



**Dread Pirate's  
Summer Beach Bash  
Writing Contest 2009**

*Dread Pirate's Summer  
Beach Bash  
2009*

**By**

**Terri Verrette**

**Allie Butler**

**Bizzy Young**

**Blanche Conley**

**Marie Sekiguchi**

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**WINNER OF THE DREAD PIRATE'S  
SUMMER BEACH BASH  
WRITING CONTEST 2009.**

## **The Scrying Game**

**by**

**Terri Verrette**

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# A note from Dread Pirate

Greetings shipmates!

This year, the Summer Beach Bash Writing Contest was the 7<sup>th</sup> annual. This contest is yet one more landmark for both Team DPe and me. The sponsorship this year was overwhelming. A special thanks to Paul Kyriazi and Ronin Books for such a generous gift! If it were not for both Team DPe and willing sponsors, this writing contest could not continue. I thank them all.

If it were not for their positive motivation the Summer Beach Bash Writing Contest could not continue. I would like to especially thank Shiro & DivaC for their commitment, energy, and never ending dedication.

I congratulate Terri, Allie, Bizzy, Blanche and Marie on their motivation, and their success in this contest. Thank you for taking the time and effort out of your long hard days to enter the Summer Beach Bash. May you treasure this ebook always; after all, it is YOURS.

Sail on... sail on!!!

*Dread Pirate*

# *The Scrying Game*

by

**Terri Verrette**

Holcey Wilkins kicked another clod of dirt into dust. From the arched window of the high stone tower his master watched and frowned. At 16, Holcey was old to be accepted as an apprentice, not that there was no precedent, but it had taken more than a gut feeling about his talent to convince the counsel to allow him in.

The hand that reached from behind the woolen cloak for the wine glass on the table was smooth. The work of a high wizard didn't usually lead to the kinds of calluses other guild masters bore. Some of the townspeople despised the mages; saw them as a drain on resources. After all what did they do to earn their way? Did they grow crops? Did they produce goods for sale or barter? Why should they be paid anything at all much less paid richly for their invisible service.

Holcey felt this way. He hadn't voiced such opinions since the day he'd been chosen by the master. He'd been afraid to say what he thought, but his thoughts didn't have to be spoken aloud to be heard by one with his master's skill. Ironic then that the master had risked so much to bring him in.

Even now, Holcey watched the practice being conducted by the battle master with such undisguised longing that he may as well have shouted his thoughts to the sky. A wry smile creased his master's face. It took no magical skill to read him. But the master stirred magic into the wine and drained it down.

Holcey felt an itch at the back of his neck and then a sudden uneasiness. He glanced up at the window. Although he couldn't see the guild master, he knew he was being observed. Whether by eye or through some magical means, he wouldn't venture to guess. But, it seemed like a good idea to move away from the practice field.

He'd been charged with finding herbs. Herbs. As though there were anything about a stupid plant that could compare to the thrill of pitting the strength of your arm against an opponent. But instead of a sword, he was given a small pair of silver scissors to wield against an unarmed plant. And such silly instructions, "snip it an inch above the soil, and before the last drops of dew are dried away from its leaves." He snorted, glanced back at the arms practice, then hurried into the tower.

The master waited at the top of the stairs. "Do you know what a catalyst is, Boy?" Holcey had been under the guild roof for almost three months now, but no one seemed to have learned or cared to know his name. Everyone called him "Boy", but no one said it with the tone the master used. Holcey felt the familiar wash of anger. If it had been so all-fired important to drag him into this place, the master could have at least made him feel welcome. "A cattle cyst, Master?"

The laughter which filled Holcey's ear was not kind. "A catalyst, Boy, is something which starts a reaction. For instance, you have dry wood lying all around, but without a spark there will never be a fire. A catalyst provides the spark. Do you understand?" "Do you want me to build the fire?"

Holcey was confused, again. No matter what he or his friends might have imagined life to be like in the mage guild, none of them could have ever pictured the tedium of ordinary chores. He might as well have been apprenticed to the janitor's guild. It seemed that he spent all his time washing, sweeping, building fires, or even on some days slicing potatoes in the kitchen to help cook.

Still there had been something comforting and safe about performing familiar tasks, even at the behest of the mage master. Maybe he'd only been chosen for his strong back after all, no need to be concerned with weird happenings or potions.

