



**2014
Teen Short Story Contest
WINNERS
COLLECTION**



Featuring:

Grades 6-8

1st place: *Ruby* by Aiyana Leetch

2nd place: *Jenkins High* by Emily Preuss

3rd place: *The Caboose Mystery* by Ruth Kendall

Grades 9-12

1st place: *Irresponsible* by Megan Jacobs

2nd place: *The Clocksmith* by Aaron Drotos

3rd place: *Mask* by Emily Curtis

Partners of the 2014 Lacey Loves to Read Celebration, which include the Lacey Timberland Library, the City of Lacey, and North Thurston Public Schools, have created this work to recognize the authors and to promote the programs and organizations associated with Lacey Loves to Read. All creative works herein have been reproduced with permission by the authors and/or the author’s legal guardian(s). All rights associated with the characters and stories included in this work are retained by the authors for their own use, and may not be reproduced by other entities without their express permission.

Table of Contents

Ruby	3
Jenkins High.....	6
The Caboose Mystery	9
Irresponsible.....	13
The Clocksmith.....	16
Mask.....	18

Ruby

By Aiyana Leetch

1

The first time I saw the planet that would end everything it was little more than a tiny red dot. I remember thinking as I looked through my grandpa's old fashioned but powerful telescope how pretty it twinkled in the night sky. I never would have imagined that what began as a tiny dot would bring about the end of the world.

"Dad, come look at this. I think I've found something."

My dad walked over from where he was kneeling by our small campfire. This campground, in the Big Bear Mountains of Southern California, was an old favorite of our family. We came here several times a year and I loved to look at the stars and planets which I couldn't do at home in the city.

"What's up, Suttin?" he asked. My mom picked that name for me before she died. I know it's an unusual name, but my mom, who was an astronomer that studied the sun, wanted her only daughter to have a creative name.

"Look at this. It's some reddish object... maybe a planet?"

"Hmm. That's odd," Dad said as he looked through the telescope at my discovery. "It figures you would notice that. Red *is* your favorite color."

I smiled at that. "What do you think it is?"

"Well, I don't really know for sure," he said, "this was always your mother's area of expertise." He squinted at the eyepiece. "But I might know someone who could tell us."

My dad walked inside to make the call. I knew who he was calling. Jimmy is an old friend from when we lived on Ft. Irwin, up in the middle of the Mojave Desert on the other side of the mountains from Death Valley. Jimmy is an astronomer at the Goldstone Deep Space Communications Complex out there.

I continued to look at my new friend, this thing that would turn out to be a planet that would change my life. Everyone's life, actually.

2

Four weeks later and we still hadn't heard back from Jimmy yet on any details about what I began to just assume was a planet. It seemed bigger than the first time I saw it, which was a little weird. I named it "Ruby." One day at school I was waiting in line for lunch with my friend Sophia. "Hey Sophia, did you hear about that new planet in the sky?"

The way she looked at me told me all I needed to know. "Suttin, you are so crazy! Sometimes I think your head is on another planet!"

I had been watching the skies for so long now and I began wondering what it meant that Ruby seemed to be getting bigger in my telescope. I was getting pretty obsessed with it as the weeks went by. After getting ready for bed one night, I suddenly wanted to rearrange my entire bedroom so I could hang drawings of Ruby on my walls, and articles I had cut out about asteroids that had hit Earth in the past. My dad started to get worried about me...and seemed anxious about what Ruby's growing presence meant.

Jimmy's call didn't come until three months after I first saw Ruby on that camping trip to Big Bear. My dad put him on speakerphone and the first thing he said was, "We need to talk," in a serious voice. My dad offered to drive him and I up to Goldstone but Jimmy didn't want to meet there. "I'll meet with you but not Suttan at Jackrabbit Park tomorrow at 2pm sharp."

My dad returned from the meeting with Jimmy looking like he was in shock, his eyes all red and his hands were shaking. As he stepped towards me he looked frightened and unsure about what to say. "Um, sweetie...we have to talk about something..." he said in a quiet voice. He didn't sound like himself. I stood still, waiting to hear my worst fears.

"That planet you found, well, that planet is getting bigger and bigger, right?"

"Yes," I replied in almost a whisper.

"Has it occurred to you that it might be heading toward earth?" he asked.

"I didn't want to believe that what I was seeing was possible. I mean, also, there's no news about it. We can't be the only ones who have seen this, right?"

