**The Box**

The smell of cotton candy and hot dogs fill the air. The breeze is blowing the leaves off the trees. I open my eyes to see where I have just arrived. A teenager dressed up in a clown suit stands at a gate. A line of people gather behind him, handing him tickets as they enter the mystical world. I buy my ticket and hand it to the teenager in the clown suit. I pace myself, careful not to enter too quickly. People; lots and lots of people. There are so many people that it’s hard to walk. Children are pulling their parents in every direction. Teenagers are on their cell phones. I turn to the lady next to me, “Where are we?” I ask. She turns and stares at me, unsure of whether or not I am being serious. She sees it in my face: confusion. “We are at the city carnival”, she replies. Somehow I knew this.

Children laughing. There is laughter everywhere I turn. People on stilts and people in costumes cover every corner. This place looks intriguing. In the distance I see a man. He wears a dark coat and big top hat. His beard almost reaches the floor, and he has a stomach like Santa Claus. I watch the man. He looks all around and sits as though he is patiently waiting for something. I walk towards him, careful of not being noticed. In my path, a young child is crying. His balloon floating into the clear blue sky. “Was that your balloon?” I ask the child. The child cries. I walk to the balloon stand to purchase a new one. I wonder back to where the child was standing just seconds ago. He is gone.

I remember the man. He is no longer sitting. A door, golden in color. Small enough for only a child. Where did it come from? I continue to watch the man. He looks scared and excited all at once. He turns in my direction, seeing if anyone is watching him. He doesn’t see me. I see the man. He slowly approaches the door. His feet crunching the brown fallen leaves. He opens the small door. Crouching down to fit, he walks through, and disappears. I walk closer to the door. I hear music that sounds like a lullaby. It’s the most soothing music I have ever heard. I turn around. People are laughing, talking, yelling; it is all very loud. I need quiet. I reach for the door, and this feeling comes over me. Comfort and security. I look around to make sure no one is watching. I turn the knob and open the door. I step inside, the door closing behind me. Lights. Flashing lights, swirling lights; all of the lights are very bright. I close my eyes. The room goes quiet, and the music stops. I slowly open my eyes, taking in my surroundings... I am in a small room. In this room, there is a small red box on a big white table. The walls are painted black, and I am alone. The man that I once watched is nowhere to be seen. I walk towards the table. As I get closer, the table seems smaller and smaller, but the box appears bigger and bigger. The air is cold, frigid. I reach the box, and open it.

By, Danielle Retterer