There was no mirth in the sigh which drifted down. "How much of the herb did you find this morning?" "I brought what you said, Master. Twenty-two unbroken leaves on four stems." "Very good, Boy. Bring it to me."

Holcey stepped onto the first step of the stair. His pulse began to pound in his throat. He'd never before climbed to the room where the master worked alone. "Wet wood won't burn no matter how many sparks you strike nearby, Boy. The question today is 'are you kindling awaiting a catalyst? Or are you wet wood?' It's time we discover the answer."

When Holcey reached the top of the stairs he looked around. The room was well lighted circle with sun from the windows. Books were neatly arranged on shelves. A table with wine glasses sat in the center. Strange patters were painted on the bare wooden floor.

The master reached out and took the herbs from Holcey then waved him into a seat. The herbs were placed into a small mortar and pestle and crushed then poured into a wine glass. The master poured wine over them and passed a hand above the glass. Holcey thought he saw a small flash of light.

"If you are the dry kindling I believe, this will be your catalyst, drink it all down."

"And burn?" Holcey knew it was a flippant remark, but he said it anyway to cover his fear. He raised the glass to his lips and drained it. The room wavered, he dropped the glass.

"Do you see, Boy?" Holcey started to shake his head, but then he did see. The master of the guild was a woman. While the wine coursed though his blood, she grasped his

hand and Holcey saw light move from her skin to his own before he absorbed it. He raised his head to meet her gaze. "Hello mother."  
She smiled.

# The Date

By

**Allie Butler**

On a dare from Chris, Autumn was going on a date with Jack. Autumn viewed the whole thing with distaste, but Chris promised her that this was huge, and that she should do it. She reluctantly agreed, but just for Chris. He decided to keep the details undercover, telling Chris, who wouldn't tell. Even though Autumn tortured him endlessly his lips were sealed. Her curiosity was so great that she couldn't back down as she had been thinking she might do. She had received a text from Jack saying, "Dress comfortably but dressy."

Following the directions Autumn decided on a silver tank-top paired with a knee length black skirt. Her trusty sandals that could be both dressy and causal when she needed them completed the outfit. Looking in the mirror, she carefully applied her makeup. Not too much, but enough to be noticed.

Later Autumn was waiting rather impatiently outside of her apartment. Jack was supposed to pick her up at six, and it was six-thirty. She was about to call and cancel the whole thing when the doorbell rang. She walked over and yanked open the door, a scowl forming on her face. It was replaced with a smile when she saw her neighbor, Orlando. He was the cutest guy in the complex, and he liked Autumn. This was well known, as was the fact that Autumn didn't want to date him. He wouldn't give up though, and everybody laughed every time Autumn turned him down. It had become a joke, and so he never gave up. He knew by now that Autumn wouldn't go out with him, but it was all in good fun. Tonight there was a party, and Orlando had come to ask Autumn to go with him. "Autumn, there's a party tonight, and you look dressed for the occasion."

“I am dressed, but not for the party. At least, I don't think so.”

“But you must! I am the only one who is worthy of your affections!” Orlando dropped down on one knee. “Let us duel! If I win, then you won't ask me out again. If you win, I will marry you, even though my heart belongs to another.” Orlando was ready. He raced to his apartment where the foils were ready. Both sides assumed their positions, and the duel started. Orlando quickly gained the upper hand, pushed her all the way down the walkway, and backed her up against the gate. He then knocked the foil out of her hand. “Surrender.” Autumn showed fear, but Orlando was excited because this was the first time he had won.

“Never.” Autumn snarled back. She looked to the side, and saw Jack's Dodge Viper driving in. Twirling out of the way, she grabbed her foil and attacked. With the element of surprise Autumn quickly beat Orlando. “Another day without you, vermin!” She turned, grabbed her purse, ran down the stairs and waved goodbye. Orlando faked tears.

“My love, how will I live without you?” This was his parting line. “You'll live!” And that was hers. Jack turned to her. “What was that about?” The confusion in his voice was clear.

“Oh, it's just something we do.”

“Does Chris know about this?” Autumn gave Jack a look. “Of course he does! Did you think I kept secrets from him?” Jack shook his head. “No, I just wanted to know. So, off we go!” He could have whispered, and she still could have heard him. That's how quiet the engine was.

