

# THE SEM MONOCLE

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The grotesques on the Buffalo Seminary facade.

Faith Wendel

## Faces on the Facade

**BY FAITH WENDEL**  
Photography Director

There you are, walking into the school building that you walk in every day. Maybe you're rushing in to make it to advisory before the bell rings. Maybe you're zombie-walking, half in a sleep-deprived trance. Maybe you're off in another world thinking about how rare the nice weather is. Have you ever looked at the building? Silly question. Of course, you have. But have you ever actually *looked* at it?

The main entranceway into the building features a

Collegiate Gothic style arch. The arch is topped with a series of grotesques, faces symbolizing evil on the exterior of buildings (usually with religious affiliation) with a purpose of contrasting holy imagery, along with the school crest and year it was founded. Those faces on the facade, a building's front wall with an entrance, have stared at every student walking in Buffalo Seminary since the new building's completion in 1909.

Most grotesques are found on historical buildings, especially cathedrals. The faces outside the cathedral

compared to the holy, saintly sculptures inside are supposed to signify the difference between what is considered good versus evil. The religious fixtures would supposedly protect the people entering the building from insidious forces. In American cities, they are mainly found in the Northeast and Midwest in buildings built between 1890 and 1930. The Great Depression in the 1930s caused contractors to stop adding the grotesques to residential buildings. In twelfth century Europe, they, along with gargoyles, were used to direct rainwater away from

a building, much like gutters today. They come in all shapes and sizes, which have different meanings behind each one.

The grotesques on SEM's facade are of fairly normal human faces, and they still represent a portion of history that shaped our school, quite literally, since the building was being constructed during that era. From now on, look up. To quote Ferris Bueller, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it."

# SEM

BUFFALO SEMINARY

## THE MONOCLE

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Since 1935

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## Learning to Love Language with Ms. Lyons

BY FAITH WENDEL  
Photography Director

We warmly welcomed Ms. Megan Lyons into the Buffalo Seminary community this year, and she has shared a few of her favorite aspects of working at SEM. “I love coming into a classroom full of students who want to learn and want to be here,” Ms Lyons said. She is grateful to all of the people who are a part of the community for creating such a “great team” of people who make the atmosphere of the building brighter each day.

“I learned about linguistics and found out I was absolutely in love with it,” Ms. Lyons said when asked about her history before coming to teach at Buffalo Seminary. Teaching Spanish wasn’t always the main goal of her academic career. Initially, she wanted to go to school for the fine arts, but soon changed her mind and her major to Spanish with a minor in linguistics at the University at Buffalo.

She was inspired by numerous teachers throughout high school and college including Shirley Melston, Linda Seitz, and Doctora Bárbara Ávila-Shah. Melston was a Spanish, French, and German teacher who first introduced Ms. Lyons to linguistics. Seitz was her German teacher that promoted language immersion in the classroom. Ávila-Shah was a Spanish professor who had a huge impact on Ms. Lyon’s teaching, not only because she taught how to teach a new language but also by “leading by example.” Ms. Lyons cited her professor’s classes as an excellent example of the impacts of immersion in the target language, and she mirrors this by practicing that in her own classroom.

As far as her teaching career prior to SEM, she had many experiences teaching. While she studied abroad in Spain, she was a student teacher. She taught English as a second language to students in Costa Rica and online to students in China, and then went on to teach Spanish at UB.

Ms. Lyons shared her reasoning as to why she believes learning a second language is important, “it’s more authentic sharing.” There is a great deal of culture, humor, and nuance that are lost when the other person has to switch to your language, and conversation can be more fulfilling especially if both are bilingual. Learning Spanish, for example, can give an insight into Latin, which can be useful in math, sciences, and etymology of words. On top of the benefits in academics and social relationships, learning a new language can open up an entire world of new pop culture to enjoy. “It is more of an equal playing field,” Ms Lyons said.

Watching the progress from the beginning of the year up until now, she is both impressed by and proud of her students as a whole. She is happy that students seem to be becoming more comfortable raising their hands to answer questions, as well as conversing in the target language to their peers in class. She hopes this trend will continue since practicing conversational skills will truly help in the long run.