My dad took a deep breath and I could see sweat on his forehead. "Jimmy says there is a huge effort to keep this very quiet for everyone's good. Some news story was thrown out there a couple months ago...I don't know, something about a dying star that was becoming a red giant, which technically would look like it was growing. Whatever." He looked almost angry suddenly as he said, "People don't pay attention to astronomy news anyway, and there's no escape from this, so panicking will only make things worse for everybody."

"So how long do we have?" I asked, worried that it would be a very small number.

"Jimmy says about four months."

I was suddenly speechless. My first thought was that I wouldn't even graduate high school or have children of my own. The last thing I remember about that day was my dad kissing my forehead and carrying me to bed.

My mom's ashes are spread in a circle around our desert campsite located about a hundred miles from nowhere. Jimmy and dad said it would be the best place to be as time grew short. As I look south toward home from our spot in the high desert I see the smoke fires rising from the city. The planet covered in swirling red and white clouds looms above it all like a huge, angry eye. Jimmy and my dad silently join me at my rock ledge viewpoint of the end of everything. I'm not alone, which is all that matters now.

Jenkins High
By Emily Preuss

I entered the school in a rush. My only thought was the consequences if I was late. It wasn't my fault my car broke down, it just did. The Trident was from 1966, so it could have died at any time. It just decided to be today.

My natural curly brown hair flew in short little wisps behind my face as I ran down the hall. My first day at Jenkins High, and I was going to be late. Luckily enough my sixteen years of life could not have prepared me more for this than it already has. I slowed as I reached Thirteenth Hall. Two-o-six...two-o-nine...Aha! Room Two-twelve, Mrs. Darbinee's home room. I think.

I grasp the note from the office nervously as I slowly turn the doorknob. My arm gives the door a slight push, and it doesn't open. I try a little harder, nothing. Zilch, nada, zippos. Suddenly a tall boy walks over to the door and pushes it open from the other side.

"You have to pull it open," he informs me in a whisper.

The first thing I notice is his sweet voice. Like rich dark chocolate melting down the Niagara Sugar Falls a few miles from Candy Corner. Perfectly matching is his slightly masculine structure with broad shoulders and a pointed jaw line. But he did have a spherical chin. His eyes were a jaded green, going perfectly with his sand skin tone and reddish-brown hair.

I blush and rush to the only empty seat, next to the teacher's desk. The perfect place to quietly slip the tardy slip onto his seat and sink into my chair without causing too much commotion.

Wait a minute, *his* seat?! But, I'm supposed to be in *Mrs.* Darbinee's class! My eyes widen hysterically as I start to raise my hand. "Excuse me?" I stutter, "But isn't this *Mrs.* Darbinee's class...sir?"

"Why yes," he explains dramatically. "But," his smile quickly fades. Never a good sign. "Mrs. Darbinee is sick today so I am her sub, as I was just explaining to the class."

"Oh," a surprised whisper escaped my lips.

"Yes. My name is Mr. Kaja, but you all should call me Mr. K. Now, the lesson plan says that today we need to discuss schedules and new clubs..." He drones on for what seems like hours until I finally hear a word that catches my eye. Well. My ears anyway.

"Next week the Drama Club will be hosting auditions after school for this year's spring 'Musical: A reinvention of Snow White with a little Shakespearean twist, *The Prince's First Snow.*' Auditions will be from 2-4 p.m.; this gives you three minutes after the bell rings to prepare yourselves. Practice a few bars, eat a quick snack, kiss your boyfriend goodbye..."

I notice half the girls in the classroom blush. Not including me.

"...Whatever tickles your fancy. Now the two leading roles, Snow and the Prince must be in pairs, no exceptions. Single auditions will be Monday through Wednesday, and couples auditions will be Thursday through the following Monday. I have the parts you need to learn here. Please raise your hand and the Teacher's Assistant," he quickly glances at a clipboard, "Mr. Mark Ponde, will hand you the pamphlet."

I'm the first one to raise my hand, but *Mark* is sitting on the other side of the room. So he gets to me last.

Rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrring!

