

Unity Within the Elements

By: Angela Daley

Lucian takes one last look over his empty home. The naked bay window shines a gloomy light down into the apartment. A fresh smell of cheap carpet freshener lingers in the air and a few boxes topple over the trashcan and a long trail of abandoned furnishings scatter across the floor. He somberly picks up his duffel bag and shuts the door for the last time. He sits down in the taxicab, "Henry International."

"Anyone else?"

"No," he stares out the window to avoid eye contact with the driver, "No one is coming."

Lucian sits at the window seat of the plane with his

single duffel bag in between his feet. He slides on his headphones and cranks up, *Long Death Coming*. He gets lost in the picture on his phone. A little boy with a missing tooth smile, a man holding his woman close with a geeky smile, and the woman with the kindest eyes he's ever seen looks as if she's staring right at him. His eyes begin to sting with hot tears. He doesn't bother to wipe them away he turns his attention to the runway and closes his eyes.

He remembers that day dearly. They just got done seeing, *Transformers*, in the theaters. He could still smell the salt in the air and feel the sticky floors as he walked to his seat. They drove home that night and the next morning he woke early to find EMTs taking his father away on the stretcher. That was the last picture he had of them all together. He is shaken from his memory by a hard hit to his arm. The seat occupant next to him, a larger plump woman too big for her own personal space let alone his, glares down at him.

"What?" She just gives him a dirty look and glances at his IPod. Normally he would be courteous of others, but today, right now, he could care less.

Lucian scans the crowd for his family. He stops, a small sign in the back with his name on it bobs back and forth behind the people. He weaves his way in and out of

the crowds, "Grams and Gramps."

An elderly lady turns around to reveal her aged face. She smiles warmly and opens her arms for him, "Lucian hunny," They pull him into a tight embrace. Lucian lets go to back out of the hug, but Grams doesn't let up.

"Let him breath, Elicora."

"Oh sorry." Lucian fakes another smile. Grams fixes his hoodie and says, "Dear, you must be exhausted. Let's get you home."

Gramps picks up Lucian's baggage, "Grams made your favorite dish. I'm staved," he is the first out the door and leads Lu to their car. He takes in a deep sigh, he knows they mean good, but he just can't force a real smile.

Lu walks into the strange home. He vaguely remembers the old people's smell and spices mixture. He touches the crack on the lamp and remembers the night that he split his knee open after he crashed into it. He looks up at the grand picture wall. "Lucian, I know the past few years have been hard on you, but being in your true hometown will do you some good," He nods while thinking, *a true home*, the only true home that he ever had was burnt down to nothing. He glances over the pictures on the wall everyone seems so happy. He spots an older woman with red hair that he couldn't place. He steps closer to get a better look.

"Those are all the people your Grams helped over the years."

"Amazing."

Grams walks up behind him and wraps her arm around his shoulders, "Thank you sweetie. One day you will help twice as many people."

"But first, you need to finish school."

"Gramps..."

"I'm serious boy. You can't slack on this stuff. You start school on Monday."

"Seriously?"

"As serious as the sun is bright."

Lu smirks at Gramps, he always compares everything to light, sun... darkness. After struggling through dinner he retreats to his room in hopes for some solitude. He shoves his duffle bag onto the floor and collapses on his bed. It creaks under his weight and he could swear he saw dust fly off freely into the air around him. He opens his window and turns on the lamp next to his bed before falling asleep.

Lucian rolls his Camaro over the freshly paved parking lot. He passes a number of cars as he drives to the last row. He sighs nervously as he stares up at the large stone building in front of him. Muffled teenager's laughter and shouts surround him. He studies the classmates and second-guesses his decision. He shuts off his engine and takes the keys out of the ignition before he peels out of the parking lot, leaving it and this town in his dust. He steps out of the car and pulls his backpack out with him.

A group of kids stand on the other side of the parking lot. A tall boy with dark hair lit red with the sunlight meets his eyes with a smug grin. The obvious top jock of the school, completed with a red football jersey, stands in the middle of the laughing crowd. Lucian doesn't look away from him. The boy's flawless smile breaks up just

enough for him to crack some more jokes. Lucian slams the door hard, not to make an impression, but because the door is so damn heavy he needs to.