“Where are we going?” Jack just smiled mysteriously. They drove down the road and passed several old beat up buildings. They kept getting worse and worse, when they popped into the nice side of town. Jack reached around, and put a blindfold on Autumn. She started to protest, but then stopped. Finally they pulled to a stop.

“You can take that off now, luv.” Autumn ripped the blindfold off and looked. They were at Nokia Theatre, where RunKidRun was playing. “Jack, do you have tickets?” Her voice was breathless with anticipation. “Of course I do. Why else would we be here?” “Oh Jack!” She threw her arms around his neck and gave him a big kiss on the cheek. “Now, no more of that. Let's go in!” The couple walked up the steps, and to the door. The doorman beeped their tickets and waved them in. Autumn was in heaven. RunKid-Run was her favorite, and she enjoyed the concert.

When it was over, Autumn wanted to know. “Jack, tell me. When did you get these tickets?” He appeared to think. “Well, I knew you liked them, so I bought tickets.” How far in advance had he done this? It was dark by now, and the Viper's headlights cut through the darkness like butter. They drove up to Steak & Shake, and headed in. They walked in, and they were shown to a table.

The waitress came and took their drink and food orders. The two made small talk until the food came. They didn't really talk during dinner, they just ate because they were both starving. When they were finished, Jack paid the cashier, and the couple strolled around downtown. Jack suggested going over to Barnes & Noble, and Autumn readily agreed. She loved to read, so going to a bookstore was always a treat.

When they got there, the young pair walked inside, and Jack wandered over to the war books, while Autumn drifted off to the pirate books. Just when she had selected one, Jack came over looking at his watch. "Time to go!" Autumn walked with him to the

counter, where he insisted on paying for her book. They walked out of the building and started walking back towards Jack's car. Once there, they climbed in and sped off towards Autumn's house. When they got there, Jack leaped out and opened it for her. He walked her up the stairs and to her door.

“It was lovely.” Jack smiled. “Thank you so much!” “My pleasure.” Jack dramatically bowed. “So, I guess I'll see you tomorrow.” Chris had made plans to go ice skating.

“See ya then.” Jack leaned over and gave her a hug. She smiled, and hugged him back.

“Bye!” He turned and ran down the walkway. When he reached the stairs, he jumped on the rail and slid down. Autumn ran to the rail. “You'll hurt yourself if you're not careful!”

“I quit being careful a long time ago!” That was so Jack. He jumped in his car, and sped off. Autumn smiled and turned around. There was the apartment gossip.

“Who was that, and where is Chris?” “Oh, that's my friend. He took me to see RunKid-Run, because Chirs couldn't go. It was all Chris approved.” Satisfied, she left. Autumn unlocked the door, and walked into her living room, and there was Chris. Before she could say anything, he knelt before her and asked a single question.

“Autumn, will you marry me?”

The End

# Defiance

by

**Bizzy Young**

A crowd of familiar faces shuffled into the auditorium and scrambled to get good seats as music from the 5 string orchestra began to softly hum the anticipated song. I nervously scanned the mass of green gowns in hopes of getting one last glimpse of my friends before we started. I was, of course, met with the goofy grin of my best friend, Travis. His sun-burnt face scrunched up at the sight of me and he twirled a little in his robes, which were clearly oversized. I laughed at his dorky shoes which looked as if they were hibernating under the puke-color fabric.

He threw me a thumbs-up and we shared our last moment together as high school suckers there, in the back of the smelly gym. The pulsating liveliness of the assembly pulled us up the aisle as we began our decent to our chairs. My hand smoothed over the screen of my Gameboy, wiping away the sweat that had collected from my anxious fingers. I slipped the techno-colored game farther up my sleeve so the administration would have no doubts that I was still the innocent, untarnished girl I had been all four years of my high school career.

I stealthily floated down the middle opening toward my destination, the second row of chairs. *Thank God they will call my name early.* Ever since I had been given the curse of a last name starting with Y (and not to mention my dad's tall gene) I have never once been in the front of line. Whether it be alphabetical or by height, I was always the one in the back who you can't quite see because the kids in front of the pictures haven't yet mastered the whole "bending at the knees" thing. I was destined for the back row. But on this particularly glorious day there was random assignment seating, and I lucked out.