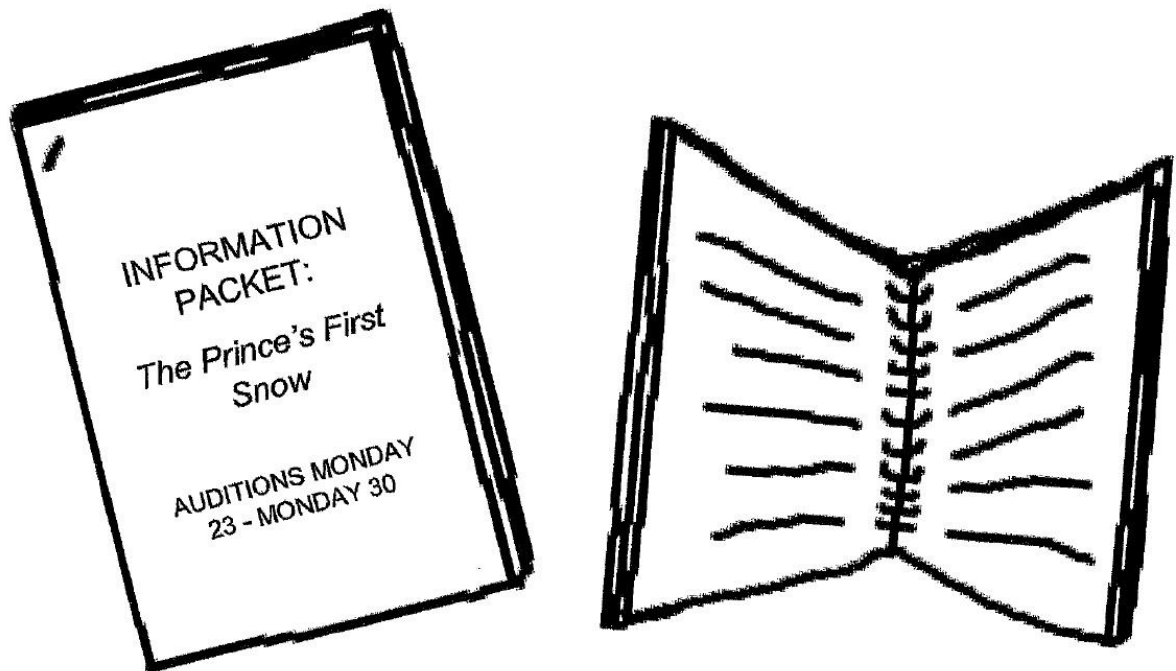
Just as my fingertips begin to feel the thin edges of the paper the bell rings. Just my luck. I rush to gather my things and end up rudely ripping the pamphlet out of Mark's hand as I'm running out the door.

Great, I think as I run down the halls trying not to drop my papers while simultaneously trying to look at the map to find room 15B, Honors Pre-Calculus. I meet a cute guy and on my

first day I manage not only to be late, but to embarrass myself, twice, in front of him. And rudely rip papers out of his hand. He was the teacher's assistant on top of it! I guess that explains why he helped me with the door, other than just being nice I suppose...

"JULIE!" I hear someone shout behind me. I do a quick one-eighty before I see who else but Mark, sliding down the hall with some papers. Wait a second! I realize hysterically.

Is that my journal!?!



The Caboose Mystery

By Ruth Kendall

The Caboose Mystery

Vader Speaks

Hi! My name is Vader. (*If you didn't know this, I'm a dog.*) I have regular stories...and then there are the special ones. The special ones are mysteries (*yes, I am a detective.*) I have a robot-wolf-assistant, Kiva. Owner made her for me. We go on many adventures together. This one is about me and Kiva getting our old friend out of a caboose. I wonder who did it...

I had decided that Kiva and I should take a vacation. Kauai was the perfect place to relax. We headed to Brightwood Station. A train would take us from there to the California Airport. **HAWAII HERE WE COME!!!!** We did not expect a Mystery.

Chapter 1

Cierra

There was nothing unusual about anything when Kiva and I arrived at the station. The day after tomorrow we would be at the airport, ready for a six hour flight to The Garden Island (*not really*). That night, we decided to take a walk, planning for Kauai. We were walking around the caboose when a clamor came from inside. Someone was trying to get out! With one mighty leap Kiva sprang to the top of the boxcar and heaved open the top hatch. It was our old kitty friend Cierra! Someone had locked her in there and lost the key.

That night I tossed and turned on the dog bed as I thought of what Cierra kept repeating after she was set loose. "I told him! I told him I would report him if he didn't get the paperwork, it's not that hard. AND HE LOCKS ME IN A CABOOSE!?!?!?! Not only was I in a caboose, but attached to a train bound for California!? Seriously!?"

