

## The Thing With Feathers

*Take these broken wings and learn to fly.*

*All your life, you were only waiting for this moment to arise.*

Perched on a rusting bench, feet tucked into an intricate crossed position, with her eyes closed was a small girl. No more than fourteen, her petite stature was covered by jeans rolled three times over and a baggy cottoned sweater with frayed edges and worn material. The wind blowing through the park rustled her feathery brown hair, which limply hung on her shoulders, and her uneven bangs glided messily across her forehead. On top of her head rested ancient headphones with chords trickling down to plug into a battered Walkman; although it was old, the music was still clear. Next to her, on the ground, sat a maroon backpack with one strap missing, and a label in Sharpie, reading “Juniper”.

This girl, Juniper, sat swaying in time with the breeze around her and the song in her ears. Mornings like these, when she beat the rest of humanity to Libero Park, were her favorites. After a frigid winter, the transition into spring was sublime and she took full advantage of the feelings. The habit of going to the park before school became a ritual over the last two years, since being inside her house was just too much. So, here she sat - serenely in the sun - accompanied only by The Beatles.

*Fly like an eagle, let my spirit carry me.*

With the change in song, Juniper’s brown eyes popped open behind her dainty, wire rimmed glasses. The rest of her body stayed still. Slowly, she turned her head towards the opposite end of the bench where a baby bird fluttered, chirping innocently in her direction. It was tiny and blue, and to Juniper it was beautiful; with trepidation she reached out a single finger until she was close enough to touch the bluebird’s wings with a gentle stroke. The bird quickly lifted itself into the air and darted away from her touch, leaving Juniper reveling at its flight of passage, wishing in the back of her mind she could do the same: just fly away.

As more time passed, Juniper watched the life in the park grow from the small animals emerging into the sunlight to men on their way to work for 8 hours in an office. Offices, Juniper thought, were just cages for the human soul, and she would certainly never find herself working in one. But, this didn’t stop the increase of bustle surrounding her; it wasn’t until a man rushing

by checked his wristwatch that Juniper thought to check her own. It was brown leather, worn down much like the rest of her belongings, but the hands still ticked in sync every second, so she could always depend on it.

Plus, it had been her mom's.

It was 7:36 and school started at 8:00 - the walk was 10 minutes, and if she wanted to claim her classroom seat she'd have to leave now. Clipping her Walkman to the loop of her jeans, grabbing her bag, and taking one last look at the nature around her, Juniper put one small foot in front of the other and started to cross the town to school.

Soaring through the park her eyes stayed focused on the ground, looking for any small objects that she could use for her crafts. The dew left over from the morning made the grassy sidewalk squish with mud, and her Converse shoes gained even more stains. Juniper glanced up only once when crossing a busy street, using the memory of the routine path to take her to school.

That is, until her backpack broke. The single strap that was hanging on by a thread had snapped, sending the pouch plummeting to the ground and unzipping, engulfing her in a hurricane of paper. Everything was displayed on the moist cement: magazines, old exams, her favorite photos. The bolts Mr. Williams had given her last week rattled around her feet; worst of all, was the marbles. He had found them in his classroom just yesterday and had graciously given them to Juniper, knowing she'd find an eclectic use for them. Now, the small orbs ricocheted off the ground, spilling all around her. Roses crept into Juniper's cheeks and ears as the cackles reverberated off the school building and embarrassment piled onto her now vacant back.

"There's Loony Juny losing her marbles," rang out a haughty voice - it was Agatha, always was.

"Literally!" one of her blonde inferiors shrieked, clutching her abdomen while shaking from the laughter.

Juniper wished someone, anyone, would fly to her rescue; she grasped helplessly at the marbles around her, but it was no use. They rolled into crevices and bushes, moving as quickly as she wished she could move into the high school. Giving up on reclaiming the marbles, and stuffing her papers into the now broken backpack she rose. Pushing her glasses back up gently, she wanted to say something to her classmates, to show she wasn't as frail as they thought. But when she looked into their cynical eyes and saw their twisted smirks, all she could muster was an incoherent chirp before darting into the building.