Attempting to avoid all opportunities of toe crunching, I slithered into my seat and settled down. Clapping resonated through the huge room as my principal waddled up the stairs to the front of the stage. He cleared his throat and patted his huge stomach resembling some creature similar to a pug in a yellow overcoat. He raised his arms as if to bless the Class of 2009 and we all grew silent.

“We will begin today’s special day with a song from a group of talented students. Please rise.” The bustle and swishing of clothes overpowered the strings of the orchestra but eventually all noise died as everyone stood. The Star Spangled Banner blasted over our heads as the rosy cheeked girls bellowed the well known tune.

Of course, I tuned it all out. The two boys on either side of me were conversing about the parties being thrown later that evening. I caught the times and places just in case I decided today was the day to break out of my “never partied in high school” phase. I mean, I was already about to break my social stereotypes that day, why not another one? And I couldn’t very well uphold my sobriety all four years in college (so I’ve been told). So I eavesdropped with no guilty conscious and remembered not to forget to tell my friends that Sarah Mora was throwing a blowout. At least high school hadn’t fried me of all my storage capacity, unlike the boys sitting next to me. Now, I was starting to think it wasn’t the studying that turned their brains into complete mush. No, I was beginning to think it might have been the excessive partying. *Note to self, skip Sarah Mora’s party and go swimming instead.*

I tousled my tassels and twiddled my thumbs, and waited anxiously for the name calling to commence. I had devised a secret plan with my close ring of friends and we had all, prior to the ceremony, stashed away tiny little plastic ponies to hand our principal when he would otherwise vigorously shake our hands. My mind drifted off the miniscule pony I had chilling in my bra. Seriously. I couldn’t think of anywhere else to put it. Despite its obvious hard-to-reach-without-looking-like-a-moron hiding spot, I thought the plan was a hilarious addition to our graduation events.

The boys next to me perked up. That meant only one thing, the roll call had begun. I straightened in my seat and gently placed the Gameboy under my chair so it was in a prime location to be used after I received my diploma.

Row one was pushed through in all good timing, and now the leader of our row was slapping hands with the kids coming back, awaiting his moment of pure ecstasy (aka official end of everything we had been working toward). His name was called over the loudspeaker and he gleefully bounced to the stage, arm at the ready for the hearty hand shake initiated by Mr. Mcousky. I was eighth in line.

I positioned myself away from the audience and covertly slid my hand down the front of my robe to retrieve the devious object. Unfolding my fingers, I stared into the artificial eyes of the only rebellious thing I had ever had the guts to pull off. This was my ticket to success, my scheme of grand proportions. This tiny pony proved I was no longer the meek, soft spoken girl in the front of algebra class. I was dangerous, I was reckless, I was a revolutionary. I created the plot and it was finally being put into motion. I would be the first of at least 13 who would calmly and nonchalantly slide the plastic deviant into the hands of the only man higher up in the ring of authority than my father. Only there was one problem, I was a fidgety bumbling wreck. I couldn't stop shaking, or sweating, for that matter. How could I gather up the confidence to shatter my safety castle I had built around me, moat and all, for the past 18 years?

*You can't do this; you're a timid, weakling of a girl.* No, I stopped my doubts of badassness. *You can. You're a leader, you're a visionary. You made this happen. Now get up there and give that man the freaking pony!*

*Wait, what was that? I thought I just heard my name.* Everything sounded like it was inside a beehive. Were my ears ringing? I could feel my eardrums pounding and my heart felt like it was about to protrude from under the embroidered name of our school.

Slapped across my face must have been the signs of real fear, because the next thing I

knew the girl two people down was shoving me forward and saying “Don’t be scared, you’ll do great!”

*Uh huh...* I answered in my throat as I was shimmed to the edge of the stage. My hands were waterfalls, and I swear the pony would have been drowning if it wasn’t for that fact it was inanimate. I climbed the steps of fate and came to an abrupt halt as I stared into the face of the man I have never met, thanks to my spotless record.

“Congrats Kiddo!” he exclaimed in my direction. *He’s talking to a ghost, I’m not here.* I was somewhere above the fixtures watching my destiny unfold before me.

