

**High School Short Story  
Second Place**

**Ipsa Scientia Potestas Est**

**By Kathleen Monahan, Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School**

**Entry 1:**

It's so dark here. The flames of the candles stand still in the air. Nothing moves in this unchanging place. The place I go back to every night in the moments before sleep. The place that haunts my days and nights ever since that day. One can't help but wonder why: why it happened to her, the sweet, innocent youth she used to be, why it had to be me who found the lifeless mass of a girl left there to rot, or why it hadn't happened to me, the one who has lived their life and left their mark on this world. She wasn't supposed to be there.

She knew that one cannot trespass on the Ceremony of Old. That is one of the Rules. She knows the consequences. Or at least, she knew the consequences. Sometimes I think I can hear her. I can hear her talking to me. I walk by the garden and can hear her calling out to me, begging me to draw near. But one cannot idle in the Home of Old. There is no time for idling. There is only a little time left until my own Ceremony of Old. I wish she had lived long enough to have her own ceremony, but there are no exceptions to our Rules, only consequences. Waste food: three nights in solitary confinement with no food. Cause damage to anyone or anything: two months in solitary confinement. Attempting to steal knowledge: instant, permanent Removal. As Line 10 of Page 2 of Document 1 states, "Knowledge is not a right. Knowledge is a privilege and a power." She probably could have bartered for two years' worth of food with the Knowledge she could have gained by observing the Ceremony of Old. Being so young, she had little Knowledge of value.

Youth in our Community of People start out Knowledge-less. Youth have to live off their Guardians' Knowledge until the age of 7. The Authority gives everyone some low-value Knowledge at the age of 7: rules, consequences, and annual Community Gatherings. This, of course, everyone knows, but in order to keep the Youth fed, Vendors accept it up to one year after the Knowledge has been distributed. This time of acceptance is dependent on the total amount of Youths turning 7. In my year, there were less than 200 sevens in the Community. We had one year. Last year, there were over 1,000 sevens. They had four months. I do not think Authority has coped well with the growing population. Authority isn't fast to change rules. There is a common epigram in the Community: "I'll do \_\_\_\_\_ when Authority changes Rule #132" (a rule that makes consuming alcohol illegal which is redundant since Rule #457 bans all misuse of drugs and #309 bans addictive substances in excessive amounts).

When I hear her calling to me, she is begging, crying for food. But I know now never to idle. The first time I went to idle, the first time I broke a rule, I found her crumpled body. Her instant Removal hadn't been a removal or relocation like I had been taught in my youth. It had been death. Death is something not understood until one enters the Home of Old and witnesses a

Ceremony of Old for the first time. Learning about death instills a certain fear in people that never leaves. One that never quite leaves your mind.

Death is a certain piece of Knowledge one can never forget. One cannot barter with it or try to trade since it will never leave them. It is, therefore, a worthless piece of Knowledge and does not need to be taught until one attends a Ceremony of Old and understands that their own Ceremony is imminent. Death does not concern the Community. No one dies in the Community; they are only Removed. But, she died. She wasn't removed.

Now whenever I see or hear of someone breaking the rules, I flinch. I carry the weight of knowing too much. Has there ever been such a thing?

## **Entry 2:**

I have been so tired lately. I think it is because I have been paying too much attention. I have been watching: watching myself to keep from breaking a rule and watching others to see the rules they break. Here's what I remember of the past week:

Elise—broke Rule #480: gossiping

Frank—broke Rule #796: idling

Martha—broke Rule #148: wasting food

Harvey—broke Rule #953: overindulging in food

Walter—broke Rule #562: absent-mindedness

Me—broke Rules #796 and #562

Martha's Ceremony was a couple days after. I didn't think I knew Martha, but at her Ceremony, I found myself hit with a wave of intense sadness. I don't understand why. I don't think I ever spoke to Martha. But, picturing her face, she seems so familiar.