Hmmm.....

Chapter 2

Mystery Stuff

As Kiva and I were taking a walk the next day, I noticed paw prints. Next to them, Kiva found a map of an attic. "I wonder how that happened," I said. "Maps don't just fall out of people's pockets."

"Maybe they were running," Kiva replied.

"But then why would they be running?"

"Why do most people run?"

"Because they're scared."

"Why would they be scared?"

Then it hit me. "They did something bad!"

"Duh." Kiva isn't exactly the most congratulating assistant ever.

Chapter 3

Suspects

There were a couple people on the train that might be suspects. Our first two were Bailey, a dog, and Kyla, a cat, but they were making brownies when Cierra was in the caboose. I ate the proof. Hailey, another cat, and Margalo, a bird, were making poppy-seed muffins. I ate that proof too. After he saw the map, Mr. Kitty said it was the wrong one, as he also had an attic hideout. BOB, a robot, only destroys attics, he doesn't have a hideout, and why would he make a map if he doesn't have a hideout?

"There's a problem," Kiva stated. "Oscar the cat isn't here."

Now that's strange...I told him to be here...Oh well. "Oscar had said he was sure he'd be here."

"There's only one reason I know of that he wouldn't be here. He did it."

"Kiva, there could be other reasons..."

"Not that I know of. His boxcar is next to the caboose. There's no reason he shouldn't be here since we're meeting in the caboose. He also has an attic hide-out."

I think we have our suspect.

Chapter 4

Soaking Wet

Later that day, Kiva and I were walking around the lake, making plans to catch Oscar.

"...and the wire catches the rope. When he shuts the compartment--"

"LOOK OUT!!!!!" *SPLASH!* I walked off the edge of a cliff! One moment I was nice and dry, the next I was soaking wet. I was a very unhappy Vader as I climbed out of the lake.

"OK. The next few hours should be juuuust fine as long as I don't fall in any more--"
SPLASH! "-puddles."

Chapter 5

Plans in Action

My plan before I fell in the lake was that there would be a loop of rope on the ground under the door of Oscar's boxcar. That rope would go up to a hook. The rope would be supported slightly above the hook by a stick. The rope would also be attached to the luggage compartment. When Oscar opened the luggage compartment, the stick would fall. When the compartment was shut, the loop would catch around Oscar's foot. Now all we had to do was wait for the morning of departure to arrive. That was when all of the luggage had to go in the compartments. Finally! It was morning. The train people were coming to Oscar's boxcar. Huh?!

The train person is falling into our trap not Oscar!

“Oh no! I guess we know it works.” said Kiva.

“Oscar’s not getting away this time!” Cierra remarked. “He has to pay for that illegal catnip trade he has!” Kiva overtook Oscar running and pinned him to the ground with one paw. Cierra and I came over.

“Well,” I said. “You’re caught. I don’t know why you didn’t just make the trade legal. Paperwork is made for that sort of stuff.”

“I guess we’ll never know his reasons,” Kiva decided. “What’s important is I just contacted the police.” Everything turned out fine in the end.

Chapter 6

The End

It turned out Cierra was Oscar’s sister. He locked her in the caboose because she was the only one who knew the full extent of the trade. He didn’t want anyone telling the police the trade was moving to catnip heaven, Kauai, so he locked her away. She didn’t tell us it was Oscar because she wanted us to figure it out ourselves. She also didn’t want her brother to get into that much trouble. Kiva bought Cierra’s ticket and she came with us.

I wonder what my next adventure will be!

Irresponsible
By Megan Jacobs

Andy Shields has only been called irresponsible two times in his life, well, until today. Considering he is well into his teens, this seems like an unreasonably low amount of times. Granted, he is a boy that stays in the comfort of his own room the majority of his time, completing all his homework and chores in a timely manner. But, he is a boy nonetheless, and today marks the third time that he has been referred to as “irresponsible.”

He remembers each time painted in his head clearly, for each time it caused him a guilt that clouded his mind for days. The first time occurred when he was in kindergarten, and it was Catherina, his older sister, that had called him that infamous term. She did so after Andy had an experience with Zeus, her inappropriately named cat. Zeus had been meowing and mewling insistently at the front door for several minutes. So, naturally, Andy let him out.