Clutching the tiny relic of my newfound rebellious nature, I watched helplessly unable to stop myself as my hand flew through the air into his. A surprised look flashed across his face as he realized there was a small object between our clasping hands. I stood dumbstruck and quickly retracted my hand from the narrowly dodged bear trap. A camera flash to the left of us captured this awkward moment for an eternity, and I ducked to the right to avoid any unwanted confrontation. A confused yet lighthearted expression bubbled to the surface of the big man’s face as he let me silently drop away.

Relief spilled out of my lungs as I gasped the first breath of air in what felt like minutes. I had done it. I had given the man a pony and lived to tell the tale. And now I was well on my way to grabbing my diploma and celebrating the summer with the rest of my class. Today, I became a mountain, a legend. Today, I fought the good fight, and won. Today, I can safely say, will forever be a good day.

# *A Day in the Life*

By

**Blanche Conley**

I wish Mom would just go away sometimes,” Ean thought to himself. After pondering this, he recanted, “No, I think I just wish she would be here when I want her to be here.” Satisfied with his new lament, he popped another Oreo into his mouth. “Yeah, she’s okay,” he finally confessed. Although he hated grocery shopping with Mom because he had to unload the car afterwards, he always went since she bought some sort of goodies if he was there. When she shopped by herself, there were plenty of hair products in the grocery bags but never any treats.

He knew the final custody paperwork would be done in a matter of days then he would be spending most of his time with Dad and every other weekend with Mom. Although it was what he wanted, he felt a little uneasy about not being with Mom as often as he had been. “Be careful what you wish for,” he remembered hearing. Even though he spent many of his thirteen years with Mom, these last three have been very weird for him. Since Dad came back from California, Ean knew when he came home after school that Dad would be on the couch on the computer. Dad was almost always at home now and while he thought it was odd that Dad didn’t have a job, Ean was glad for the company.

Ean’s thoughts went back to his daycare days when he was surrounded by a bunch of his friends and his teachers. Sometimes he wished he were still in grade school so he could go back to daycare. He realized that he’d been surrounded by people since he was practically born. “Man, growing up sure is a lonely business!” he thought.

“I need you to take out the trash and empty the dishwasher,” ordered Mom. Ean put down the milk glass and the Oreos and shuffled to the kitchen to do his chores. She rushed by him with the vacuum cleaner and fiddled with the cord and the attachments as she got ready to clean the rugs. “Well, at least she’ll be occupied for another 30 minutes...I’ll take my time,” he conspired.

While unloading the silverware piece by piece to inspect for dried-on crud, Ean’s mind wandered to his parents. “Why couldn’t Mom and Dad work things out?” he questioned. He like Dad’s new wife/his new stepmother, Sarah, because she was nice and made good meatloaf...not as good as Mom’s venison version but it’s good, nonetheless. But he still felt sad sometimes. “Aren’t parents supposed to stay together?” he asked himself. All this separation/divorce/custody crap was confusing to him. “I’m a damn kid, for chrissakes—this isn’t supposed to happen until I’m in my twenties and in therapy!” he muttered to himself.

After the last shiny fork was placed in the silverware drawer, Ean felt restless and needed to get outside before he suffocated. He tapped Mom on the shoulder startling her and yelled over the din of the vacuum “I’m going outside for a while!” She nodded, gave him a thumbs-up and went back to hunting carpet critters.

He walked over to his favorite patch of shamrocks and began searching for four-leaf clovers. “If I find enough of them, maybe things will change,” he pondered. As luck would have it, he found five of them. He ran inside and showed them to Mom—she was impressed. “We should press these in some paper,” she declared. She took some newsprint paper from her drawing pad and pulled the largest book on Ean’s shelf (Shakespeare, of all things). She cut the paper into rectangles, laid the clover on the right side of the paper and splayed the leaves out so each plant was like a tiny fan. She folded the left side of the paper over the clover and pressed the pieces between the pages of “Romeo and Juliet.” Mom said it was the only Shakespeare play she liked in high school – typical girl. “How long do we have to leave them in the book?” he asked.

She said, "Probably a week – by then they'll be flat and dry, then you can figure out what you want to do with them."

Ean had to think about that. He liked collecting the shamrocks but hadn't really put much thought into any practical use for them. He had read somewhere (perhaps the Internet) that if you found seven four-leaf clovers you will be granted one wish. Well, it was a very cool idea but not very practical. Maybe he could make a bookmark or some jewelry out of them. Then he had to dismiss the idea. "Mom's better at those things than I am," he thought. After ten minutes he finally gave up. "I'll worry about it later," he told himself.

