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12th Grade, Independence High School

Don't Let Your Vision Fade Away

2nd Place, High School Creative Writing

"It's terrible, just awful. I can't imagine what those poor kids and their families are going through."

"Yeah, makes you wonder if it could happen here."

"Oh honey, you go to a high ranking school in an upscale town. These things aren't random. Nothing is going to happen."

Boy, had her mother been wrong

She opens her eyes to the scene before her, the shrieks falling from her classmates' lips, the look of sheer *terror* in their eyes. You *never* think it's going to happen to you until it does, that's what they always say. Even Jess let her mother's reassuring words fool her but, the truth was, she was wrong. It doesn't matter where you are, all it takes is one person consumed with anger for everything to go to hell.

Suddenly, she hears it. The first shot. Next, she sees it. The dark red blood slowly spreading across the floor, like a disease, reaching for the next person to perish in its grasp. She wonders if that's all the attacker sees, *red*. The color red so vividly blurred across his vision that anger is the only thing he feels, the only thing he *knows*.

She shuts her eyes again, this time pulling her knees to her chest and placing her hands over her ears, gently rocking back and forth. She wishes she could shut the world out.

Jess can still hear the bullets flying, along with the cries of fear now intertwined with the screams of pain. She wonders how many of her classmates have been shot, and how

many more would be shot until it was *her* turn. She let her imagination sweep her away from the situation at hand.

She pictures the future, *her future*, a vision of peace and happiness. There she was, standing at a podium, in front of an audience of thousands of people clapping ferociously for her. Her future self raises her hand, a smile spread across her face, and the noise dies down. "Thank you, thank you..." her future self begins, "When I first began this ordeal, it was to make simple changes in my community, to make it a safer place for my daughter, because even the *smallest* of changes make a difference. I never could have imagined that it would grow to become so impactful on the world. It started with building a safe haven for kids in our community, a place to go where they would be accepted for who they are *no matter* what, and it expanded into an organization that over 4million people, of different genders, cultures, races, and ethnicities have joined. We aim to protect the earth, to protect the people on it, and to put an end to the violence and harm we experience daily. When I was a teenager, I was in a school shooting, and *that* is when I was truly inspired to change the future. I imagined a future where I could send my child to school without the fear of them being shot, a future where the violence would end, a future where *human life* has value. That future has come to pass and we are the reason for it. *We* made it happen. I thank you for honoring me with the Nobel Peace Prize, I'm fortunate enough to be the face of this movement, and I can speak for *all* of us when I say we will not stop. Again, thank you, and good ni—"

She feels it, then, in the side of her abdomen. It doesn't hurt, at first, it's the initial shock that causes her perfect vision to fade away.

Her subconscious had conjured up *this* image in her time of need, showed her *this* future as she sat there desperately clinging to the life that she *deserved* to have. She'd gotten a taste of what her future could be and she wasn't ready to let it go.

She falters before opening her eyes, trying to hang onto the moment that had passed.

When she finally does, it's along with a gasp for breath that shakes her entire body violently.

"Jessica," she hears, confused and unaware of her surroundings. She turns slightly to get a look at the speaker. It's the boy that sat four seats in front of her, and she realizes she doesn't even know his name.

"Hi," she rasps out, the pain now starting to seep in at a high speed.

"Hey... hey." he scoots toward her, an expression of agony evident on his face.

It suddenly dawns on her that it's much quieter now. No crack of the bullet, no screams, just the soft sobs echoing throughout the room.

"The shooter?" she questions shakily.

"Dead." the boy jolts his head toward the right, pointing her toward the body.

Blood oozes from the shooter's right temple and Jess can tell he'd done the job himself.

The events finally catch up to her.

"Why?" she sobs, not expecting an answer.

"I don't know. I guess we'll never know."

"You're one of the lucky ones," she chuckles softly, "you got it in your shoulder, you'll make it out. Me..."

"Hey, hey, no," he tries, "don't think like that."

"You know," she snuffles, "they say your life flashes before your eyes before you die, all your memories, but that's not true. It was my future that flashed before my eyes, all the things I won't get to do. Not the life I've lived, the life I won't get to live."

"Jessica-"

"I'll never get to make a difference in the world because of some guy with a gun. My children will never get to make a difference. *They* were supposed to protect us and now because they didn't, they've deprived the world of all the great things we were gonna do."

The numbness had started to set in. She takes one last look around the room, seeing only a few survivors, before grasping the boy's hand.

"Promise me something," she begins, "don't let your vision fade away, my vision. Make sure this wasn't all in vain, that it's not just another sob story on the news. Do something with it, use it to create a future we would be proud of. Ok?"

He grips her hand tighter and nods furiously. "Ok."

She shuts her eyes gently as she takes her last breath

"Good."