As a final note of encouragement, Ms Lyons said, “it gets easier.” She acknowledges that learning a new language can be stressful or seem utterly impossible, but it will get better. As with most things in life, getting there is hard, but the final result is very rewarding.

# Home Away From Home: A Boarding Student's Story with Her Host Family

BY KATHERINE F. ROONEY  
Features Editor

Buffalo Seminary educates boarding students from all around the world. Right now there are students from the Bahamas, Canada, China, Mexico, Kenya, South Korea, and Vietnam. However, when the Covid-19 pandemic first struck many were unable to return to their home countries. While stranded in the United States, they were forced to stay with other families in possibly unfamiliar houses. Yet for one student, Phuong Ha '21, that meant finding a home away from home in Buffalo and forming lifelong and lasting bonds with the Schmidt family.

During her freshman year, Aubrey (Bre) Schmidt '22 began talking to Phuong about her plans for spring break and discovered that she was looking for a place to stay. After asking her parents, the Schmidt family agreed to welcome Phuong into their home over the break. It is common for residential students to stay with generous host families for breaks if they are unable to return to their home countries. In the words of Bre, "I did not want her to be alone at the dorms with nowhere to go." Phuong continued to stay with the Schmidts for all of her breaks beginning her sophomore year and Bre's freshman year. However, when Covid-19 began in the spring of her junior year she needed a place to stay for a longer period of time. She needed a home. Once again, the Schmidt family opened their doors to her and she stayed with them over quarantine and the summers of 2021 and 2022.



Left: Phuong Ha '21, Bre Schmidt '22, and Julie Schmidt '83 going out to eat.  
Above: Bre and Phuong take a selfie.  
Photos courtesy of Bre Schmidt '22

Phuong has not been able to make it back to her home country of Vietnam since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, but luckily she now has a second family here in America. In her own words she says, "As a residential student, I had to adjust myself to life in America before I met the Schmidt family. However, since I have been staying with them for quite a while, I feel really connected to the family. They always try to introduce me to as many new things as possible, so I'm very familiar with American culture. It's like I have a home in America now to go back after a tough time at school." This feeling is mutual as Bre says, "For the first few times, we were still getting to know Phuong, what she liked, what she did not like, when she would talk to her family so we wouldn't bother her, and so much more. Over time, we all warmed up with each other and she is now like another family

member to us. To me, she's like a sister, to my parents she's like a daughter, and to my aunts and uncles, she's like a niece. She is a part of our family."

This is a bond that was formed with countless shared memories. Now a student at Ithaca College, when Phuong was still looking at what schools to apply to and where to attend, the Schmidts took her on trips so that she could tour and make her decision. They celebrated Lunar New Year together so that Phuong could feel more comfortable and at home. When going on trips to Florida and to Canandaigua Lake, Phuong went along too and participated in various activities such as fishing, kayaking with manatees, and of course, eating lots of ice cream. And finally when it was time to drop Phuong off at college, Bre's mother Julie Schmidt '83 says, "Moving Phuong into her dorm gave

me the same anxious feeling as moving one of my own children into their dorms. The worry of 'Will she be ok?', 'Will she find friends?' I periodically check in with her and look forward to her breaks so she can come 'home.'"

Yet, even now that Phuong has moved out she continues to be a part of their family. She recalls when "They sent me a package full of pictures and snacks after I first moved into college. Everything about college was still new to me and I didn't know a lot of people there, but when I received the package and the letter inside saying something like they missed me and that I could come back anytime I wanted, I just needed to tell them and they would come pick me up. It was really heart warming." Phuong continues to stay with them over college breaks and now has a home away from home and a second family in America if she ever needs.

# The Skomra Story: Swimming and SEM

BY ELLE NOECKER  
Staff Reporter

Four years ago, SEM gained one of the school's most significant and beloved staff members who has a passion for the school, helping others, and athletics—particularly swimming. She is the cool, approachable, and reliable school nurse that every school needs, but not all are lucky enough to have. If you haven't guessed yet, that staff member is the one and only Nurse Kim Skomra. Beginning her journey at Buffalo Seminary four years ago, Nurse Kim has made an incredible impact on the school through both her kindness and passion for nursing as well as her incredible contribution to SEM's swim team.