I heard the girl again. It was like the times before except I responded, but at the same time it wasn't me. It was my voice and my words, but my lips did not move. I heard it so vividly and so did she. She responded. For a moment, I was with her. I was someplace with her. I saw her, but she was alive and well—maybe even younger? It was all so confusing. The girl again seemed so close. I tried to follow her. The voices led me to the garden and seemed to be coming from a certain tree. A tree I wasn't familiar with. It had needles and blue berries on the branches. I think I used to know this tree, but the Knowledge escapes my mind. I probably traded it before I left for the Home of the Old. I traded a lot of Knowledge before I entered the Home. No one needs any previous Knowledge to enter the Home. Everything is provided. The hope is that you

won't live long enough to waste too many resources. The strange thing about the Home is that it has a library. All they tell you in the Community is that if the Community had a library, the value of Knowledge would diminish too quickly for Authority to respond. But since the Old don't need to trade Knowledge, we are allowed to visit the library. No one ever feels the need to go to the library, though, since they do not need to use Knowledge to get the resources they need. I think I want to visit the library to find out the Knowledge it holds.

### **Entry 3:**

I visited the library this week. It was quite strange. It was full of books, something considered to be of a very high value in the Community. The books filled shelves that reached from the floor to the ceiling. You could pay for a life in luxury with the Knowledge you would get with these books. As I wonder of the life one would live if they had this much Knowledge, I tried to recall my own life: Was it one full of luxury? Was it one of riches? I can't seem to remember my life before entering the Home. I have seemed to have traded it away. What did I trade it for? I wish I could remember!

I had a very strange dream this past week. I was with the girl. We were sitting at a table talking, but it wasn't really me talking to her since I could see myself at the table. I couldn't hear what they were saying; I could only see their lips move. She was smiling. I was smiling. Then they both got up and walked over to a tree. The tree had blue berries on the branches.

I went into the library a second time that week on a mission: Find the name of the tree. Among the what must be thousands of books, I could only look at a couple. They were about all different types of things, but they seemed to be written by the same person. I wonder how this library is organized. Maybe I can find out and find a book on trees faster?

I have stopped by the garden every day this week to listen to the tree, to hear the girl. She hasn't talked much this week. Staring at the tree, I feel close to her. I feel happier sitting by the tree.

The other Old in the Home have noticed my absent-mindedness and idling in the garden and library. They haven't said anything about it at the meals, but I have noticed their lingering stares. I wonder if they hear the girl. I wonder if they all wish they had the courage to sit by the tree and be near her voice. Do they have the strange dreams? Do they also have to write everything down to remember?

### **Entry 4:**

I have figured out the organizational system of the library! Half of it is about things that haven't happened, but the author pretends did and the other half is about observations about things that have happened. The books of things that have happened all have numbers on the spine.

The numbers correspond to subjects from what I can tell. I think the book I'm looking for lies between 550 and 590. I can narrow it down further, but my free time has been cut shorter. I think someone has reported me for wasting my remaining time.

The dreams have gotten stranger. It starts out like the others, watching me and the girl talk and go to the tree, but sometimes it fades to somewhere different. I transition into a younger version of myself, but instead of the girl, there is someone different. I think I am fighting with the other person. Maybe not fighting? The other girl seems to be smiling as I talk angrily at her. Then she seems to hug me as I start to cry in her shoulder. To add to the strangeness, I lift up my head, smile, and kiss her. She seems so familiar. Her face is so recent to me as if I just saw her a couple of weeks ago. Maybe I did? Maybe the second girl is in the Home with me? We seem to be around the same age in my dream. I want to go looking for her next week if I have time.

I have been sitting by the tree every day. It puts my mind at peace when I sit near the tree. I've been feeling so confused and frustrated lately, but by the tree, I can let go. But, there is always this nagging in the back of my head to find out what the tree is. I'm going to bring a piece of paper to the library to write down everything I can about the tree.

