



Best



Claire Carpenter Henning – Best PYW

Dear Laura,

Well, as you know, I am an egg. I am sitting alone on a table. Books with titles like, *Responsibility*, *Orders*, and *Busywork* are constantly being piled on top of me. When will the load become unbearable? When will I crack?

The last time I cracked was at cheerleading practice over the summer. It was right before I went on my month-long trip to Fargo, among other places that were everywhere but my home. At the time I didn't know exactly what was going to be happening or where I was going to be staying for the next month. We also had to cheer at a parade coming up, and I had been led to believe that this particular practice was just informational about said parade. Unfortunately, as luck would have it, the practice turned out to be tumbling, which I didn't usually go to. You know that tumbling isn't something I am especially skilled at.

So, here I am, super stressed about my upcoming trip, and one of the first things my coach asks me to do is a somersault "to the counts." Well, for one, I didn't know the counts, and for two, somersaults are my worst fear, as you know. So what do I do, up in front of everyone, expected to do something that terrified me, and to counts that I don't even know? You guessed it: I started crying. I started crying *in public*. And because I hate doing that I tried really, really, REALLY, hard not to, but I couldn't help myself. The heavy books finally got to be too much, so I cracked. Right there in public.

Now, three months later, the books are beginning to weigh me down a bit more than in summer. To take off some of the pressure, I removed the heaviest book, titled *Cheerleading*. This really helped, because now I have more time to lighten the book called *Schoolwork*. Now the heaviest book is the one titled *Family*. My parents and siblings sometimes drive me up the wall, so I have three great resources that help me calm down and lessen the heavy burden.

These three things are also my most valued possessions. They are, in no particular order, friends (who probably help the most), music (especially sad songs like "Too Little Too Late" by Jojo), and books. The best thing for me is when I'm at a sleepover with my friends and I'm reading and some really great heartbreaking song is playing in the background. Then I have almost no books on me... maybe just one flimsy paperback.

On a related note, the second largest book is called Emotions. As I have recently suffered a great emotional smack, this book has gotten considerably heavier (and I have begun to only allow myself to listen to the same song, mentioned above, over and over, because it is so sad and my very favorite. In fact, I'm listening to it right now.) Some days this book is as light as a feather, and some days it's heavier than a few tons of gold. I suppose that's just how it is with girls. My guess is that a boy's Emotions book remains about the same weight all the time.

So anyway, I would like to thank you, Laura, for all that you have done, and I apologize for reading ahead. I was having a really bad day, so I couldn't help myself. Sorry. I WILL make it up to you. I'll do a million secret assignments. I'll give you my cookie at lunch. I'll make you a CD. I'll do SOMETHING. Promise.

Love you like a sister,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Claire". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. There is a small star symbol above the first letter 'C'.

Rachel Hunter – Best
PYW AWARD WINNER

It All Starts With Creativity

Creativity is very special, you see,
with it, I can be anything I want to be:

A pirate set said,
with the wind at my back,
a shipful of treasure,
with gold in a sack.

A knight with a sword,
out to save a fair maiden,
with dragons and creatures,
with my quest, I'll slay 'em!

A whale out in the ocean,
singing a lonely tune,
as I plunge through the waters,
from morning til noon.

Now I'm an eagle,
soaring through the crisp air,
my wings spread before me,
as I fly without care.

As I become a grand elf,
I move with grace,
with a bow and some quivers,
and pointed ears and a pointed face.

A small, fragile fairy,
with flowers in my hair,
a small set of wings,
I fly far into the air.

Now I'm a nymph,
a part of the earth,
with much skill and magic,
that started from birth.

I can swim across oceans,
fly through the air,
run through the jungles,
both elegant and fair.

I can be anything I want to be,
It all starts with creativity,
A simple wish,
a thought, a plan
some that makes send,
others, that's bland.

For the simple thought you think,
is not always what the eye can see,
but a vision, a glance,
at what may never be...

So as you ponder alone, by yourself,
imagine you being something else,
for what you may not always see,
is real, real enough, with creativity!

Emily Klump – Best
PYW AWARD WINNER

Remembrance...

I will always remember that day. The feeling of gentle sun beams caressing my forearms, the light, unhurried wind lifting the hair off my neck, sending cool relief to my every pore. It was elemental, life changing, and will forever cling in my memories. We were down near the lake, basking in the beautiful day. My brother and I share a bond unbroken, stoked by the passionate, judgeless light of youth. He was my best friend, and I was his. But we were as different as sunlight and shadow. Where I was fair and pale-skinned, he had hair the color of onyx and piercing blue eyes. Whereas my manner was bright, honest, his dark countenance often served to show him as brooding and mysterious.