Nurse Kim began her vocation as a delivery nurse in the hospital where she worked for almost 20 years. However, that all changed when her daughter, Alex, who was in eighth grade at the time, pointed out to her mom that "you haven't been to one of my softball games." This was an eye opening moment that inspired Nurse Kim with the idea of becoming a school nurse where she could have more flexible hours and spend much more time with her family. After working as a nurse at a few other schools, she eventually arrived at SEM.

In the words of Nurse Kim, "I have always enjoyed being a school nurse [and] I enjoy working with the kids and my colleagues. I always say to myself, 'I can't believe I get to work here, like this is so perfect.'" It is safe to say that she absolutely adores Buffalo Seminary as a school and she loves working here. When asked about her favorite aspect of SEM, she enthusiastically replied, "I love that the girls come and hang out with me



Alex and Nurse Kim are SEM's latest mother/daughter duo.

Faith Wendel

sometimes even if they don't have a medical problem. My days are fulfilling; whether it's coaching, whether it's taking care of kids, whether it's just talking to kids, I'm just very lucky, I have landed in a very good place." She also added that out of SEM's many traditions, "Hornet Jacket (day) is my favorite, like all the skits, it is super fun for you girls and it's also fun for us as a faculty because we kind of get to let loose a little bit." Although she may be "Nurse Kim" to many, outside of SEM she has a reputation as "Kim Skomra, the champion swimmer and coach."

She started swimming alongside her two sisters at an early age for a small swim team called the "Orchard Park Town Wreckers" (now a larger club known as "TWST," Town Wreckers Swim Team). Growing up in Orchard Park, this local club was an excellent and convenient opportunity to discover her passion for the pool which would soon become a career of high school state championships, collegiate

racing, traveling for high level competitions, and even open water as well as Masters swimming.

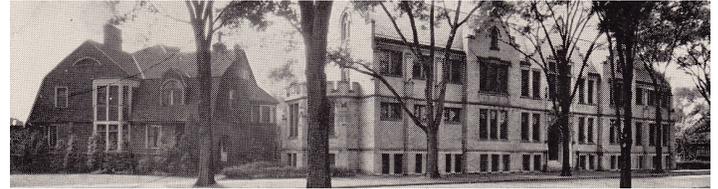
After a few years, Kim and her sisters, apprehensive at first, joined a club in Cheektowaga, where they ended up thriving. "My coach was fantastic," she said, clearly happy with the decision, "he got me to where I was and it ended up being a really good move." Nurse Kim described her high school athletics experience as "Only swimming...swim, swim, swim." In fact, her commitment went so far as to defy the status quo in order to get the training she needed to be on top of the sport. She recalls an experience she shared with her sister in 1976, before women in athletics were common. "I remember my mom would come and pick my sister and I up and we would go to this Nautilus Fitness gym. We had this one-on-one training," she illustrated: "People would be like 'where are you guys going' and we would lie and say 'we're going

to the mall.' You wouldn't dare say, 'yeah we're going to lift weights!' That was NOT cool for girls in 1976."

Certainly, all of this dedication and devotion to the sport has turned out to be an extraordinary career. In high school alone, Kim reached heights that most athletes dream of such as being a state champion. Her relay team won the 4x100 yard freestyle relay swimming at West Point Military Academy, which was an unforgettable experience and her favorite swimming memory. She also recalls the excitement of swimming at the collegiate level for Syracuse where she competed at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) championships. Occasionally, Nurse Kim wonders how her childhood would have been different if she had tried other sports, however she knows that she probably would not have reached such an elite level in swimming if she had divided her attention. "It was a lot of

See Skomra on Page 5

## The History of Buffalo Seminary's Locations and Additions



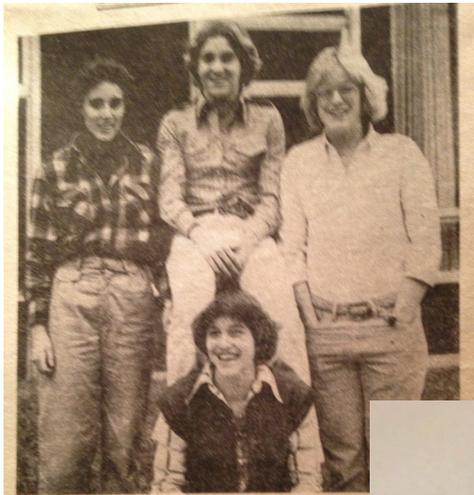
SEM prior to the West-Chester addition.