They all look over at him and the boy says something else making eye contact with Lucian before they erupt in laughter again. Lucian smiles and waves at the group obnoxiously chipper; they immediately silence and turn away from him. All except for the ringleader, Lu can tell his blood is boiling underneath that rosy skin. Lu locks his doors and he walks towards the grand staircase in front of the school.

The large courtyard is scattered with trees and the mob of dimly lit half-asleep students. He looks back meeting the fury in his eyes; he knows he shouldn't have done that, but pompous idiots piss him off. "Watch out!" a deep voice shouts far above him. A boy crashes down on him snapping his skateboard in half. "Damnet!" the boy picks up both pieces of his board. The flow of the students doesn't break up. They ignore the boy's curses and laugh at him as they make their way into the school. Lucian watches as the boy runs his hands through his light brown hair pushing it back from his eyes.

"Sorry, I didn't even see—"

The boy doesn't look away from his board and says,

"Yeah, whatever. You okay?"

"Yeah I'm—"

The boy's eyes flash towards him silencing Lucian, "Good. Now don't get in my way again or you won't be," The boy smashes through the school's front doors.

"I'd stay clear of him," A tiny voice says behind Lucian. He looks around to see a petite girl holding his bag out to him, "My name's Nixie," she smiles kindly at him.

"Nixie?"

"Yeah, different I know, but I'm one of a kind," Her smile is so sweet it could brighten up any gloomy day. And Lucian sees himself about to have the gloomiest. Her dirty blonde pixie cut hair has a mind of its own, but her beauty is in her deep blue eyes. His eyes, on the other hand, focus on the angry jersey wearing jock he pissed off in the parking lot.

"Shit."

The boy doesn't hesitate; he lifts Lu up by his shirt and smashes him into the concrete wall, "Who do you think you are?"

"Lucian," he says, which probably wasn't the best thing to do. The boy punches him in the stomach. He bends over gasping for air; the boy pushes him to the ground and

steps over him.

"Lucian, are you okay?" Nixie runs up to him.

"Yeah, I'll be fine."

"You've really done it to yourself, pissing off Adam and Kenny."

"Adam wasn't intentional. And Kenny started it," she giggles helping him up.

"Which is your first class?" she asks ripping his schedule out of his back pocket. They make their way through the doors as first bell rings through the hall scattering the self-absorbed teens, "Oh perfect your class is in the same wing as me," Lucian follows her through the school maze, up three flights of stairs, and into a large decorative hall.

Colors and shapes are pasted all over the walls creating beautiful colloques. He can't get over the amount of decoration and art projects that are in this school. Coming from an offbeat school in the city this school is like something out of Beverly Hills to him. The second bell rings and all the remaining delinquents disperse, "This is me. If you want to meet up after this period I'll show you your next room."

"You're a life saver. Thank you," Lucian returns her warm smile with his. She turns into her room and Lucian

finds his.

Teacher doesn't even look up at him, "You're late. Take your seat," Lucian scans around the room for an open seat. The class is decorated similar to the hall outside. Warm sunlight lights up the room from the wall of windows, which to him is better than any other man made light. And like fate there is one seat left in between the window and the most beautiful girl he's ever set his eyes on. He can't look away; he doesn't even remember walking to his seat. Her long black hair crowds her face perfectly and her deep brown eyes flashes up to him just enough for him to fall in love. He smiles at her as he sits beside her.

"Hey," He says to her. She glares at him with her beautiful eyes then looks back down at her phone.

"Who are you?" a loud voice asked exactly what he was thinking. Still a little stunned, he looks up all eyes are on him. He smiles when he sees Kenny glaring at him from the other side of the room. His gaze turns towards the front of the room at the tall skinny adult standing behind her cluttered desk.

"Lucian, err Lu."

"I don't have any new students," The teacher says stubbornly.

"Is this Art Recognition, room 312?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well, that's what my schedule and my escort says, so I know I'm in the right place. You might want to check your emails."

"Excuse me?" the teacher couldn't believe what she's hearing. He didn't mean to be smart towards her, but Kenny and the other students snicker. Lucian glances at the girl, but she pays no mind to the discussion. The teacher checks her computer reading her weeks old emails, "Fine, look onto a classmate's book next to you I'll have your stuff prepared tomorrow."

Lucian looks at the girl for help, "I don't have a book," She says answering his unspoken question. He looks into her opened backpack on the floor at the book; she scowls at him again and kicks it further under her seat. He pulls his attention back to the teacher, but he can't stop thinking of her. The bell rings releasing the students from first period. Lucian picks up his bag slowly as he tries to think of what to say to get the girl alone, but when he turns around she's nowhere to be seen. He runs out the door and scans the halls for her. Instead of seeing the dark beauty he spies a bubbly sees Nixie at the stairs searching for him.