He felt like he was doing a service, and you may understand his confusion when his considerate deed was deemed “irresponsible” by his red-faced sibling, whose self-claimed maturity did not prevent her from screaming at a five year old child. Little dusty-haired Andy, in all his empathy and sincerity, cried with his sister when he realized the error of his ways. Despite the detail that Zeus was found within twenty minutes of the exchange, he still set out to somehow repay the damage that his carelessness had caused. So, the very next day, he began educating his classmates on the dangers of releasing housecats into the wild.

It was actually warranted the second time he was called irresponsible; he had forgotten his sister’s birthday. This time, it was his mother to call to his attention what he had done, only after it was too late. Neither of them acknowledged this lapse in her own responsibility, but it didn’t even occur to Andy, not even as a passing thought. This in itself is a wonder, because by then he was fourteen. It would be no surprise to anyone for him to place the blame on others for his shortcomings, as many kids his age make a habit of doing.

No, Andy did not blame anyone but himself for his forgetfulness. He immediately made the decision to spend the remainder of his own birthday money to take her out to lunch, but not before he apologized profusely.

The point is, Andy is not irresponsible. He felt irresponsible when he was called irresponsible, and that in itself should show you what kind of person he is. Knowing this information, it may come as a shock to know that when the third time comes around, he doesn’t feel guilty at all. It’s even more of a shock to learn that he’s currently in a jail cell.

It’s the police officer that sits dutifully at his desk that says it. Irresponsible. He says a few other things too, but that’s not really the main focus. Andy’s the only other person in the room, and he stares at the cracked, bare ground and sits on the bench provided for him to do so. He thinks about the hard life he’ll face in prison for the rest of his life. But he does not feel guilty.

He had tried to steal something. He’d never done so before, or committed any crime worse than downloading a movie. That only happened once, and he didn’t even realize it was illegal at the time. He nearly had a heart attack when he found out that it was.

He remembers this and internally laughs at his naive past self (it happened two months ago). He schools his expression from an anxious one to a determined one, and thinks, yeah, he could do prison. He nods to himself, it wouldn’t be so hard. He could have a roommate and everything. These thoughts last for about thirty seconds, before he buries his head in his hands and resists the urge to start crying.

He had only tried to steal something that belonged to him in the first place. It was this that Andy reflected on bitterly in his confined space, and it was this that prevented him from any feelings of guilt he might have had otherwise. It was his bike that had been stolen, and upon

realizing who took it, it was him that tried to get it back. Head still down, he tells the officer as much for the fourth time, as Andy's words didn't seem to have the desired impact the first three times.

The man, incredibly unfit for a police officer (Andy realizes why he has a desk job), laughs as condescendingly as a man with that deep a voice can laugh.

"We aren't holding you for attempted burglary," he says, and Andy lifts his head up from the sanctuary of his palms. "I got you here for trespassing. And I'm only holding you until your mom gets here."

Andy's breath stops short in his throat, before he lets out an eloquent, "What?"

The officer sighs. "Look kid, there's no charges being pressed against you. Your bike was returned with a big apology from the kid's mom. It's in the back of my squad car." He takes a break from his speaking to take a sip from the coffee mug he has on his desk. Because he's not the smartest guy around, he laughs and adds, "Technically you're not even supposed to be in that cell, I just thought it'd be kinda funny." Andy's mouth hangs open, and his eyes widen.

Before Andy can actually start crying at the whole situation, his mother arrives and saves the day. The officer jumps in his seat a bit, and curses himself for not listening to the next room over, where she had just come from after being redirected. He might have been able to get Andy out of the cell in time to avoid an earful.

But, as it stands, he did not avoid said earful. He has the decency to look ashamed and apologize. He lets Andy out of the cell, who by then is on his feet and babbling his gratefulness to his mother. Andy squeezes the small woman in his arms to emphasize his point.

The officer leads them out of the building and helps transfer Andy's bike from his trunk to Andy's. He apologizes again and Andy's mother leaves him with nothing more than a hum before getting into the car.

They ride in silence for just minutes, but it seems to stretch into hours for Andy. Eventually, his mother clears her throat, and he glances over.

"That was very irresponsible of you," she says, alarmingly calm.

Andy says nothing. He leans his head against the cool window, closes his eyes, and smiles.