I recall that I adored him, shadowed his every step. Even where this manner of behaving was met with general disapproval by our small town, I persisted in this way. The lake was our only, and favorite, retreat. We would sit there for hours, splashing in the cool, refreshing water, or simply sitting, giving at the blood-red setting sun, he arcane air rubbing off on me. The lake was the most important element in this scene, so powerful that the sun clung to its every ripple, encasing jewel-like tones in its waves. That day in particular, my brother was hunched over an old, tattered paperback novel. Its musty smell still clings to me.

I sat, bracing myself against the slippery rocks, recalling my past experiences where I had exercised less caution than I perhaps should have.

This time, we were seeking retreat because of a particularly nasty boy. He was the neighborhood bully, upset at my brother's closeness with me. He had acquired an eye for me quite a long while ago. I, only 7, could not comprehend the extremity of his feelings, and so brushed them off, returned his passionate prose with a dazzling smile, and an inquiry as to his well being. Then my brother would see me exchanging words with him and with forced politeness, and a dangerous glint in his eye, lead me away, insisting our mother was calling. Today, as I was being led off, with my brother tugging roughly on my hand, I chanced to glance back. The book stood there, trembling with rage, sunlight glistening off his silent tears, and I could make out two words:

"...Love you!"

I started, overwhelmed at his untamed passion. Perhaps that was the day I learned how dangerous love could be. Perhaps that was the moment where a cross appeared in the road, and I chose the wrong path. Perhaps, but I shall never know. Never know what might have

happened had I broken away from my brother's grasp and hastened to comfort the forsaken boy. But instead I found myself turning back to my brother's scolding words,

"Lizzy, you know he could hurt you. It would do no good..."

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a figure angrily kick up a cloud of dust, and run off. I stared at his retreating back, full of mixed emotions.

My brother's constant stream of prattle stemmed, and eventually halted, nearly identically in time to his footsteps. At his abrupt halt, I plowed straight into his back, and rubbing my sore forehead, frowned up at him, my pert nose wrinkling.

"You didn't listen to a word I said, did you?" he demanded.

I glanced up at him, brow furrowed, and then shook my head; a resounding no.

He sighed, ran his fingers through his unruly hair, and gave me a look nearly identical to the one I had previously given him.

"Lizzy, I'm trying to protect you, and believe me, it's an awful hard job with you seeking out trouble at every corner. But you wouldn't understand, would you? You're just a child!"

And he stormed off in another of his moods, with me trailing after him, careful to keep my distance. That's how we found ourselves where we were now, at the lake, the air filled with the melodious singing of crickets, and the wind hastening through the grass. I was perched upon a rock, my flowered skirts bunched up in my tiny hands to keep them down in a manner that befitted a young lady, while my brother sat under a large oak tree, with his back upon it, reading his favorite novel. After a long while, I cautiously asked,

"Edward, you still love me right?"

His head snapped up, and he stared at me with a quizzical look; then, after a while, as if having gauged my seriousness, and proved I was sincere, he threw his head up and laughed, but most angrily, bitterly. It always amazed me how readily his mood could change, and this time was no exception.

By the time his face turned towards me, he had composed it into a calm mask. It was one I had known for many weeks. I had grown to hate that guise that suppressed the true brother I knew and loved. It was the exterior wall he built up while the rest of him crumbled into dust.

"Lizzy, I love you, and shall always love you, as long as the sun sets upon the earth and the Heavens. Does that satisfy your curiosity?"

I crossed my arms rightly over my chest and huffed off, slightly stung by his laughter, only securing a few steps before his softly spoken pledge halted my progress.

"I meant all I said; I do not make statements lightly."

This served as a damper to my simmering anger. It was true; my brother was a boy of few words, but hose he spoke, he meant. I turned towards his voice, and his soft smile served to further douse any fires. Running up toward him on light feet, with my flowered skirts flowing around me, I threw my arms around his neck and laughed for joy.

It had been months since I had seen him smile, truly and uninhibited.

I was not aware of the cause behind the dampener that had been pressed over his true personality lately; all I knew was that my brother was sad. If I had known that it was because he was dying, my outlook would have vastly changed.

