



as vacant as a grass field

collage essays

from LA Matheson Secondary

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Introduction

For writers, there's joy in taking risks. Why not try a new voice, add some adjectives, explore a setting we've never seen? Sometimes the experiments don't work, but it doesn't matter—we learn from the attempt, and we can apply that lesson to our next piece.

The three grade 10 writers in this little collection took the risk of creating collage essays. The collage essay is a unique and tricky form: the writer relates a series of brief narratives, with no direct connection or transition between the sections. The only thing that ties it all together is the title, which must perfectly encapsulate each element without giving it all away.

This is not easy. Few grade 10s have ever tried to write collage essays. You *can* find ones written by professionals, though, such as Christina Tang-Bernas' piece "[in-english](#)" or Brenda Miller's "[Typos](#)". You read them and you think, *oh yeah, that kind of essay—I didn't know there was a name for that!*

But yes, there's a name, and there's a certain skill to it. You'll see those skills at work in the following essays. These three students took a risk—Grace with her misadventures, Maddie with insomnia, and Anant with his exploration of emotion—and the learning was beautiful. We hope you enjoy their work!

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The Disobedient 7

Grace Cerchin

“Don’t touch!” read the sign on the tiny, metallic stone-producing gadget.

Every day the machine buzzed until one class; I jokingly shoved my friend's hand against it. I don't understand why we weren't allowed to touch it, especially when the machine was already broken. All we got were some broken pieces of stone, and I earned a seat at the time out corner, accompanied by a fuming rhino with her hands on her hips.

*

My chest heaved up and down vigorously as I ran through the pouring rain. Behind me, my mom screamed and chased after me in an attempt to get me to stop. However, I didn't. I kept running and running until I fell forward into a pool of mud. My face stuffed with dirt and powdered with specks of grass. My mom splashed with muddy water as if she took a swim in a swamp.

*

I dragged my aunt, who had a look of dismay and regret. She grunted, putting one foot after the other, she grew angrier each minute. When we passed the first park, she was her cheery self. Smiling and laughing freely. When we passed the second park, she became a bit quieter and confused. As we kept going, her anger began to seethe from behind me. A 7-year-old dragging a 19-year-old across the streets as if the kid were walking her dog. Once the park was visible, letting go of my aunt's hand, I hopped onto my bike. She shouted after me, trying to catch up to me. Suddenly karma hit me in the form of a chunk of sidewalk. Its accomplice, a large, grey vehicle. I hit the cement and went flying across the grass as if I were flying. It took three months to persuade my aunt to take me out again.

*

I was the best and most popular gymnast alive. Or at least I thought I was. Despite my teacher's warnings and multiple safety lessons, I hopped and fumbled onto the balance beam and swung fiercely. I could imagine the cheers for me. "Hurray!" they shouted.

The shouts were soon drowned out by a heavy thud, caused by the impact of my body hitting the cold, hard mat. The teacher blew the whistle, piercing into my skull a hollow, "I told you so!"

*

“You can't go!” my mother yelled through the phone.

The words rang in my head like an alarm, over and over again. The sounds grew louder as my body submerged into the water, and my hands flailed around helplessly. The alarm snoozed as I was pulled out by a pair of hands. However, the sounds blared for hours once an angry mother arrived home. I never snuck out with my friends again, or at least for another set of years.

*

Smoke filled the tiny room, and the house reeked of burnt eggs. For my first time cooking eggs, I guess abandoning the small pan on the burning stove to play with my dolls was a wrong move. I should've listened and waited for my parents to come home, but now I realize why they always hid the kitchen appliances from me.

*

Slow down. Be careful with those," my teacher said as she handed us the supplies.

My partner and I began working on our English project, which was due in the upcoming days. Already behind the rest of our classmates, we rushed, hoping to create the best model possible. *Click. Click.* I punched the staples in hurriedly, my partner rushing me through each stab. *Clack.* I yelped loudly, due to a mixture of shock and pain. My mind a blur, as it went in and out of the spinning room. I held onto my finger, which now had a metal staple hanging from its tips.

*

Squeak. I pushed away from the computer table, grabbing a pair of scissors before heading to the washroom. My hands became clammy as I began to sweat, and my breath became uneven. Furrowing my brows close together, eyes heavy with concentration. *Snip, snip, snip!* I rubbed my feet together as they began to tickle due to hair covering the bathroom floor. I brushed my hair quickly, cutting away at the uneven pieces. I was supposed to cut my hair tomorrow at the salon with my mother, but I couldn't contain my excitement. After watching two videos on how to cut hair, I thought I was prepared.

However, that wasn't the case. Waking up the next morning with slanted lines and crooked pieces; my hair was a mess. My mother rushed to the salon that morning, however, I was told it wasn't possible to make my situation any better.