BY INGA WOOTEN-FORMAN  
Staff Reporter

Buffalo Seminary has a complex history of various buildings and several additions. Upon the school's founding, the Board of Trustees enlisted Dr. Charles E. West, SEM's first head of school, to choose the location of the school. He picked Evergreen Cottage in Johnson Park, which was originally the school's only building. Buffalo Seminary was able to grow thanks to the generous donations of Jabez Goodell, a teacher and settler of Buffalo. He donated ten acres to the school and around \$15,000. With this money, SEM was able to build an academic building called "Goodell Hall" behind the cottage. Afterwards, the cottage was mostly used as a home for the headmaster, some of the staff, and the residential students. In 1906, the Graduates Association announced plans to purchase land on Bidwell Parkway for construction of a new school. This land was considered to be ideal as it was not in a bustling area, but it was close to the Elmwood Avenue streetcar line, which provided transportation for many students. Estimated costs of the new building were almost \$100,000 so Goodell Hall and Evergreen Cottage were sold and SEM took out a mortgage loan of \$40,000. Because of

the plot's strange triangular shape, SEM had George F. Newton, a notable local architect, design a plan for the new building in what is known as a "Collegiate Gothic style."

In the 1920s, SEM experienced its first large addition. As SEM's enrollment grew, Bley and Lyman were hired to plan an addition to the east side of the building on Bidwell Parkway. The new addition included several classrooms, a gym, an art studio, and West-Chester Hall, named for Dr. Charles E. West and Albert T. Chester, the school's first two heads of school. In 1953, Larkin Field and the property on it were donated to SEM by a prior student. Buffalo Seminary utilized the property considerably; the house became home to the head of school and the field was used for sports teams. As SEM continued growing, another addition was constructed in the 1960s. Bley and Lyman's subsequent firm, Duane Lyman and Associates, planned to add a science wing to the building. In 1984, the North Star Construction company constructed the Margaret L. Wendt Performing Arts Center. This new room would be used for theater, dance, and several other skills. Most recently, the school's facilities were renovated in 2001. During this modernization, the courtyard was converted into an atrium.



TOP MERMAIDS who represented Orchard Park and 1 statewide competition at West Point are (standing, from left to right) Lisa Casale, Debbie Scheider and Lisa Bunker and Debbie in the foreground. —Suburban Press Photo

**O. Park mermaids show heart in state events**

Above: Nurse Kim (left) being recognized in a local newspaper for her accolades.

Right: Competing in the Empire States Games in 1980.



Skomra from Page 4

fun swimming, I don't have one single regret about what I had to give up to do it," she confidently stated.

Last school year, an opportunity came up for Nurse Kim to become an assistant swim coach for Buffalo Seminary's swim team. Although she had only had experience being a head coach, she gladly took the position as assistant. It was exciting to coach again, as she has been the head coach of the Amherst swim team for about eight years straight in the past, as well as a head coach for a local YMCA team. Taking this role was "just kind of a good fit." She described: "I had always been a head coach so I wasn't sure, would I like being more in the background? Andi (head coach) was great to work with

and the last two years were really a lot of fun." During her time with the swim team so far, Nurse—or Coach—Kim won two consecutive All Catholic Championships (SEM's third in a row), and got to relive the New York State Championship experience with five girls from the team.

Nurse Kim feels beyond fortunate to be a part of the SEM community, each day. She never takes a moment for granted and feels that "we've all made a good choice to be here."

It is safe to say that many of us in the SEM community couldn't agree more.

Coincidentally, when an opportunity appeared for a Summer at SEM camp director, Nurse Kim was able to share the SEM experience with one of the people she is closest to—her daughter, Alex.

# Joining the Team: Alex Skomra

BY ELLE NOECKER  
Staff Reporter

Alex Skomra was hired as the Summer At SEM camp director a couple of years back, but first had a connection to SEM as the school's assistant track coach three years ago. Now, she is the beloved director of UGO SEM which is the in school fitness program for students who are not actively involved in a school sport. Many students would agree that UGO SEM with Alex is one of the highlights of simply being a student. From Just Dance (the popular favorite) to basketball, students (and Alex, of course) enjoy a variety of sports and games to be active during the day!