It was during this lighthearted scene that the crackle of a fallen branch alerted us of an onlooker. My brother's grip upon me tightened, but even so, I sprang lightly from his grasp, my eyes panning the scene before me for any sign of movement. A rustle in the bushes occurred mere moments before a black shadow hurtled out of the shelter, aiming for my brother.

"Edward, look out!" I yelled, startling him, just allowing the threat to register before he was plowed over by the figure.

I screamed wildly, crazily, as the shape pummeled my brother, with blows raining so quickly, you could see naught but their impact.

The shadow finally pulled itself away from him, and I was able to see the full extent of my brother's injuries. Both eyes were sporting ugly bruises, puffy, purplish-black, and swelling quickly. His chin, cheeks, and nose were raw, and his lip was cracked and bleeding. I gasped, covered my mouth in horror, and glared at the monster that had done this to him. My eyes focused, and horror-stricken, I recognized the boy we had left earlier that day, the bully. As if he could read the unmasked fear in my eyes, he stepped forward with both hands level to his chest.

"It's okay, Lizzy. It's just me," he tried to assure me, but I was too far-gone. My fear had overtaken all reason. When he took another stop, I yelped and retreated.

Reading his expression from the safety of the shadows, I could tell he was hurt, and I could almost feel a small amount of compassion towards him. But an injured moan from the direct vicinity of where my brother had fallen brought back my anger in a raging inferno.

"YOU!" I yelled, pointing an accusing finger towards him. "You!!!"

He looked at me, as if he was trying to read how upset I was, and, figuring the true extremity of my anger, tried to calm me down.

"Lizzy, you know I only did this because I love you. I care about you, and he was keeping us apart."

I scoffed at that.

"You know nothing of love. Look at what you did to my brother. That isn't love." I exclaimed, "I hate you; leave me alone!"

A determined, maddened glint filled his eye, and I was once again awed by the danger of passion.

"I shan't leave you alone, Lizzy! I love you, and that's all there is to it."

He made a move as if to grab me, and I darted away. My breath was coming in short, panicky breaths.

"Go away. No, please. Please go away!" I pleaded, but to no avail. He cornered me, and raised a hand to muffle my screaming. His movements were gentle, but his eyes screamed rage.

Suddenly, he was tackled from behind.

"You leave my sister alone, you old brute!"

Then, it was almost as if I blacked out. I had noticed the change in the weather, but the utter chaos the storm brought lit fear in my eyes. Rain started falling, violently, soaking us, and I shivered. A deafening burst of thunder filled the air, and lightning ran across the sky. It was at this moment that I realized the fighting boys were nearing the rocks, made slippery by the rain, the very ones I had attempted to conquer earlier that morning. I recalled the many scraped knees I had acquired whilst falling from them in the dawn when they were covered in dew. It was much more dangerous now.

"Edward, look out!" I shrieked, a final warning.

He turned, glanced at me, and his eyes lit with compassion and inquiry. It was at this moment that the other boy decided to land a final punch. Everything seemed to be in slow motion. Edward stumbled back, taking the full force of the blow, and I stood, stricken, as he neared the hazardous rocks. His heel closed upon one of them, and he slipped. I watched in stunned silence as his face twisted in surprise, and he flew through the air, landing in the water with a resounding thud.

It was only moments afterward that his struggles to stay afloat ceased, and he slipped under the choppy waves, churned into a sea of raging foam by the rough wind. The force with which he had landed knocked him unconscious.

I remember standing paralyzed for a few seconds, stunned by what I had witnessed. Silent tears were running down my face. A bloodcurdling scream ripped from my lungs, and I sank to my knees, my unseeing eyes searching the vicinity of where his body had disappeared. The boy stood beside me, staring at his hands with a horrified look on his face. He was silent, unbelieving; he must have thought it was a dream. I, however, was not so lucky.

I raced to the edge of the lake, with waves tugging at my heels, as if they wanted to carry me to the same fate as my brother. I was willing. I made a move as if to throw myself in, but strong arms held me back.

"No!" I heard a haggard voice whisper. "You'll drown."

But at this point, I was past caring. My cheeks streaked with tears, my hair sticking to the sweat upon my brow, I sobbed, wishing I could be with him. We, the boy and I, stood this way until long after the rain had stopped, its only remembrance being the wetness on the grass and the emptiness at my side.

He walked me home that night, the boy, and whispered silent entreaties of forgiveness. His voice broke many times, and I imagine I heard him crying. I was so full of emotion, and disbelief, at the time, though, that I don't believe I could have let anything more in.