Mom was getting ready to make his favorite dinner – tuna casserole. She made a lot of good vegetarian meals but every once in a while it was nice to drown in carbohydrates, tuna and condensed cream of mushroom soup. And, man, hers was the best. He liked to watch her prepare the meal so he could learn how to make it himself. "Do you need any help?" Ean asked. "Yes, open the soup and tuna cans, dump them in the casserole pan and mix it up. If you want, you can add some Parmesan cheese," she suggested. Other than boiling the noodles, Mom had Ean prepare the whole meal tonight; tuna casserole, canned corn and instant chocolate pudding. Once the meal was ready he decided to set the dining room table and put the food out instead of eating in the living room in front of the TV. Mom came in after washing her hands and looked at him with a slightly surprised look on her face. "What's this? No M\*A\*S\*H DVD tonight?" she questioned. "Nah, I thought we could just eat and talk for a little bit," he declared proudly. She raised her eyebrows and nodded approvingly.

Although they didn't talk a lot, they had a good laugh about different things; a funny work anecdote from Mom, a goofy antic about one of Ean's friends, a silly joke they shared about Ean's toddler days. "That was a tasty meal!" he boasted after he had his fill rubbing his tummy. Mom agreed stating that he should do this more often. They both looked at each other and giggled. "NOT!" they exclaimed together and roared with

laughter. Ean's mood lightened as he put the leftover casserole in the refrigerator and helped Mom load the dishwasher.

The hour finally came when he had to get ready to go back to Dad's. Ean enjoyed his Mom-time, but the current visitation arrangement annoyed him. "I'll be glad when this is over and I can be on a regular schedule," he fumed. He finished packing and decided to do a little cleaning before he left. As he put his clothes in the hamper and organized his books, he reflected on how his life has changed so much in the last year. He tried to be optimistic about it. "Change is a good thing," he'd hear Mom say. It didn't feel too good...not to him. Then it dawned on him that maybe Mom just said that to ease the tension and anxiety that came with change. Perhaps Mom didn't like change either, but she had to endure it because she's a grown-up and giving positive feedback was her way of coping with stress.

A wave of sadness wafted over him as he slowly picked up his backpack. He's been feeling this way a lot lately and it totally bummed him out. He overheard Mom telling her friend that she went through her first depression at age thirteen. "Dammit...snap out of it," he thought. It was a half-hearted effort but he was trying. "I don't want to be like one of those EMO creeps in school," he groaned to himself. Then he spotted the Shakespeare book and decided to make that wish after all. "What could it hurt?" he wondered.

"Ean, time to go!" his mother shouted from the living room. "Be right there!" he yelled back as he closed the book and picked up his backpack. He gave the room a once over, satisfied that it looked clean. Even his bed was made complete with half-assed hospital corners. "That'll do until I can get it right," he thought.

Mom ruffled Ean's hair as they walked out the front door and went to the car. "Don't forget, we have a doctor's appointment on Tuesday; I'll pick you up at 11 o'clock," she reminded him. "I won't forget," he replied, secretly hoping they'd go to Wal-Mart after the

exam for baseball cards. As if she'd read his mind, she said, "Maybe afterwards we'll go to the store and do some shopping." Cool.

They pulled into Dad's driveway and Mom hugged and kissed Ean. "I love you...miss you!" she said. "Love you miss you, too," he declared. He got out of the car, waved good-bye and walked into his other house. He went straight to his room and watched Mom drive away. He was glad to be home but hated saying good-bye to her. After she disappeared down the road, he unloaded his bookbag and laid down for a nap. Just then Dad poked his head in and told him to take a shower. Ean reluctantly rolled off the mattress and stalked into the bathroom to end his weekend by washing off the daily grime.

Meanwhile, Mom pulled into her driveway, shut off the car and slowly strolled into her now-empty house. She walked over to Ean's room to close his door for the rest of the week. She looked at his desk and noticed the Shakespeare book. She opened the book to where the shamrocks were pressed and noticed the five clovers were arranged in a slight heart. Inside the heart, Ean had written in his sprawling penmanship "See you next weekend, Mom! Be Happy! Love, E." She sat on his bed, put her face in her hands and cried.