But, how did Alex arrive at SEM? If you ask her, Alex will say, "My mom drew me to SEM." Nurse Kim stated in an interview how she had always thought Alex would be a great fit to the SEM faculty, especially because she had always wanted to be a physical education teacher. It was just a matter of waiting for the "in." That "in" ended up being the Summer at SEM camp director position, which Alex recalls as being "collectively really fun." She specifically loved getting to witness and be a part of the reason(s) why girls choose to come to SEM for high school. Alex is enthusiastic about being the camp director again this upcoming summer and seeing herself continue for many years to come. Alex was also highly drawn to SEM by knowing her love for the small, all girls school experience from previously attending Sacred Heart Academy. As soon as there was a need for a UGO SEM director, Kim and Alex immediately felt as though it was meant to be.



Alex has been a great addition to SEM, expanding the UGO SEM program and Summer @ SEM.

Faith Wendel

Now working together, they have quickly become SEM's most iconic mother-daughter faculty duo.

As a multi-sport athlete, Alex had always had a particular passion for swimming. As if working together today is not endearing enough, Nurse Kim and Alex shared a significant portion of their swimming careers together, where Alex was coached by her mom from ages six to 18. Following in similar footsteps, Alex became a swim coach "right out of high school," she said, "I got a job at the Y which is where I swam." For a while she coached younger kids, but always had an interest in the higher level, more competitive world of high school swimming. For the past four years, Alex has been the coach of Nardin's swim team. She described how she took the position after it was turned down by a friend who recommended Alex for the job. Slightly uncertain

about coaching a rival team to that of SEM's, the result was an easy transition. "The atmosphere coaching at Nardin is very similar (to SEM) with great kids," Alex claims. While coaching for opposing teams, Alex and her mom have experienced a sense of friendly competition that is more fun and exciting than anything else.

At SEM, Alex loves the familiarity of the school after attending a similar environment for high school. She most definitely highly enjoys working at the school and getting to share the fun of UGO SEM classes with the students. When asked what her favorite activity to do with her classes, she stated, "I love when we play Just Dance." However, she is also always down for "a good game of Knock-Out if people want to play." Additionally, she enjoys badminton, having played on a team in the past.

Working together has

undoubtedly been a unique and delightful experience for both SEM Skomra swimmers. Alex described working with her mom as "really cool." The pair gets to eat lunch together everyday, visit one another, and help each other out often. Having a close relationship with her mom her whole life, Alex continued that, "we always got along so it is very fun." Oftentimes, during her breaks, Alex will visit Nurse Kim in her office. And other times, Nurse Kim will visit Alex during UGO SEM to say "hi." Buffalo Seminary is so fortunate to have two such positive attributes to the community who are part of the reason students and faculty love coming to SEM. This mother-daughter duo is beyond appreciated at the school and simply fun to have around in the building. The story of SEM's Skomra swimmers continues as they coach, work, and thrive side by side each day.

# Untitled

## A Short Story by Dakota Clay

It was time. I sat up waiting all night for this moment.

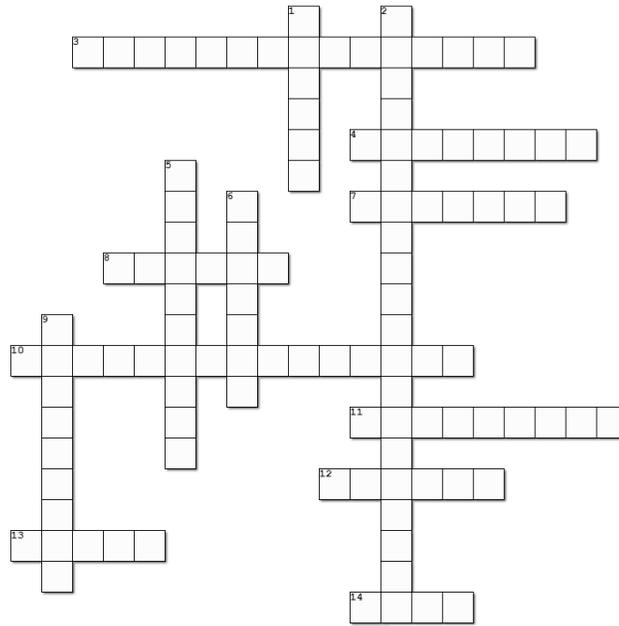
The wooden floorboards squeaked under my feet as I crept to the back door, attempting to avoid the loudest ones. By the time I reached the door, only the harsh murmurs of my breath could be heard. I stood in front of the rusted screen, trying to steady my breathing, feeling myself getting overwhelmed. I didn't even notice that the door was beginning to open until I heard the metal frame collide with the side of the house, opening the last barrier to the darkness outside. I was being called.