"Hey," he says walking up to her. He hands her his

schedule.

She looks it over, "Harsh, you on the other side of the school."

"What?"

"Yeah. Gym. I can't take you that far I'll be really late."

"It's okay. I think I'll be able to find the gym. Big open Olympus stadium looking room right?" She laughs until she sees Kenny walking up to them. Lucian looks behind him, "Whoa man, we weren't laughing at you," He says putting up his arms.

"Nah, it's okay. Sorry about earlier I'm kind of a hot head. You were funny back there. Nobody's ever put her in her place and it was about damn time."

"Oh. Okay, well I gotta get going I have gym next—"

"No way, me too, I'll bring you there," Kenny places his arm around Lucian's neck and escorts him the opposite way as Nixie. Lucian looks back at Nixie she mouths, *sorry*, and disappears down the stairs.

Kenny swings open the gym doors just as the second bell rings. Lucian stares at the enormous gym with bleachers that reach the ceiling. Banners cover the walls with the school's mascot on them, and flags hanging down in a form of triumph over the opposing schools.

"You guys win a lot huh?" Lucian says to Kenny who is no longer by his side.

"Yea we do," A peppy girl's voice responds instead. Lucian looks over to a group a girls stretching in their red tight shirts and black mini shorts.

"What?"

"We always win," the pretty blonde repeats. She walks up to him her high ponytail swings behind her, "My name's Missy."

"Lu," he says sticking out his hand. She giggles, "Okay," she shakes his hand. He smiles back until he sees the girl from his first period come out of the locker room. Missy waves her hand in front of his face, "you okay there?"

"Yeah, I'm fine," he says distantly. He can't wrap his mind around her.

"That's Melanie. She's kinda evil."

"What?" he says caught off guard, *how could something that radiant be evil?*

"Yeah, she always dresses in black and she doesn't talk to anyone, like I try talking to her and she just glares at me. It's like she hates the world and everything in it for no reason."

He smiles a daring smirk then runs over to Melanie,

"Hey, Melanie," She doesn't look up.

"Oh this is sad," Missy says to her friends as they look on from the center court.

"So first two periods together, pretty cool huh," Melanie ignores his attempts and begins stretching, "it's okay, you don't have to talk. I love talking. I also love indie music," he pauses when she hesitates. Knowing he got somewhere he continues, "So, I have these tickets to, *Long Death Coming*, but I don't have anyone to go with. Would you like to come?"

"Why ask me?" She says skeptically.

"Well, I was going to take my friends at my other school, but I moved and I'm not going to drive all the way back there," She stares at him skeptic, "I had the tickets changed to the one a few towns over," her face lightens up, "I was talking to Missy and she mentioned that you like that type of music..." as soon as he mentioned her name he knew it was a mistake.

Melanie drops any sense of excitement, "Missy?" She questions looks back at the girls who are watching their whole conversation, "Why would she want me to go out with you?"

"Why not? What does she have against you?"

Melanie opens her mouth to say something, but catches

herself and says, "Look, I know you're new here and everything—"

"So you were listening in class?" he jokes.

"Yeah, well, it's hard not to with your voice," she says.

"Ouch," he says and grabs his chest.

"But Missy and I never see eye to eye so with her helping—"

"Look, forget that I mentioned Missy. Would you go with me for me?" he smiles handsomely.

She laughs out loud; her laughter makes Missy and her friends gasp. She catches Lucian off guard as well. Her laugh is even more beautiful than her voice, "I'll have to think about it," Lucian's face lights up his lips stretch from ear to ear, "That doesn't mean yes."

He walks backwards towards center court, "But you didn't say no," he calls back as the coach blows his whistle. Lucian smiles proudly as he walks past Missy.

After the suicide sprints, Lucian can't think of anything except food. He follows his nose the lunchroom. The room is surrounded by wall length glass windows that show and entire picnic area outside. The only wall in the room is covered in a mural. He passes Kenny and his friends and enters the long line for the food and notices Adam in

line in front of him. He tries to get his attention to apologize again, but he's interrupted. Kenny and his friends laugh loudly as they walk through the line picking what they want and cutting to the front.