# Bottles & Silhouettes

By

Marie Sekiguchi

As a 13 year old youthful boy, I was outside practicing baseball when I decided it was time to take a break. I dropped my battered glove on the ground, causing the dry, powdery dust to shift in all directions. I tilted my chin towards the clear blue sky; sweat trailed down my sunburned neck. The sky of Chiba, Japan was so beautiful. I sighed deeply. The upsetting thoughts of my financially broken family stirred.

I jerked my head towards the telephone pole when the sharp *clang* of metal against metal caught my attention. I squinted, preventing the evening sun from flooding into my eyes. A young man appeared to be working on the electrical cord. Only his silhouette was visible; a dark figure against the deep, rich red, orange and purple background. Simply astonishing.

My mouth open in amazement, I gazed at the man. He must have noticed me. His black figure gave a slight wave, and carefully made its way down the pole. "I want to be able to afford milk one day." Inspiration hit me.

As I snapped back to reality, I noticed that it must have been past my curfew. "Oh crap!" I swore. I started running out of the dusty field, only to go back again to pick up my glove. I grabbed it, and ran out of the field once more, leaving a trail of dust behind me. I raced my shadow home.

As I reached the front of my house, I grasped the edge of the door, and tried to slide it open. "Damn!" I was locked out of my own house again. I could hear my father talking

to my siblings about being on time for dinner. As if to emphasize this fact to me, the one who was locked out, he roared it out to my older brother. And, like always, my long night began. I hugged my knees and stared up at the sky again. I was leaning against our sliding, poorly made door. Maybe it'll break one day.

Tomorrow is Saturday. The milk man will come early in the morning to drop off a bottle of milk, like always. I could see families of crows flying back to their nests. I saw the young man again; he walked by my house, a big metal, square toolbox in hand. I must have fell asleep soon after.

My kind mother gently tapped my shoulders to wake me up. The sky was black now. Someone must have spilled ink. My mother let me inside. Two riceballs were placed on a plate in the family room. The room, however, was barely a family room. Our family of five managed to squish ourselves near the small table every evening. I liked the smell of my house. It was comforting and sweet; it reminded me of summer evenings.

I folded my legs neatly beneath me and devoured the food offered. My mother sat across from me, her arms crossing her chest loosely. "Why were you late again?" she asked gently. "I want to be an electrician." My words were muffled by rice. "Oh? Is that so." came her response.

After I finished, I was ushered to our bedroom by my mother. The country was facing depression, toothbrushes were not common. I carefully stepped between my siblings until I reached my section of the room. I could hear my older brother stirring beside me next morn.

I went to our family room. I watched my father gulp down a whole bottle of milk. He went to work after that. "How come father gets a bottle of milk and I never get any?" I asked. My mother looked at me with her gentle eyes and told me, "That's because he goes to work, dear. He needs the energy."

I know my father worked hard six times a week, and yet, it wasn't enough to fully support us. A selfish part of me really craved a sip of milk. And after everyone left the table, I went over to the empty bottle, tipped the opening towards my lips, and waited for a drop. Nothing happened. Just like always.

Senior high school in Japan costs money to attend. With my three other siblings, we barely made through those years. "Why study anyway?" I asked my teacher, as he made me sit on top of the desk, legs painfully folded underneath, and my arm smacked with a ruler.

When I was 18, I joined the military. I actually earned enough to spend, up to a limit, how I pleased. I was able to purchase myself some milk. Milk was not sold in stores; farmers would drop off orders in the morning instead. I woke up exceptionally early that morn. I quietly slid open my door and stepped outside. Crows were flying in the sky.

A man on a bike stopped by our house. He fiddled with his plastic, square carton attached to the back of the bike. He took out two bottles, walked towards me, and placed them on my outstretched palms. I curled my fingers to keep them balanced.

"Thank you for your business." he smiled. I went inside and admired the divine bottle. I turned it left and right- I read at the top label: Fresh Milk. Before anyone else in the family was awake, I gulped down the bottle with glee. There was nothing special about milk, but to me, it tasted heavenly. I got sick later that day.

"Lactose Intolerance." my mother concluded from my constant visits to the washroom that morning.

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