods and announce, "I'M HOME!"

Only Ba pauses to turn his head towards me briefly before resuming his screaming match with Ma. Again, I only catch snippets of their conversation - only this time it is because of my broken Mandarin. If only I didn't drop out of Chinese school. I was halfway up the stairs to my room when I heard a new voice cut in. "Enough," it calls in strongly northern-accented Mandarin.

Slowly, I backed down the stairs and into the kitchen, where I saw Ma and Ba earlier. There, I found both my parents, as expected, and everything else was as it was when I left. However, there is something new: an old woman with snow-white hair between my parents with an expression cold enough to start the next Ice Age. As soon as I stepped into the room, those glacial eyes settled on me, freezing me in place. To my surprise though, her eyes melted in recognition and she ran towards me. Well, not "ran", exactly. She does a kind of brisk walk; it's the way people who fear falling move when they wish to be quick. She wrapped herself around me, and I knew then that she must be NaiNai. There was something about the warmth of her hug, the warm comfort in it like a fireplace after a day spent in the winter cold; it was the type of hug that only a NaiNai could give. Somehow, I knew my life was about to change...

"ZeZe, watch where you are going!" NaiNai yelled from the kitchen as I tripped on the stairs. I rolled my eyes, both at her apparent super-hearing and her use of my baby name. Instead of commenting on it as I've done before (which led to many arguments about how she is not deaf yet, and that "shouldn't he be happy that his poor NaiNai cares for him so deeply?").

I yelled back, "I'll be down to help you in a second!" I'm still shocked at how good her English was, despite her having been here for only a few months. Whenever I ask her about it, she pretends to be offended and says that I must think she is stupid because "English is such an easy language! Even a dog could learn it! Now, Mandarin is not an easy language, so I suppose you can be forgiven for only speaking English."

The last few months with her have been a blur and everything seems to have gotten better. The once-empty living room has come to life, filled with knick-knacks, pictures, and memories of our old life. "Just as a proper living room should be!" as NaiNai says. Where once the kitchen's quiet was disturbed only by the occasional argument, its sleep is often disturbed by NaiNai's ruthless cooking.

On the day after NaiNai arrived, I arrived home to find the kitchen table covered in trays and trays of dumplings. She was singing along to some folk tune on her phone's speaker as she folded the last few dumplings. My aunt had bought a phone for her and taught her how to use it, and NaiNai had been obsessed ever since. She was always playing one song or another on that phone. My mother and father both wandered in as well. She gestured all of us closer and, as if by some magic spell, we obeyed. She showed us how to fold the dumpling and, as she explained, the song came on. The song we all knew: "The Moon Represents My Heart". As the first few lyrics came on, NaiNai paused

and began to sing. Then, my mom started, hesitantly, and then my dad. Finally, I join in and we all begin to sing at the top of our lungs as we fold. "You ask how deep my love for you is, you ask how much I love; my heart is true, and my love is true; the moon represents my heart..."

...That same song from that long-ago day begins to play on my phone now. I've gotten in the habit of playing my music on speaker instead of in my airpods when I'm cooking. Both Ba and NaiNai would always tell me to take them off while cooking because of how expensive they were and how he couldn't buy another pair if this one fell onto a pan or something. I never wanted airpods anyway, but apparently, Apple products are a sign that we have "made it to the new world" and "since everyone in America has them, wouldn't it be better to blend in?"

I miss even NaiNai's nagging now, and I fear that one day her voice in my head will begin to fade- along with my memories of her. I can no longer remember the exact shade of her eyes or the mixture of herbs whose smell would always cling to her. I worry that if I move on, if I stop feeling this grief, her memory will evaporate with it; like fog when the Sun rises fully. Time sure is dragging her feet on this one too.

When she was newly gone, when her loss was still fresh, even the slightest reminder would send me careening into despair or spiraling into fits of rage. I wonder if it was this type of all-consuming grief that caused my parents to begin fighting. The loss of the old world is something that I'd never experienced before. I had never known of the world outside of America until NaiNai came. She told me stories of gods and goddesses, of dictators and revolutions, and of wars and betrayals. I felt stronger then- bold and fearless, like the archer who slew the 9 Suns, because I was protected by the superpowers of my NaiNai.

When I think back, I move to empty the dumplings into the water, which has just begun to boil. As I swirl them around to prevent them from sticking to the wok, I am struck by the memory of a garden from the time before...

One of the first things that NaiNai did was to plant her garden. She brought seeds from her old garden which she smuggled past customs in her hat. Every morning, she would wake before the sun rose to tend to it. She seemed happiest when she was in her garden, and would often go there just to have a cup of freshly-brewed oolong and watch her plants as they grow.

One spring, while I was helping her trim the newly-opened rhododendron bushes, she asked me if I had anyone I liked. I paused and looked up at her, my cheeks flushing red as I asked, "Why do you ask?"

She replied dismissively, "Your face." I turned even redder, and I got the feeling that she enjoyed my discomfort. She sighed loudly, saying, 'You never come out of your room anymore except when it's time for meals. And your face lately! That is the face of someone in love!"

I eventually confessed that I do have a crush, one on the boy who had just moved in a few weeks before, and she started to cackle. "On the boy who looks like he's never enjoyed anything before? Oh Sunzi, your taste is poor!"

... Now as I gaze out the window to my right, I think about that garden and that boy. He had moved shortly after NaiNai's death, and I was too grief-stricken at the time to care. Now, I have decided that when spring comes, I will start again. I will start fresh. I will start anew.

Bloom. Blossom. "Be bold in life and good things will come." I ladle the finished dumplings onto a platter and bring them to the table as I sing out the last few lyrics, "My love is forever, my love remains unchanged... Our deep love will make me miss you forever."