*Rocketman, burning out his fuse up here alone.*

Juniper clicked off the music as she sat in the back of her math classroom, and now she really was alone. Her first hours weren't anything special; math, history, physical education, and lunch were the epitome of boredom. She kept to herself, singing the songs in her head to keep out the unwelcome thoughts. Throughout the course of the day the gossip of her humiliation fluttered around the ninth grade, and she knew that the stares in the hallways were really just people trying to imagine 'Loony Juny' clutching at her spilt marbles on the ground. But, she ignored them. It was time for English, with Mr. Williams, and that was what she waited for with anticipation every day.

Even before she could talk, her mom read to her, sometimes even her dad, too. They would sit on the couch, like any normal, happy family, and her mom would tell the stories of *The Wizard of Oz* and *Narnia*, just to name her favorites - young kids traveling to new, magical worlds. It seemed so simple, and she frequently hoped to find her own rainbow or wardrobe. But that was why she liked English so much; she could immerse herself in these stories and imagine what it would be like to live them. Certainly, it would be much better than her life now.

"Juniper, how are you today?" asked a warm voice, interrupting her moment of nostalgia.

She looked up in surprise - she hadn't realized she'd gotten to Mr. Williams room. But here he was, looking down at her with crinkled eyes and an exuberant smile. He was tall and skinny, always dressed in freshly ironed buttoned down shirts with patterned cuffs. His hair was full and voluminous, specially cared for, and he peered at Juniper through his large glasses that illuminated his blue eyes. As other students filed into the room past him, they looked at the man with slightly humored expressions; today his green shirt was decorated with pink flamingos, neither of which entirely matched the other. But that's what Juniper loved about him - he wasn't afraid to be himself especially when others looked at him oddly for it.

"Hi Mr. Williams," she peeped, turning her lips slightly.

His eyes lit up, clearly remembering something, and reached out to touch Juniper's arm.

"I just remembered what I found at home yesterday! I think you're going to love it for your project."

Mr. Williams ushered Juniper into his classroom and over to his desk; he opened up a drawer and revealed a jar full of jewels and beads.

"I know that you prefer your tools, but I found these while cleaning out the basement studio and figured anything could use a bit of dazzle!"

She took the small jar, smiling in appreciation, and turned to her corner of the room. Her class was reading *The Outsiders*, but Juniper had read that two summers ago. In fact, it was the last book her mom shared with her. When Mr. Williams announced what they were reading, she was afraid to mention it to him, but did so anyway. He was accepting, just like always, and told her that this spring she would have a special project.

Juniper had recognized from an early age that her English skills were many bars above her peers. Usually, she was quite inattentive during class since her natural talent in reading and writing got her the grades she wanted. But with this new, special project she was able to explore; Mr. Williams had given her *The Shawshank Redemption* and Juniper was enamored with the story. Hope, love, and fear all working together for a brilliant escape was just what she wanted to read about - and, it was inspiration. All class she flipped through the pages attempting to find the motifs about freedom she knew were in there, wondering what the best way to discuss the symbolism behind a rock hammer would be. Of course there were the not-so subtle whispers surrounding her, murmurs of “freak” and “try-hard” swarmed through the classroom, but Juniper found solace in the words of Stephen King.

Once there were only a few minutes left in class, Mr. Williams brought everyone’s attention to himself.

He cleared his throat, announcing, “Don’t forget, class! Tomorrow we’ll be doing our show and tell of your creative projects. Drop them off in my room in the morning, and anticipate being amazed by each other’s unique creations!”

How could Juniper ever forget about their show and tell tomorrow? She’d been working on her project for weeks now, and if she could just fix a few loose screws tonight, it would be ready. For her, the project wasn’t about the grade; it would be her own rock hammer.

The bell rang and every student rushed out the door, anxious to return home to their after school activities. Juniper hung back for a few moments, and walked over to Mr. William’s desk placing her book down.

“I finished the story,” she said, in her soft spoken voice.

He beamed with benevolence, “That’s great! Did you like it?”

After seeing his excitement, Juniper nodded eagerly, “Yes, of course I did. I’m just so happy he escaped at the end. Do you have any other suggestions for me?”

“Well, have you ever read *To Kill a Mockingbird*?” he asked.

Juniper shook her head, and made a note of the title in her mind.

“Thank you for the beads,” she said, “and the recommendation. I’ll see you tomorrow, Mr. Williams.”

She left him in his classroom, watching her with a bemused expression as she walked away carrying her broken backpack in both arms and pulling her Walkman over her ears.

*Rocketman,*

*And I think it's gonna be a long, long time.*

Juniper migrated through the town of Mt. Libero on her way back home; she passed her favorite place, the library, with its large glass windows that reached all the way to the top, hundreds of feet above her. She saw small birds flapping near the roof, taking deep dives, but their robust, indestructible wings pulled them away from the plummet. Juniper wanted to go up there, look around at the town below her and feel on top of the world, but she had to get home - her project was waiting.

It only took another 10 minutes, but eventually her feet left the smooth cemented sidewalk and reached a gravel path. The trail twisted between stark trees until it led to a small house they had moved into two years ago. The paint was peeling on the sides, and the roof had its shingles twisted from storms in the past. Surrounding the house was pale, yellow grass - the spring sunshine hadn't revived it yet. Instead of plants outlining the base there was trash littering the scenery which had blown away from the cans resting by the front door. Juniper kicked through this as she climbed up the porch steps and pushed the door open.

The inside of the house was even worse than the outside; the strip of light that broke into the kitchen reflected off the broken bottles resting on the table, their few grams of contents seeping into the unopened bills. There was a distinct musk of alcohol and smoke that made Juniper's stomach roll over every time she stepped inside. The TV was still on - her dad had forgotten to turn it off again - and the static filled her ears. Juniper walked over and switched it off, submerging herself into silence. Well, except for her music.

*She's a good girl,*

*Loves her mama*

Tom Petty's lyrics made Juniper look around the trashed living room at the small mantle above the window: on it, was her favorite picture. She wasn't even four in the image, and her parents looked eternities younger. Her mom was beautiful; she had dark brown hair tied up into a messy ponytail with a pencil sticking out of it. She was lying on the ground, feet kicked into the air, with her book resting at her elbows, and watching her husband and daughter with a

smile. Juniper's dad had her in his arms, extending her body high above him, allowing her to soar over them all. Her arms were outstretched, and her entire face was lit with happiness. Juniper wished she could remember the feeling exactly - of innate peace and power flying in her dad's embrace - but it was just a memory, not even that. The only proof it existed was this photo; comparing it to life now, it seemed fake.

Once Juniper's mom died everything changed. Her dad was once full of a childish sense of adventure, but now he was only filled with the desire to drink away his grief. It wasn't until her mom was gone that Juniper realized she was the glue - without her, they fell apart. At school, all her teachers would say, "I'm always here to talk, Juniper. Anytime," but she never wanted to. The only two people she wanted to talk about what happened with were gone. One, gone forever, and the other was a different person now. She couldn't remember the last time, in the past two years, that her dad had held an actual conversation with her; most of the time he was gone at work, but in the few hours they were home together he sat lazily on his couch, yelling at the TV. This was why Juniper wanted - no, needed - to escape. She had a house, but it wasn't a home.

She realized she was staring at the picture while reflecting, and broke her gaze back into the kitchen where she had set her backpack down. Remembering it was broken, she rustled through a few drawers of miscellaneous objects before finding a sewing kit. She grabbed that, a sandwich made up from the morning, and retreated down into the basement where she lived.

*And I'm free,  
Free falling.*

The lower level of their compartmentalized house was cluttered with the past: Christmas decorations, costumes, and picture books were all covered in dust. Time had seemed to stop in the basement, forever preserving and withholding all the memories. Juniper moved past the boxes and shelves and opened up the door that led to her own nest.

Her room was small. A mattress without a bed frame was tucked in the corner with mismatched pillows and blankets piled on top that kept her warm. Her clothes and shoes were folded on the ground, due to the lack of a closet. There was a bathroom, complete with a sink, toilet, and shower, attached to the room but only out of necessity. It wasn't much, but she made it her own. Next to her mattress she had decorated her walls with arbitrary posters and papers that she worshiped; images of NASA's Apollo missions, Emily Dickinson's "Hope is the Thing with Feathers", and butterfly stickers filled the empty spaces. Looking at her muses, Juniper

longed to finish her project that sat hidden in her bathroom, but it would have to wait until her dad went to bed.

He wouldn't be long now, since she heard their front door squeal open and his heavy boots stomp on the floor upstairs. Juniper closed her door quietly, and sat timidly in the corner of her mattress, peering at the closed wood through her glasses, waiting for him to walk in. The stomps above toured the living room and kitchen for a few moments, until beginning to cascade down the stairs, echoing closer and closer to her, matching the beat of her heart. For a moment, the pounding outside stopped, until the doorknob slowly opened and Juniper's dad stood there facing her.

He was tall and muscled - the result of carpentry - although his stomach, which used to be toned, began to spill over his pant's buckle due to unhealthy indulging. His dark hair was overgrown, reaching his ears, and a messy stubble covered his face. The only brightness to him were the striking sky blue eyes, but even those were clouded over. Leaning against the doorframe he was a man of grief. Unfortunately, the grief had won.

Juniper felt small, like a mouse hunted by a hawk, with him staring down at her, brown eyes meeting the blue. They had gone days without speaking before, so every time he emerged she struggled with what to say. But, she knew she had to say something.

"Hi dad," she whispered.

He didn't say anything back, just kept piercing her with a gaze she couldn't read - was he angry? Sad? Drunk? Eventually his eyes left hers and looked around the room, falling towards her broken backpack next to her on the floor.

Clearing his throat, his gravelly voice asked, "What happened there?"

"Nothing," Juniper replied a little too quickly; she took a breath to steady herself, "It just got stuck at school and ripped."

She could tell he didn't believe her, but didn't question it at all. Somehow, that was worse. He had to know that school was a cage for her, even more of a cage than this house was. Besides for Mr. Williams' class, the eight hours she spent there were a cyclical experience of judgment and isolation. But, he stayed stoic in the doorway, not daring - or not wanting - to discuss it any further. Their staring contest continued for a few moments longer, until Juniper broke away, glancing down to her twiddling thumbs torn in anxiety.

A sigh came from her dad before he mumbled, "Well, you get some sleep. Goodbye," and with that he turned on his heavy boots, and climbed back up the stairs leaving Juniper alone.

A goodbye, not even a goodnight, she thought to herself. She realized her eyes had grown slightly misty, but she blinked away the drops before they could be released. At least her

dad wouldn't be coming back down, and she could finally finish her creation. She closed her bedroom door before opening the one to the bathroom. Yanking back the shower curtain she smiled at what was hidden, and delicately carried it to the middle of her room, where she stood and looked down at it with wonder.

It was a compilation of all sorts of items: screws, wires, cloth, string, and soon enough Mr. Williams' gems. They were twisted in intricate patterns, perfectly strung together with physics and hope. Juniper had researched all there was to know about this, had meticulously planned it out over hundreds of pieces of paper, and could feel her heart flutter in anticipation. All of the hard work culminated into her escape - her very own wings.

The mechanics of the wings were complete, and although she had not tested them yet, she had an understanding they would work; she just had to add a few finishing touches. For starters, there was only one strap to attach to her back and she needed two. The first one was the missing strap from her backpack, but she hadn't wanted to use both of them. Now though, she figured it was pointless to not use the second strap since it was already broken. If she could fly away from here, surely there would be a place to find a new backpack. Cutting off the limp fabric still attached to the bag, Juniper began to sew the maroon material to her gorgeous wings, securing the way she would be lifted into the air. After the attachment was complete, she pulled out the gems she'd received and rustled through her bag to also find a case of Elmer's glue. For nearly three hours she spent the time dotting the pieces of metal with drops of glue, and sticking the sparkles on. Mr. Williams was right - anything could use a bit of dazzle.

*Cause I'm as free as a bird now,  
And this bird you can not change.*

Once she was finally complete, and satisfied, Juniper took a step back and gazed at what she'd done. The wings were pretty, but their possibilities were beautiful. She showered quickly and brushed her teeth, before climbing under her blankets, smiling herself to sleep and dreaming of her first flight.

--

Juniper woke up peacefully; she had gone to bed feeling on top of the world, and her wings sat on her floor, ready to be used. She rolled out of bed, eagerly changing into an old Wonder Woman shirt that had been her mom's and the same pair of jeans from yesterday. She



detangled her hair and brushed her teeth, before nearly tripping over the wings that still sat in the center of her den. Slow down, she told herself, inhaling before resuming her activities. Juniper was excited, but it wouldn't do any good to rush and break the wings. She reached for her backpack and remembered that both straps were gone - she'd have to go without it. Shoving her Walkman over her ears, and holding her prized wings in a bundle she flitted up the stairs and opened the front door.

It was raining.

Luckily, next to the door was a clear umbrella she could use. Now, balancing both the folded wings and an umbrella, she stepped outside, allowing the pitter patter to surround her. It wasn't pouring, only sprinkling, but it was enough rain to make the birds hide away in the trees - they can't fly in the rain. Running at times, and walking at others, Juniper made it to school early to place the wings on Mr. Williams' desk and stride to her first hour class.

The day was long. The students had already forgotten about her marbles incident yesterday, their attention was turned to new drama, but Juniper still felt their cold expressions everywhere she went. All day though she kept reminding herself that she had her wings. And once her peers saw her magnificent feat they'd finally look at her differently. The minutes seemed to take decades, but eventually it was time to go to Mr. Williams, and Juniper bounced through the halls with anticipation.

She bounded into his classroom with more energy she knew existed, startling Mr. Williams, who sat at his desk by the wings.

"Juniper, hello!"

"Hi, Mr. Williams," she uttered out of breath, grabbing the wings and pulling them close to her body, "these are mine!"

"My goodness, they're breathtaking. What do they do?" he asked, intrigued at the sight of her enthusiasm.

She paused for a moment. Wasn't it obvious what they did?

"They fly," she said.

He was taken aback at first, but shook off the surprise and returned a warm smile.

"Of course they fly, Juniper. What was I thinking? Go sit down now so we can begin."

She walked past the line of freshmen gawking at her from their seats; never before had Juniper been able to keep her chin up while doing so, but right now that changed. Now she had her wings, something no one else had, and all their smirks would go away soon enough.

"I guess Loony Juny still hasn't found her marbles," whispered Agatha to her comrades, hiding their giggles behind nail polish and bangled bracelets.

Taking a seat, Juniper hugged her wings closer to her chest; her hands were shaking and her heart was pounding, but her hope was indeed a thing with feathers - they had to work.

The other presentations seemed to drag on forever, but Juniper wanted to go last to end with a spectacular performance. She paid no attention to her peers, but instead spent the time imagining what the wings would feel like on her back and how they'd lift her off her feet. She was so deep in the imagination, that she didn't even hear Mr. Williams call her name the first time.

"Juniper?"

She snapped her head towards him, pushing her glasses up while realizing it was her turn to go. With extreme coordination she slid out of her seat and walked to the front of the room. Juniper stood there for a moment, looking at her creation for the last time, and pulled the maroon straps over her shoulder; she could feel the rest of the material fall down against her side, and her hands found the handles to hold onto at the tips. The chuckles she expected from her classmates were nonexistent. Rather, every eye was on her, wondering if it really would work. She closed her eyes, taking a breath before beginning to run. Although petite, Juniper's leaps created a wide circle around the classroom, gaining momentum while flapping the wings up and down maniacally before reaching the time of departure. With all the strength inside her she bent her knees and exploded upwards, allowing her moving wings to pull her towards the ceiling, and float in the air for just a moment too long.

Juniper landed on one knee with her eyes on the ground, and for a full minute didn't dare to look up - had she really done it, or was it her imagination? It wasn't until Mr. Williams cleared his throat that she rotated her neck towards him. He was flabbergasted, staring at her, trying to solve her like a mystery, with a look of utter astonishment. She glanced around the room and saw the children with their mouths wide, and eyes even wider. The silence was thrilling and terrifying; Juniper decided to stand.

"Everyone please give a round of applause for Juniper," croaked Mr. Williams, still struggling to find his voice, "That was... phenomenal."

The round of applause was not orchestral or deafening - in fact, not everyone even clapped - but that wasn't what made Juniper grin as she took her seat. She had done it, she had flown, and could finally be free. In perfect timing, the school bell rang just seconds after her conclusion and the class rushed out of the room. It was Friday, the end of the week, and they couldn't be more excited for the luxury of the weekend.

Mr. Williams was still stuck in the front, watching as Juniper bundled up her wings again, so she gave him a small wave while leaving the class as a goodbye. She marched through

the hallways with a new confidence she'd never felt before; surely, everyone would know her as 'the girl who flew' now. However, just before reaching the doors to lead outside the snarky voice of Agatha echoed behind her.

"Look everyone, there's Loony Juny with her loony wings!" she cackled, followed by a storm of laughter bringing red into Juniper's ears. Didn't they see her fly? Weren't they impressed?

Agatha arched her eyebrows and gawked at Juniper standing there with her wings, unresponsive to her comment, "Did you really think that a pair of silly wings would make you cool? You didn't even fly, don't kid yourself."

But she had flown - Juniper knew it. Her feet had dangled inches above the ground in a way no human's had before, opposing gravity like only a bird could.

Hadn't she?

The thoughts racing through her mind paralyzed her and she couldn't move a muscle as Agatha edged closer, a predator to prey.

"Is Loony Juny scared?" she pouted, tilting her head to the side.

A voice behind the bully chimed in, "Are you gonna run home and cry to mommy?"

"Oh wait," whispered Agatha, whose face was only inches away from Juniper's, "You don't have a mommy to run home to."

The words sucked the air out of Juniper's lungs and she wanted to scream, cry, and run at the same time; but the conflict of which to choose delayed her a second and Agatha reached her pink painted nails towards the prized wings and ripped them from Juniper's grasp.

"No," was all she could breathe while helplessly watching Agatha retreat to her friends and toss the clumped wings around and around, making Juniper dizzy in fear. She could see them moving closer to the doors, to the front of the school, and in a heart wrenching instant two boys held open the doors as Agatha spun like a ballerina outside, letting the wings take their own flight and fall to the cement.

"Oops," she said, with a shrug and a grin to her followers.

The cluster of people all moved outside, purposefully walking around the pieces of wings dusting the ground, and laughed giddily as though nothing had happened. Juniper was still frozen, gazing out the glass to the abomination her freedom had become. In slow motion she forced herself to move towards it, through the doors and to the ground, where she sank to pick up the broken pieces.

"Juniper, what happened?" asked a familiar voice, startling her from the grief building inside. She turned and saw Mr. Williams towering over her.

With a shaking voice she replied, "It was an accident, that's all. I tripped and it broke."

She was praying he wouldn't ask any more questions, wouldn't offer her help and just leave so she could run away without looking back. But that wasn't who Mr. Williams was.

"Let me help you clean this up and I'll give you a ride home. Is that okay?"

Juniper rose, steadying both herself and her voice; she needed to show Mr. Williams she was fine so he'd just leave.

"No, I'll be fine, Mr. Williams," she lied, "I'll see you Monday."

She knew he wanted to say more, to ask the questions burning inside him, but he just sighed.

"I'll see you Monday, Juniper."

And he walked away, leaving her to pull the Walkman over her ears, and gather all the loose screws in her hands. She had no bag, so she balanced all the pieces while beginning the walk home.