"Hey Kenny!" Adam shouts tossing a spoon full of mystery meat sauce at his jersey.

"You idiot, I have a game today!" Kenny shouts plowing through the line of kids to get to Adam. Adam laughs until Kenny gets close. He jacks him up by his shirt.

"Here they go again," Lucian looks behind him to see Melanie.

"Hey, I didn't even notice you."

"Most people don't."

"I'm pretty sure I would if I saw you," She smiles a small smile, but it's still a smile.

"Should I stop them?" She shrugs and picks up a tray. Lucian turns his attention to the boys when he hears a loud bong sound. He sees Kenny bounce Adam off of the glass covering the food. Adam strikes him back into the salad bar. The lunchroom fills with cheers.

"Oh shit," Lucian says leaving the line. He runs up on Kenny and peels him off of Adam. He pushes Adam back with his other arm separating the fight.

A husky voice shouts, "What's going on here?" The lunchroom silences and everyone slowly pretends to eat while they watch the dean walk up to the three boys.

"Nothing, everything's fine now," Lucian speaks first.

"Really? Because I have a salad bar and broken heating glass that says otherwise," The Dean stares down at the trio, "Community service. All of you. Adam you still need to finish up last episode's punishment," Lucian tries to speak up again, but The Dean throws his hand up shutting his mouth before he got a sound out. He glances at Kenny and Adam and shakes his head then walks out.

"Why did you get involved?" Kenny asks.

"Nobody wants you here. You get in everyone's way," Adam says then disappears into the crowd. Kenny pats him on the back hard then walks out the door to the outside patio leaving Lucian in the cafe.

"Here," Melanie hands Lucian his tray.

"Thanks, you didn't have to."

"And you didn't have to break them up."

"How often does that happen?" Lucian continues the conversation at a nearby table. Melanie goes to answer when Nixie appears on the other side of the table.

"Hi," She says cheerful.

"Hello," Lucian answers, Melanie just looks at her stunned.

"That was A-mazing!" Nixie says smiling at Lucian.

"Thanks."

"But we all want to know, why?"

"We?" Lucian asks looking around he sees people staring at him, "Well I-uh don't know I didn't want to them to get carried away."

"Oh. Well, there is the tri-annual carnival happening in a few weeks you both should come."

"I don't think so," Melanie rudely denies.

"I'll see."

Nixie smiles at Lucian ignoring Melanie, "Perfect 'kay bye."

Later that day just as the last bell rings, Nixie finds Lucian leaving the school. She runs up to his side, "You are really friendly."

"Hey Nix, and yeah, so?"

"No, it's not bad. I'm just saying nobody is able to be friends with Melanie. She's mean to everyone. But somehow you- did you actually make her laugh?"

"She is human," he says.

"I know. It's just weird, sorry. I'm happy for her though."

He waves, "Well, see you tomorrow."

Lucian sits up in his bed with the window open and the lamp on next to him. He chows down on his chips as he stares intently into a book. He glances at the clock reminding him that it's past midnight. He closes his book and pushes it off his bed.

Lucian finds himself standing in the hall just outside the cafeteria. He looks around and feels something is off about the school. The once colorful walls now droop with a saddened grey color scheme. He reaches forward for the door and he flashes into the center of the picnic area. He sees a hooded figure out of the corner of his eyes. He looks over despite his building fear. The hooded figure raises its head slightly and flickers a few inches in front of him. He stumbles backward as it reaches its arm out towards him. The black fabric peels back from his arm and sags. Its arm charcoaled and deformed reaches for his face. Lucian smacks the hand away from him and he whips around.

He only gets a few steps when his peers transform into more hooded figures. They turn their attention to him. He backs himself into a corner and covers his arms over his eyes, "No!" He peaks through his sleeves and sees a bright glowing light aluminates through the darkness. He squints, "Melanie?" She looks over at him, but her gloomy face

scares him more than the hooded figures in front of him. Another bright light appears and three more follow. The light increases as the hooded figure close in on him. They wrap their hands around Lucian and an intense light blinds him.

Lucian bolts up in his bed dripping with sweat. His eyes practically bug out of his head. He glances around his room. He sees a figure in the corner of his room. He must still be thinking of his dream because when it turned on his lamp there's nothing there. He drops his head back on his pillow and glances over at the hot Dorito chips on his nightstand. He gets up and tosses the chips in the trash as he leaves his room.