Summer Nights

Madison Cerqueira

Night 1

My eyelids fluttered beneath the icy breeze from the fan across my room. The scent of the night air poured over the highest peak of the window into my drowsy lungs. My thick brown hair strikes the pillow as does my worn-out body.

Night 2

Sleep doesn't exist in my adventurous mind. Glistening stars beam down. My short legs stroll along the uneven train tracks that go on forever. Whopping oak trees fill the pitch-black sky and block the glowing moon.

Night 3

The fair lights fill the sky as does the scent of butter popcorn. Screams and laughs of delight appear. My milky hands clench to the chilly bar as my body swings many directions.

Night 4

My head is as vacant as a grass field that goes on for miles. I peer up to the sky with brown eyes, my frame laying on the damp greenery. Thinking 2am air would be even.

Night 5

Salty tears travel down my cherry cheeks. Regrets fill my colourless soul. Why do I try to push it away if I know it's still there? My life is a mess and I can't fix it. People leave and I can't make them stay.

The Four Horsemen of My Personal Apocalypse

Anant Dhot



The first feeling you feel is sick. A child is born crying and I'd imagine he's terrified of all the pathogens eyeing to infect him. And so it sleeps hiding in its mother's embrace.

My dad called me downstairs. We were going with my aunt and uncle to a waterfall at Golden Years Park. That one jolly uncle who took a photo with my dad in the swimming pool and they both looked so very naked.

The drive to the park was exhausting. It was 45 minutes long and being beset by the worst flu of my life for the last three days didn't help either. The waterfall was a short trail from the parking lot and I'd tell you how long it was, but I don't know either. Shivering, snotrunning and barely standing up against the wind I lost my perception of time.

At the end of the trail I looked up. Stairs as far the eye could see. I surrendered. This was not one barrier I would cross, I could cross. I was certain of it. I told my dad I would sit at the bottom of the stairs and wait for them to come back. And then my uncle said, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger" (in Punjabi of course). It sounded rather cringey when he said it, even more so as I write it, and it did not convince me to climb those stairs.

I went to the waterfall a few years later, not as sick. It was a beautiful place. The cool rushing water bounced off the rocks and sprinkled into the air and landed on me. I regretted I did not reach it the last time I came; I told myself I couldn't, but I could.



It is so easy to feel angry. It flows through the veins smoother than blood. Perhaps that's why it's symbolized with red.

It was Thursday. A new episode of Discovery came out on Thursdays. It isn't a great show in my opinion, but it was good enough to watch on Thursday's with my brother. We'd put the episode on the laptop and connect it to the TV with a HDMI cable. The whole process took a good 50 seconds but out of our shared laziness we'd alternate the duty every other week.

This week was his turn and he thought it was mine. Both of us refused to do it, no longer out of laziness but out of the arrogance that refused to budge. I reached for the laptop and began watching it. Yet only the intro, I wasn't cruel enough to watch it alone. I thought it'd make my brother budge and it did. He ran upstairs and watched it on his phone. Yes, it was futile, and yes maybe I was to blame but those were only reasons for me to be angrier. An hour later after being angry enough my brother and I reconciled (and solidified the rules of who'd put on the show). And so an hour of time was lost forever.



Orange is a terrifying colour. When you close your eyes you see it, quiet yet not revealing its name. It has a use of course but you get too much and as Sappho wrote "She has killed me with love for that boy."

Woodwork was the first class I had that morning. And as I paced quickly to class as not to get late, I slowed down. I was not good at Woodwork and in the bustle of the day I had forgotten that. My cuts were not clean, my technique was below satisfactory, and I was a week behind everyone else. I told myself I didn't care about the class and that it didn't matter.

I was lying to myself and it is rather hard to lie to yourself. Uncompleted thoughts raced through my mind and my emotion changed faster than I could comprehend them. The final bell rang and I was late. As if things couldn't get worse.

Several months later Woodwork was over. The nightstand I had made was not too bad and dare I say, I was proud of it. Forget that though, I have a Math test on Wednesday and I'm terrified.



Two settings make me think the clearest. The first is looking at the vast ocean as it reaches for the sky and the second is my walk back home. Both are rather gloomy.

On a September day I was walking back home. I thought of the man who had passed across the vast ocean. He was the father of my mother, yet I don't think I had the right to call him my grandfather. I did not know him very well and as I walked I attempted to recall any memory I had of talking to him. I found none.

As the clouds above grew duller I realized it did not haunt me that I was a bad grandson, it haunted me that because of the decisions I made his memory would burn on the pyre as he turned into ashes by the flame.

Sunny waves or a lack thereof.

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