As if in a trance, I felt my feet begin to walk past the edge of the forest, into the heavily forested area of my backyard. Though I lost control of myself, I was not afraid. I knew that I was safe.

My legs stopped once I arrived at the familiar clearing. Here, I could see her clearly. The light of the moon flooded the area. I strained my eyes trying to get a glimpse of the moon, unable to help myself from admiring her beauty. Breathing in, I let my eyes close, just wanting the smell of the earth to fill me. Once my eyes opened, I could no longer see the moon. But, I could feel her there. Even in the deafening silence, I knew she was there. We stood like that for what felt like hours until my legs could no longer support themselves. It was when my back finally hit the ground that I felt her hand on mine. It was ice cold.

Before I knew it, I woke with a start. The moonlight had returned and I was alone again. I looked up again at the sky, seeing her so beautiful. Against my forehead, I felt the whispers of a kiss. I smiled.

# GAMES & PUZZLES



### DOWN

1. Last name of SEM's longest head of school
2. Original name of the school
5. We have 11 \_\_ in the school.  
Hint: Helps you stay warm
6. Fastest way to get to class.  
Hint: Named after an animal
9. SEM's go-to song

### ACROSS

3. Who is the courtyard named after?
4. Tables used for discussion
7. Name of Buffalo Seminary's newspaper since 1935
8. Name of SEM's first robot
10. SEM's mascot
11. Name of the yearbook
12. We have 10 \_\_ in the school.  
Hint: instrument
13. December concert
14. Last name of SEM's first head of school

P K N Z Y F S C H A P E L H B Q C P  
 L T B J X N E C I B G C C E A S C A  
 E Q U G R G M O C I X L A F T E G K  
 A J F M Y Z I L O D B Y D M R M Z E  
 D M F L Z C N B M W M M V K I A S H  
 E W A H I H A Y M E O A I T U C Y O  
 R G L Z C E R O U L N T S A M H X R  
 S K O Y R L Y E N L O U O F O O D N  
 H E Q Q W T N P I Q C U R G X R X E  
 I I N T E G R I T Y L V Y N J D D T  
 P J L A J F S Q Y S E M V B F S I I  
 D X I G S Y U B J A C K E T A R Y N

