

Charm Bracelet  
Flash Fiction (7-9) First Place  
Bridget Scranton  
8th Grade

I should've brought the axe. I was going to. I practiced swinging with it for months. I even learned how to throw it at targets. Despite that, I couldn't bring myself to take it off; my charm bracelet. As soon as I tried slipping it down butterflies started attacking each other in my stomach. And I'd worn the bracelet for so long there was a tan mark on my skin as clear as if it were a tattoo. The charms had the essence of my friends, my family. I love my charm bracelet. It's loaded with so many charms gathered from all throughout the world that it functions the same as a map. It reminds me that those places still exist, even if I will never see them again. So, when they said one item only, I didn't bring my axe. I brought my charm bracelet.

Considering everything, I'm glad I did. Some people brought guns. However, without bullets they were nothing more than unwieldy weapons that did nothing against the people who had loaded guns. The same people who limited us to one item. The same people who ripped us away from everything outside our little boxes. I brought my charm bracelet. I never take it off. Each of the charms is tied to memories that weigh me down, but keep me grounded. I remember the outside world. I remember the beautiful sites, and the wonderful people. I remember pain and sadness, hope and happiness. They tried to cloister me from those things, but they let me keep one thing. That was their fatal flaw. I don't know what's going on in the outside world, but I know what used to, and I can build from there. They built me a box to break me, but I'm building a buttressed wall to protect myself. I have everything I need to survive, and they can see that.

They have surrendered: they will let me go. I'm too much of a problem for me to stay here. They will give me a gas mask so everyone thinks they're being humane, just like how they let us bring one item. It's a veneer, a small layer of goodness to hide more malignant intentions. They think I will rot in the radiated lands, but I won't. I know the lands, I have a map right here on my wrist, one that I've memorized. Memories will guide me till I'm safe in the homes with bunkers, and welcoming people. I have one month to say goodbye to everyone still here. They ask me why I'm leaving. They don't understand, they say they can barely remember living outside. So I've decided to leave something else, too. A charm for each of them, and I will keep the bracelet. I hope they remember me, and maybe someday remember the reason why I'm leaving. I may not remember each of the memories tied to the charms once I leave them, but I'm going to make news ones.

Hurricane Katrina  
Flash Fiction (7-9) Second Place  
Maddie Hager 7th Grade

"Katrina has now reached a category 5. With winds up to 174 miles per hour, it is ripping through the Bahamas destroying everything in its path." Mom turns off the radio. We're hiding in the basement, huddling together, shaking from fear. The storm is coming fast. We can hear the wind as it approaches. There's a loud crash outside and the lights go dark.

"There go the power lines," mom says, a sense of fear in her voice.

We can hear the rain pounding on the walls upstairs. Windows shattering. Cabinets falling. As the rain water runs in through the egress windows, we move toward the stairs to try to avoid it. The storm surge comes in, filling our basement with water. One foot, two feet, three, four, and we're almost completely under water.

"Let's go upstairs," mom yelled over the sound of the wind, with more worry in her voice than the last time. As we made our way up the stairs, we could see the damage. Everything was destroyed, broken and scattered across the floor. The water was starting to pour in through the windows. We moved to the bedroom to try to stay dry. Hours passed. What was four feet had turned into six. We were standing on tables trying to avoid the water, when mom said, "We need to get to the roof." Sitting on the roof we had no cover. With the rain and wind pounding on us, we huddled together waiting for the boats. The water rose from six feet to ten.

"When the boats come they will save us." Mom repeated over and over again. It seemed as though she was telling herself more than me. We sat for hours as the water rose. Ten feet turned to twelve, then fifteen. We sat waiting, feeling more and more helpless with each minute passing. The water came to be too high for our one-story home. Fifteen feet turned to sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen. Twenty feet. The water became too high for us to stand on the roof. With the entire house underwater, we struggled to keep above. As we both gasped for air, the water rose over our heads. Mom went under, and I didn't see her come up. Suddenly, I heard a noise in the distance. The boats! They were here! But in the rush of the moment I didn't realize that as I climbed onto the boat, my mom didn't. As we slowly drove away, I tried to go back for her, but they wouldn't let me. It was too late. She was gone.

Good Morning  
Flash Fiction (7-9) Third Place  
Paige Auxier  
8th Grade

Her blue eyes open that morning to the creak of a door and the jingling of keys. She doesn't know why she gets up anymore and she wonders if she had stopped living long before she stopped trying. She turns toward a photograph on the nightstand and fixes her eyes on two unrecognizable beaming faces. Her throat aches and she can still feel his hands around it. She forces her body out of bed and drags her feet to the vanity and looks at a woman in the mirror. The marks left by his hand are still visible on her neck and her lip is covered in dry blood. Colors have become less vibrant over time, and when she looks out the window, grass in the front yard is nearly gray. She uses makeup as a bandaid to cover up the damage and sunglasses to cover the hurricane forming in her eyes and the bruises around them. But band aids have only ever helped to cover wounds but have never done much to heal them.

No matter how bad she wants to leave, the weight of the diamond ring on her left hand makes it impossible for her to move. Her heart was once filled with passion and delight. After being smashed over and over again, the only thing left is a few scattered pieces. She turns toward the water bottle on her dresser and wishes she could jump in and drift away, better yet remember how to breathe because at the moment she feels like she's drowning. Her feet threaten to run away but her head forces them not. In the kitchen waiting for her is an apology that she doesn't want, and flowers she will throw away. In the kitchen waiting for her is her life.

She makes her way downstairs holding back all of her emotions until all that is visible is fictitious smile. His breath smells of alcohol as he hugs her and instead of running out the door she pulls out a chair and joins him for breakfast.