#### **Entry 5:**

I was at the library, and I found it! I found a book about the different types of trees and had started making a list when the name jumped out at me. It was the most amazing name I had ever seen: Juniper. It is even more pretty to write and say! Juniper Juniper Juniper! I can't believe I had ever forgotten such a beautiful word. My heart almost leaps with joy when I say it! How could I have ever traded away that word?

I cannot wait to go to the tree and say its name! I will have the time now that I don't have to go to the library!

Speaking about extra time, I have even more since I looked everywhere for the second girl but couldn't find her. She must have been here though. She must have already had her own Ceremony. I wonder if I was here to attend it. We seem so close in the dreams.

#### **Entry 6:**

The dreams! The dreams have started to have sound! At first, it was all silent, but I have started to make out the word "juniper" on the girl's lips. Then as soon as I figured it out, I heard her say it! When they walk over to the juniper, I hear her say it again! It's the most amazing thing! I wish I could figure out what else she is saying. I miss her voice. I rarely hear it outside the dreams anymore.

A strange thing did occur when I said the tree's name. I was sitting next to the tree, and I remember I had promised to tell it its name. I said, "Hello, juniper."

And then the girl responded! She answered, "Yes?"

What a strange thing! She answers to the name of a tree. Maybe it is her own name? I think I will call her Juniper.

I might be able to give a name to the second girl in the dream. I described the girl to someone at a meal, and they looked at me confused and said that I was describing Martha. For some reason they thought I should have known that. I thought to myself that was why I thought her face so familiar, why I was so sad at her Ceremony. She and I must have been close before I traded away that Knowledge. She must have traded away her Knowledge of me, too. She and I never spoke that I can remember.

### **Entry 7:**

This week, when I go to sleep, I look forward to the dreams. They have changed. Most of them make me happy to remember and others make me sad. One that makes me particularly happy is one of a baby. I'm not sure where I am in this dream, but I seem anxious to be there at first. I'm pacing back and forth, and then someone comes up to me holding a baby. I take the baby out of the person's hands, and it is crying. For some reason, I am so happy to hold this baby and see her cry. When I see her in the dream, the baby is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. I can see myself say one thing as I hold the baby: "Welcome, Juniper." I hold the baby closer as the dream fades away. Another dream that makes me happy is one of me and Martha. Again, I am very anxious in the beginning. I am standing under an arch outside on a nice day. A few people sit in the benches in front of me. They seem to be happy and smile at me. Something happens, I can't quite tell, but it makes everyone stand. Martha enters wearing a white dress as she walks forward toward me. The dream starts to fade when she reaches me, and I look into her eyes.

Not all the dreams are happy. The saddest happens in the same place as the one with the baby. I'm pacing anxiously again, but something is different. An attendant rushes toward me and grabs my arm. She leads me to a room with Martha lying on a bed. Martha is crying. I rush toward her and hold her as she sobs. I start to cry, too. The dream fades away as I watch them crying. I am hit with an intense feeling of loss when I think of this dream. I try not to think of it as much.

They all seem so real! They seem too real, too detailed, too consistent to be just dreams.

### **Entry 8:**

They are memories! They are my life! I remember now! How could I have forgotten?! Juniper must have been trying to see me that night! She remembered I had been sent to the Home and must have wanted to see me. She tried to see me! If she had seen me, I wouldn't even had recognized her. I wouldn't even know my little Juniper. She would have been 9 this year. At least I think she would have been 9.

The dreams are not happy anymore. They are of when I found Juniper and of Martha's Ceremony. The feelings of loss consume me not just because of the physical loss but of the fact I didn't recognize them. I didn't recognize the people that brought me the most joy in my life were gone. But, in some way I did understand. Did I not feel that intense wave of sadness at Martha's Ceremony? Was I not haunted by not recognizing Juniper that I had to figure out how to remember her? I could never forget the love I felt for both of them no matter how many times I could trade away that Knowledge. Love is a certain piece of Knowledge one can never forget. One cannot barter with it or try to trade since it will never leave them. It is, therefore, a priceless, endless piece of Knowledge.