

YOU ANSWERING ME??” I ignored them and addressed my dad. “Did mom ever go to prom?” I asked. He scrunched his forehead as he thought. “Yes actually, but she didn’t really talk about it.” He chuckled. “But I remember she did go on and on about how she had the perfect dress,” he said with a faraway look in his eyes. I smiled sadly. I didn’t know my mom for long; she was only in the first five years of my life, before the cancer took over her body. I don’t remember much, but I remember she was brave, she fought long and hard, and I remember that whenever I visited she was always so happy, despite what was happening to her. I have no clue how her life was like when she was eighteen, but I get the feeling that she was popular, and loved by everyone. She had the best clothes but was still kind and easy to talk to. So basically, she was everything I’m not. I can’t help but think, if she was alive, would I be different? Would I be popular and confident and fearless to the world around me? Would I be smart and outgoing instead of the shy, awkward girl I am now? And if so, does that mean she would be disappointed with how I am now?

We parked in the driveway of our small house, and I quickly hurried to get to my room. It consisted of a white desk, a dresser, a closet, a bookshelf and a twin bed. It was exactly as it was when my mom was alive; it was the same white desk where we did finger paintings, the same dresser that we picked out together from eBay, the same closet my preschool dresses would hang in, the same bookshelf that we would spend a solid ten minutes staring at looking for a good bedtime story, and the same twin bed she lay down on with me when we decided that we would just make up our own. There were so many memories from here, from the way she would stroke my hair as she said goodnight, to the day when she wasn’t there to tuck me in and I fell asleep without her loving kiss, wondering when she would come back, not knowing that she never would.

Suddenly my dad came in, excitement written all over his face. “I just remembered something!” he exclaimed. “Your mom told me a long time ago that she put her prom dress in a chest up in the attic, if you want to take a look at it,” he said. I almost fainted. “Of course I want to look at it dad!!!” I squealed as I hugged him. “Thank god you remembered!” And with that, I ran to the attic. It was big and mostly empty, so it was easy to spot a large brown chest in the corner. I went to it and dropped on my knees in front of it. I undid the latch and yanked it open. Inside was a white box, and on top of the box was a single, folded piece of paper. Curious, I unfolded the paper and saw small but neat cursive handwriting. At the top it said “Lucinda Adams, May 1992.” It was written by my mom! I continued to read.

“My name is Lucinda Adams and I just got back from my senior prom. Now, please know that I never write down my experiences or feelings or anything, but tonight was just so amazing that I had to. I’m hoping that one day, when I’m old and gray, I can find this paper and relive tonight. Maybe I could show it to my daughter or grandchildren, if this little piece of paper lasts all those years. Anyway, tonight was prom and I had found the perfect dress. I didn’t want to go at first, but once I stepped foot in the ballroom, I was so glad I did. It was fun seeing the looks on people’s faces as they saw me. I was so dolled up; no one could recognize me when I was apart from my jeans and sweaters that I wear everyday at school. I think that was what motivated me to actually socialize and have fun tonight. I’m such a quiet little thing; I try to never draw attention to myself. I’m just so awkward, and I hate it! I try to be outgoing and whatnot, I really do,

but every time I try to make a new friend I always end up looking down and stuttering and stuff. It’s so darn annoying. It’s not like I don’t have friends, I do, just not a lot. But tonight, this prom night, I felt so beautiful in my dress and hairstyle, why, I felt like a princess! For the first time in my life, I felt confident, and I decided to use it. I must have made ten new friends tonight! I was mingling and laughing, and I was actually talking! No stuttering or nothing! It was so amazing to relax and not worry about saying the wrong thing, because tonight I realized that most people don’t care. They will forgive you if you forgive yourself. I feel like a new person. I am filled with bravery I had never had before and I hope never goes away.”

I can’t believe it! My mom, who I thought was the most confident person to walk this earth, actually started out like ... me? This was amazing! She wouldn’t be disappointed in me, she would relate to me! I felt so relieved, knowing that I was not alone. I grinned and read the last paragraph.

“And I do hope, dear piece of paper, that I can tell my daughter about tonight and tell her about how I became a new person for the better. I hope to help her in her prom dress, and to do her hair and makeup, as she raves on about her nervousness. And I do hope that on that day, I will be there for her.”

A tear escaped my eye as I read it. She wasn’t here, but I knew that if she were, she would tell me about her prom night with excitement in her eyes, the way she did when she told a new bedtime story. Because of that, I knew what I wanted to do. I took the dress out of the box and held it up against my body in a full length mirror. It was absolutely breathtaking. It was strapless with small rhinestones covering the chest area, and the bottom was long and beautiful. It was blue, the color of mine and my mom’s eyes. “For mom,” I said as I put on the dress.

*Olivia Bohne, an 8th grade student at BASIS San Antonio, won first prize in her age group for this entry in the San Antonio Book Festival Fiction Contest.*

## The Patient

Coggin Galbreath

First things first: Sullivan’s Place for the Addled of Mind is not an asylum. Asylum, like crazy, is what Dr. Keith calls a Damaging Word. We at SPAM try to avoid Damaging Words.

Perhaps this is why Detective Inspector Bradley’s question about the fire at the asylum takes a moment to sink in.

“Mr. Seward,” he repeats. There is a bit of fried egg in his mustache. I stare at it, transfixed, as the questioning continues.

“You were an Orderly at Sullivan House?”

I nod. “SPAM’s idyllic retreat for the less dangerously insane.”

“You seem to have quite the record of surviving fires,” he says, sifting through some papers. There is sympathy on the Detective Inspector’s face, in his voice. It is true that flames seem to follow me, but I do not want sympathy. I want him to comb the egg out of his mustache and go away.

There are more questions. I think I answer them. The only thing I really hear is spoken as he stands to leave:

“Seeing as you’re the House’s sole surviving employee, Sullivan has offered you a job at the city Hospital.”

No. I have seen Sullivan Hospital, where the more dangerously insane go. All straitjackets, wild-eyed men, muffled screams