And he left me upon the porch that night, left me with sorrow and despair. I never saw him, nor his family again.

For days, I was in a half-daze, almost expecting my brother to show up, none the worse for wear, upon our doorstep. But he never did.

Weeks later, they found his body, and I remember not attending the funeral, scared of the shell he had become. Scared of what was left of my loving, brooding brother. I lost my best friend that night, the only person I could count on. I lost my innocence, and my naivety as well, learning a hard lesson in life.

One night, a year after his death, I visited his gravestone, placed upon it the late pebbles he so loved to skim upon the surface of the lake. And I cried, sobbed my heart out, died a little with every passing day.

Then, years later, we were packing up our belongings, in an effort to move to live with my aunt, to put all our memories behind. I often discovered my mother standing upon our porch, staring out in the direction of the lake, and pleading forgiveness for letting such a young soul pass through her fingers. Our family was devastated at my brother's loss, and they never recovered.

As I was clearing out my room, its chipped wood floors reminding me of a time years ago, I spied something lodged in the far corner under my bed. It was a note. I opened it, and it proceeded to read:

My dearest Lizzy,

This is my early birthday present to you, as I know you prize beauty above near all else. I dearly hope that as you grow older, you'll find it is not the only things to be treasured. I... I'm not sure how to tell you this, Lizzy, but... well, my time is limited. You see, Lizzy, I am dying. The doctor says it's cancer, and I don't know how much longer I have. Mum doesn't know this, nor does Dad. But, you see, I have to tell you. We have always had a bond between us, and I can tell that as I recede further and further into the shell I am becoming, you drift away from me. I can tell that you know that something's wrong. I'm sorry for worrying you. I'm sorry that I won't live to see you older, with children. I'm sorry I have to leave you this way. I'm sorry for many, many things. But you must know, always remember, Lizzy, that I love you and I always shall. You are my dearest, my only sister, as well as a great friend. You hold a special place in my heart. Remember to always shine, and love who you are. Never forget what you live for.

Yours always,
Edward

Into my hand fell a polished, ivory rock.
My breath caught in my throat, and tears glazed my eyes.

It was at this moment I realized that I couldn't go on living like this. My days were filled with pain and misery, and I had lost everything Edward had loved about me. I realized that I couldn't change the fact of my brother's death, I could mourn for his early disappearance from my life, and I could hate him for what he had forced me to become, by leaving me when I was not quite steady on my own legs, but nothing could prevent what had happened. He would not want me living like this.

I took off towards the lake, and my feet seemed to recognize the path I had not taken since before his death. Grief was present here, but so were the many happy memories I had shared with my brother, and the beauty of the surroundings was never changing. As the wind stroked my hair, and the scent of dew touched my nose, I lifted my head towards the sky and laughed through my tears. In losing my brother, in coming to terms with my overwhelming grief, I had found myself.

And that is what Edward would have wanted.

Veronica Rosand – Best

Bethlehem Town

Follow the star to Bethlehem Town and there lies a king, but he wears not a crown.
Straw for a pillow, hay for a bed,
Not a sound is heard as Mary strokes his sweet head.
Here come the shepherds and their sheep,
The first to know the Prince of Peace
Was born this night in Bethlehem Town,
The King of Kings that wears not a crown.
There in the distance, following the star,
Come the kings that traveled from afar.
With faith they proceeded across the land,
Just to kiss the baby's hand.
They are the wise men, that number three,
Bearing gifts for all to see.
One by one, they present them at his side.
Gently the last man bows low and childes,
"Only the best for our king,
This is what we humbly bring."
As they step back, the stable is filled with glorious light
While angels proclaim with heavenly might,
"Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth, peace goodwill towards men,
The son of God to come only once again."
Will I be ready? I didn't know.
To the manger I did go.
As I knelt down at his feet,
An incredible thing happened when our eyes did meet.
Away went my fears.
Gone are my doubts.
All of my worries have all run out.
All that is left is his divine love
As angels look on from up above.
Slowly he smiles when I'm suddenly wrapped in a warm embrace...
Just by looking upon his holy face.
And now I ask, what will you bring?
God, money, maybe riches to our king?
Or maybe, just maybe, you will give *you*
Devotion and love your whole life through
So, follow the star to Bethlehem Town.
Find what you may,
But I know what I found.
The best gift of all doesn't come with price tags or bows,
You'll find it in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes.