Hello, and welcome to Lasswade High School's "Sharing Stories," Volume 3. This week, we have a humorous tale of a Chocolate Heist by Declan, a powerful prison piece by Emily, and a heart-warming reflection on 'Home,' by Anna. With special thanks to our talented readers and amazing art by our students. Enjoy!
Chocolate - By Declan

Chocolate is a treat that can be enjoyed in many forms from ice cream to hot drinks. Everybody loves chocolate, especially primary school me. After all the boring and basic math lessons, after singing the same old songs in the assembly hall and the constant bombardment of literacy and numeracy tests, we could finally go home. It wasn’t rare for me to run home and burst through the door into my house and ask for some chocolate.

After managing to survive through the morning, break time came around to save me. We were all enthusiastically playing football despite the rusty and broken goals. The paint peeled off the posts with ease and they creaked with a horrible wailing noise in the Scottish summer winds. In fairness, the grass was well kept and a brilliant green which seemed to spread for miles with a sea of snotty nosed children stretching from end to end. But to our dismay the bell rang to mark the end of our freedom. After everyone assembled inside the classroom, our teacher revealed that we would be doing a science experiment to learn about the states of matter. He brought out a large stack of chocolate and proceeded to melt a bar in a microwave. Once the bar had melted, he opened the door and the delicious fumes filled the room. At the end of the experiment I sat in anticipation, waiting for the teacher to offer us a piece of the delicious treat but was let down after he ended the lesson. Surely after
making us watch such an uneventful and boring experiment, we would get a reward? Me and a few others wanted revenge... And chocolate.

The next day, it didn’t take long for somebody to notice the very same stack of about thirteen chocolate bars from yesterday’s lesson sitting comfortably on a cabinet. They stared down at us mockingly, how easily I could claim one for myself. The whole class had the same menacing look on their face. Nothing had to be said for me to know what was going down. We can’t just take the bars right in front of the teacher, so we brought are brains together to devise a plan. The chocolate heist. Three of the group will go into the classroom during lunch, one member will be on the lookout, the other two members will attempt to grab as many bars as they can.

Lunch time had arrived; we all probably ate enough sweets as it was but that did not stop us. The three entered the school to grab the chocolate while the rest of us stood and watched through the grubby windows that peeked into the classroom. I was cautious to watch because surely the playground supervisors would notice our absence at the shoddy football pitch we were always on. My eyes jetted around my head out of anxiousness, but I was quickly distracted by the memory of the chocolate fumes that came from the experiment. The sun beamed against the window reflecting the malicious grins of my classmates. I could vaguely make out a shape zipping around while panicking. Another shape entered my vision that appeared as though it was scaling the walls. I pressed my head up against the glass, ignoring how disgusting it was, still wary of the supervisors. The shapes became more apparent, which helped me decipher what was going on.
The first boy I saw was holding the legs of a tiny grey chair and shaking, his realisation of what would happen if he got caught clearly had just entered his mind, while somebody on top of the chair was flailing around trying to hold his balance with an angry yet fearful face. It was like a slapstick cartoon. I wasn’t the only one that thought this as there was an uproar of laughter. I imagine it was audible from the other side as they both tilted their heads towards the window. Unlucky for us it was also audible to one of the supervisors who didn’t hesitate to see what we were up to. She looked through the in shock and reported the incident to our teacher. Me and the other spectators got pulled into the classroom where we reunited with the other three.

I sat down in a row with all the others as the teacher began preparing to lecture us, I had to focus on keeping eye contact on him because every time somebody stopped paying attention he got angrier. The teacher revealed that he would be sending us home with a letter for our parents. I began thinking about the punishment I would get when they found out, I could get grounded or be banned from having any chocolate at all! We were also told that we would be getting detention. The next day I was stuck inside the classroom to mope around and watch through the same window I was looking through during the heist at all my other classmates playing football. I realized that if I never do anything like this again I won’t miss out. I looked around the room at everyone around me and saw that they also had the same bored and plain expression on their face. I’m glad I experienced this as since the incident occurred, I’ve never missed out on anything due to stupid mistakes made from decisions made out of greed or anger.
“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

By Emily

I’ve spent my life wondering what Jesus meant by this. Or why Matthew even included this. I know this is wrong but I honestly think that this is what I need to be listening to. This isn’t what I need to think about. Jesus clearly didn’t understand- clearly it’s crap.

Jesus didn’t speak English. He didn’t say that. Jesus wasn’t put in prison for seven years despite it being a justifiable homicide.

The gospel of Matthew is my favorite. I’ve studied it a lot. Matthew’s gospel is not written to me. It’s written to non-believers. It’s written to prove that Jesus is the Messiah. I know that already. I pray for myself and I pray for those I care about. But I am not going to pray for the man who tried to kill me, I am not going to pray for the woman who I am forced to share my living space with, and I am not going to pray for the prison officers that abuse their power to break me down because of one mistake. And I really hope God doesn’t expect me to love these people.

Clank.
The lights are blinding and come on at five in the morning. I slept terribly last night—tossing and turning all night. I couldn’t sleep because all I could think about was how small these beds are. How did I not notice? These beds feel like rocks. It’s Mary’s fault for pointing it out. I couldn’t sleep at all last night.

“Are you going to breakfast this morning”

“No.”

I don’t like this new cell mate; she talks too much. If I have to be locked up for seven years I may as well have some peace and quiet. She’s in for tax evasion and only got three months. She had no reason not to pay her taxes— I shot that man out of self-defense. Besides, one of the COs beat a woman at breakfast yesterday so I think it might be best to stay out of the morning shift’s way for the moment.

The bed is cold and the walls are ugly— I always wonder if the drab appearance of this place is part of my punishment. The paint is peeling off the walls and the bed is metal so it gets as cold as my fridge. I don’t want to go to breakfast so I could sleep but no one can sleep with these blinding lights and the guards won’t let you cover your eyes with anything. I saw my sister last week and she told me to pull my blanket over my face and convince myself that the shouting around me was a positive noise—that’s hard to do when all your neighbors are locked up. I lay in my bed, the covers pulled up, and I am trying to sleep.

I woke up sweating and panting. I think of that every time I sleep. I can’t escape from what I did that day but I had no other choice. I had to shoot him or else he would have shot me. It was either kill or get killed.

“LUNCH”
A fight has broken out in the chow hall. Officers are running to the centre of the room. All hell broke loose. Food is being thrown. I think I even see a bible flying across the hall. This one fight between two of the women has become a mini riot- inmates were fighting each other, inmates were fighting officers, everything from food to bibles is being thrown across this hall. The walls are covered in mashed potatoes and inmates are being thrown against the hard-concrete walls and were banged on the hard-concrete floors. Suddenly a circle was formed around one of the CO’s and an inmate. The COs began shouting and one started calling for the lieutenant. There was so much shouting that I can’t understand what is happening.

“This is bad even for you Lou!”

“Lou you’re going to get fired!”

“Never mind fired, Lou you’re going to kill her! Don’t kill her, she's done nothing wrong.”

“She was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. She is not the bad guy here!”

Sick of not knowing what was happening I climbed on a table and looked over the crowd. I cannot believe what I’m seeing. Mary is lying in the centre of the hall unconscious. Her face and arms are black and blue. Her breaths are very shallow but she is alive. The lieutenant and the sergeant came in. I actually didn’t mind the lieutenant but the sergeant makes my skin crawl.

“Well,” the Sergeant started, “Don’t do the crime if you can’t do the time.”

I kicked the Sergeant. I kicked the sergeant and now I’m in the hole. The hole is designed to break you, twenty-four hours a day in a room with the only human interaction being with the CO that brings you food twice a day. I’m here for twenty days. I don’t care that this is where I have
ended up. Sargent was out of line. I don’t like Mary. Okay, I hate Mary. But she’s one of us, we live in an ‘us vs them’ world. Yes, I dislike Mary but she is one of us. He had no right to comment. She has two kids and a husband. It’s visiting day tomorrow and her sons are going to be left wondering where Mummy is. She is a good woman and doesn’t deserve to have to live with this trauma forever.

“Dear Heavenly father. I wish to ask for forgiveness for how I acted today. Until today I never understood Matthew 5:44 but after what happened today, I do. I know I used to hate Mary but please through your grace guide her to a healthy recovery. She is not my enemy any more. In Jesus Name I pray- Amen.”

Home - by Anna

The concept that home is a safe, irreplaceable place is overrated. From experience I can say that home is wherever you are. Until five months ago I always used to wake up in the same bed, my days were planned, I had my routine, I used to see my parents every day and hang out with lifelong friends. Then, my life changed on August the 15th, when I took a plane from Rome to Frankfurt and then to Edinburgh with a tangle of fears mixed with happiness, a printed smile on the face but also tears falling on cheeks. Scotland was supposed to be my ‘new mum’ my new home. Now, everything is different: I wake up in another bed without knowing what will go on the following day; I speak another language; I wear a uniform; I text my parents and friends; I feel colder. At the beginning it was obviously a rush fact: seeing on social media my friends keeping going out and partying without me made me think that for me there was no place as
beautiful as my home and the feeling I was missing something happening was dominant. But as time went by, I realised how lucky I am, as only few people of my age have the same opportunity that I have, an exchange year happens only once in life, so enjoying it, is a must.

Changing home, or rather, having one more home is the most marvelous surprise that could ever happen to me. Even without my mother’s hugs, being helped on math by my stepfather, hearing my grandma complaining about me getting fat. Even if I do not live 200 metres away from a beach with the sunshine on. Even if I can’t smell the whiff of sea air and the sun cream odour, rubbing it on my dark skin. Even if I don’t see any more Sunday cakes coming out of the oven. I don’t sip a fruit drink in the town centre chatting with my friends. I don’t go to my theatre company rehearsals. I don’t see my dog happily waving his tail when it sees me. I don’t hear loud voices yelling open voweled words.

Conversely, in a freezing cold Scotland I’ve felt a warmth which means more than any hot temperature in another country. And a sense of place that goes over massive Scottish castles, a crowded Princess Street, or the breath of a Scottish piper. Now my view from home is a wide green grass area that someday can be iced over. Sunshine is rare, rain beats incessantly on my umbrella like dancing on a stage and breaking the silence. I’ve tasted haggis but Friday is my Italian cooking day, I sip at least a tea every day, I hear voices that for me sound like whispers with remarkable Scottish accents. My New home has turned out to be an host-mum that struggles to take care of all people she’s surrounded by, a passionate rugby host-father that demonstrates his caring for me by staying up until I
get back home on weekends, a small host-brother that hopes that one day I’ll learn to play Fortnite and who’s very lazy when it comes washing the dishes with me, and two fluffy doggies jumping over me. I’ve learned to tie a tie, I’ve danced at ceilidhs, I’ve started adding milk to tea, I’ve learned that wallets get empty sooner than you expect, I’ve learned that ‘tea’ can also mean dinner. But, more importantly I’ve learned that sadness is a normal emotion that we shouldn’t be afraid of feeling, that nothing is perfect, all things are difficult if you don’t work on them, asking for help is not a weakness and what really matters is not already having the best but getting it from my actions, trying my best in everything I do. I would not be honest with myself if I did not admit that sometimes I struggle and I don’t always have the impression of fitting in this ‘new world’ the best remedy is carrying out all the negativity and taking all worse vibes as gifts: a crisis will be just an outburst that will make you realise that what you need is knowing your worth and carrying out the best version of you. Be aware that agonizing times are only a stop along the way leading to wondrous destinations!

I am not in the opinion a place can be ‘owned’ but my point is that it can make us feel the owner of ourselves; as experiencing and trying new things get into you a major self-love and confidence. My hope is that I will feel glad about the time I had when I was on my exchange that made me feel the owner of myself and my decisions, because we are free, me I’m young, the only person that can decide how to be happy and look forward is me. Time exists to be enjoyed. And time has not to be remembered as a lamentable friend that fades behind us, since it leads to change and to a personal growth in ourselves.
We consider home as a certainty, but we don’t consider that the people who build up our certainties are us: home perhaps is just the assumption of loving yourself and feeling comfortable with you, making every place the right place to be.

“At the end of the day, it isn’t where I came from. Maybe home is somewhere I’m going and never have been before.” (Warsan Shire)