It didn't take long for the rain to start. At first it was just the same sprinkles from the morning; it barely phased Juniper in her determination to get home and fix her wings. She kept her head facing the ground so drops wouldn't sit on her glasses, and strode forward. Eventually though, the light sprinkling turned to heavy water drops which poured along her back and drenched herself and the wings. She had forgotten her umbrella in Mr. Williams' room so her glasses eventually became fogged over, clouding her surroundings. Her hair stuck to her neck and her shirt clung to her skin; Juniper began running, hopelessly trying to dodge the endless raindrops until she stumbled up her own porch and through the front door.

*I'm learning how to fly, but I ain't got wings,  
Coming down is the hardest thing.*

She didn't stop to even turn on the lights, just ran into the kitchen and dropped the pile of mechanics on the table, wiping the bills and bottles to the ground and the water off her glasses. It was still light outside so she used the sun to illuminate the project in front of her that she was already piecing back together; Juniper found the holes in her wings and put the screws, bolts, and fabric back in place to restore what had been broken. It wasn't as beautiful as it was before, but she hoped they would still work.

In the midst of her reveling and distracted by her music, she missed the sound of a car pulling up the gravel road and into her garage. She even missed the sound of her dad's heavy boots beating up the porch. It wasn't until he stumbled through the door she became aware of

her company. Instantaneously Juniper could tell he had been drinking; the slight sway in his step and clouded eyes clued her in, but as he got closer the unmistakable booze on his breath was a dead giveaway. The rain outside pounded on the roof, and Juniper sank back to the corner of her kitchen to avoid an interaction, pulling her Walkman down to her neck.

Her dad licked his lips and edged forward, "What are you doing up here?" he slurred.

"I just got home from school," she whispered, catching sight of herself in a mirror seeing how pale and meek she seemed. Her dad turned his head towards the table - he saw the wings.

"And what are these?" he asked in a sardonic tone, stroking a dusty finger along the tips.

Juniper couldn't let him take the wings - her escape - so she moved in front of the table, placing herself between the repaired creation and her dad.

"They're mine from a project in school, nothing to worry about."

"Then why," he said, drawing closer and gripping her arm, "are you protecting them?"

Juniper's fear prevented her from moving, but she needed to get away.

In a moment of bravery she locked eyes with the man, "let me go."

But he didn't.

Juniper twisted her arm around in his fist and slid out of his grasp; she kicked her dad in the knees, and in his intoxicated state he struggled to keep balance. As he tumbled to the ground, she yanked the wings off the table and darted away. Juniper stumbled over his legs, and for a brief second her dad reached the wings knocking a few screws loose. But, she didn't notice while regaining her momentum and flying out the front door.

Despite the rain, Juniper didn't turn around; she kept running until reaching the gravel road, and still continued as it took her into town. There was no life outside, nobody to stop her, and she knew exactly where to go: the library.

Its glass windows had thousands of droplets trickling down, pooling in the grass around the building. She ran inside, dripping water with every footstep, and began to climb up the flights of stairs. They were twisted, and steep, but she was determined to reach the top; her heart was pulsing and her legs ached, but eventually the exit sign leading to the roof appeared. She stumbled through the door and back into the downfall of rain, moving all the way to the edge of the roof sliding the Walkman over her ears.

Juniper grabbed her wings, swiftly pulling them onto her back as she stared at the city below her. Not all her life, but these last two years it was her cage. The pity stares bore into her like a knife, resurfacing the grief she thought she could suppress; the mocking at school embarrassed her and stripped away confidence; and not having a loving home to return to, losing both parents over the death of one, only shrank the bars. But here she was, hundreds of

feet above the city that had withheld her, ready to soar over all the heartache. Her wings had been broken, but she fixed them. The sun was across from her, beginning to sink low into the horizon for the night. Juniper shifted her weight forwards, balancing on the edge underneath her with a newfound calmness. She closed her eyes, fluttered her wings, and with an icarian leap soared off the building, leaving the pain behind her ... to follow the sun.

*Take these broken wings and learn to fly,  
All your life, you were only waiting for this moment to arise.*