Advisory  
 Atrium  
 Bidwell  
 Buffalo  
 Chapel

Colby  
 Community  
 Hornet  
 Integrity

Jacket  
 Leadership  
 Monocle  
 Semachords  
 Seminary

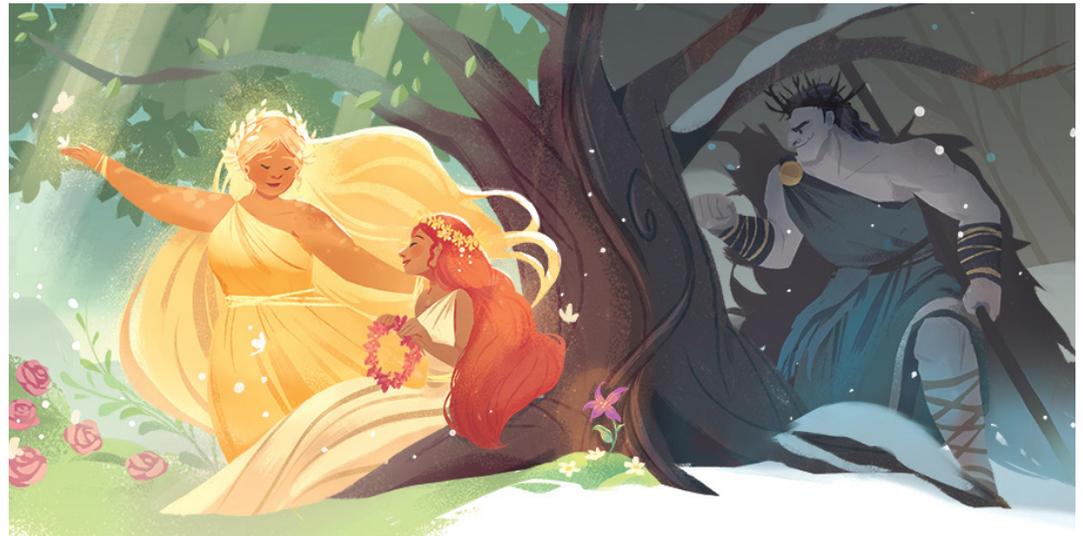
# The True Story Of Persephone

A Short Story by Shamaya Banks

Years ago before there were stories, drawings and whispers of this tale, there was just a girl. A girl with a strict mother. A mother who loved just as hard as she protected. This could be overbearing at times for the girl. But that was not uncommon, often daughters fought with their mothers or thought they were controlling when they were the girl's age. Seventeen, the age of curiosity, the age on the cusp of adulthood ready and slightly afraid of that new adventure. No, it was not uncommon at all for a girl eager for independence and a mother, fierce with the need to protect her daughter, even from herself to fight.

What was odd was that this was not the reason behind her mother's helicopter parenting. No, the reason was much darker than that. This reason would not only change the girl's life but the life of everyone for many centuries to come. But first let's start with a name: a name that is going to last forever in history, remembered even when the people in this story are thought to be myths; a myth designed to explain the way the world works and it does but not in the way you think. The name that is going to start it all, the betrayal, pain, and loss is— Persephone.

You see, Persephone's mother, Demeter, couldn't have kids; it devastated her and her husband. Years after many failed attempts her husband left, unable to deal with the grief of their unspoken dream, a child. Demeter became hysterical, not wanting to deal with the thought of being alone, she traveled to a



What is the true story of Persephone?

Scholastic

forbidden place in her village, a place made from darkness, a place filled with the torment calls of the damned. This place was dripped in sorrow and pain filled to the brim and forever unending. It was known to the villagers as the Underworld. There Demeter planned to join the people that lived there, where she could live out the rest of her days without the torture of remembering her past. And for a while she did. She was never happy, sad or angry, she just existed not for anything in particular but it just became as common as breathing for her. Then something happened or rather someone happened, a couple came to the village. They were like a bright ray of sunshine and warmth after a brutal cold winter and with them came a child, Persephone. The child triggered something in Demeter's long, dead soul — envy.

Demeter made a rather rash plan. A plan based on nothing but her own bitterness over

how her life turned out. She invited the couple over to her house for dinner and then filled with rage over their happiness and the beauty of a child that she was denied poisoned their food not enough to kill them but keep them indisposed as she got what she really wanted, Persephone. When she crept through the Underworld and took Persephone she felt complete, the anger over her failure to have a child completely buried underneath the joy of taking one from another. However, she knew Persephone's parents would come for her, so she fled away from the Underworld, Persephone's home for years, intent on raising Persephone as her own. For a while she did, until Persephone got curious about the Underworld and ventured to the town that held the truth of her past, the truth of who her parents were.

However, someone else had other plans for Persephone because the second she stepped into the forest of the Under-

world she was trapped. This trap was orchestrated by a man responsible for giving Demeter the poison. The leaves of the poison that started it all, dragged Persephone deep into the dark forest of the Underworld, to an evil long forgotten: Hades. Once Persephone reached this evil, her memories were stolen away: all the worries and questions about her past forgotten, along with the memories of her mother Demeter. All that was left was the dark, and she and Hades disappeared into forever, leaving people to speculate about the whereabouts of Persephone and launching Demeter completely into insanity, making her hollow. Wherever she went things died; light darkened forever; she was cursed to wander looking for the daughter she loved that was lost to her for all eternity while Persephone's real parents died from the weight of their broken hearts.