The Clocksmith

By Aaron Drotos

The Clocksmith

He is one of analog,
One of movement,
And of precision,
With mechanical disposition,
For mechanical tradition.
He finds beauty in the otherwise overlooked,
In the unappreciated, unnoticed complexity,
That, when contemplated, is truly fascinating.
Each movement requires perfection,
From the miniscule gears in the fist sized box,
Turning in time, in harmony, in rhythm, in grace,
Moving within with reliable pace,
By the precise hands of The Clocksmith,
And tightened springs on weights.
He is a secret artist crafting his hidden art;
A masterpiece which shall be our utensil,
And most will overlook its perfection,
Which I find sad,
But not he,
And I wonder and ponder that.
He says, "My art is not on any museum wall but my own,
Not because it's under-appreciated,
But because it is viewed every day unnoticed,
For it is just another art,
That is also a tool,
That is viewed every day unnoticed.
I just happened to notice,
And now I'm here."
Surrounded by the ticking, I say,
"I've noticed too,
Thanks to you,
And now we're here."

Mask

By Emily Curtis

Again I feel alone, dejected, and hideous. Again I let myself drift into this state. Again I realize that the world around me doesn't necessarily need me. Again I am reminded of just how unwanted I am.

I lie awake, staring at the space in front of me, not seeing what is there, but seeing the twisted images procured by my own memory. I can feel the cool fingers of death, gripping around the nape of my neck, sending chills down my spine, causing every muscle within my body to contort with pain and sadness. I know that if I were to get up now, then my knees would buckle under me, and leave me weeping on the ground. I don't cry now, for I know that if I do, it will be nearly impossible to stop.

I think of what is to come tomorrow, and I dread it. It has always been overwhelmingly taxing on my body and mind to be around them. All those people, those who can destroy one's life with a few simple words, and try to do it as often as they can, but only when convenient for them. I wish I could end it all, stop all the pain and suffering, but I can't, as long as there are seemingly content people in the world, then there will always be horrendous cynics to counteract them.

Everyone I know has always seen me as the most optimistic person they know, they say that when they see me, they can just tell that I have always had the brightest of moments and the happiest of times. I could only wish for that to be the truth, but that isn't always what comes to pass, because from my point of view, it has usually been the opposite. I have always found that I'm able to wear the mask that society tells me to, the mock imitation of jovial presentation that I wear each day, but it does nothing to change what hides beneath.

The only interactions I ever seem to receive from those I know is always the same. They need something, so I do what I can to provide it, no matter the cost on my end. However, anytime I ask for any aid in my own issues, my so-called friends always find more important or more interesting matters to attend to. This leave me feeling more hopeless than anything, knowing that I help, but none will help me.

They have always tried to take advantage of me and anyone else who will let them. Maybe it's just because they can, and some voracious voice inside their mind is telling them that they should take what they can get, before what they can get is gone. Or maybe it's because they feel just as alone as I, and they feel as if no one can understand their pain, and in their blind ignorance, they become selfish, rude, and cruel to those who they shouldn't take for granted.

I suppose it is a bit humorous, in a melancholy sort of way. The fact that I feel as if the only person who can understand my pain is the person I see when I glimpse my reflection in the mirror. When in reality, I am more likely than not to meet a tortured soul just like me, walking along my same path, stepping in my same footsteps, but failing to see me for I hide myself behind my mask.

I look up from time to time and peer through the small holes my mask allows for vision, and I attempt to see through the facade of all the people who seem to be the happiest. On a few occasions, I manage to catch a fleeting glimpse of a lonely man or woman when they think no one is watching. I am allowed, for a moment, to envision their lives and all the horrible ghouls and monsters that plague their waking dreams, and I wish for nothing more than to simply be able to mend their broken bones and give them happiness and security. However, due to my veil put on to conform to society, I hold back from attempting to do so and thus, the cycle continues.

Again people feel alone and undesirable. Again people fall into depression. Again people feel as if the world rests upon their shoulders. Again people want to be more than they are. Again and again, continuing forever.

But what so many people fail to see is that each and every one of us is completely unique and not a single one of us would ever go unnoticed. The world doesn't rest on any of our shoulders, because for someone out there, we may possibly be their entire world. We tend to live in denial that we are cared for, even when the proof stares us in the face. I suppose we cannot see the people who care for us because we don't show them what they need to care for. We wear these masks with grotesque impressions of happiness, and in doing so, we lose our human ability to express our emotions, good and bad, which doesn't allow for us to gain the comfort of heartfelt words from the people closest to us.

I try to leave my mask off, I try to be purely myself and not hide how I feel about situations or events, but it is always close at hand, and I fear that is how it will always be.