

Third Place – High School – Fiction

Slop Trough

By Maya Gosztyla

While the others wandered aimlessly around the cell, Lyra sat quietly in a corner, a thoughtful expression on her face, reminiscing about the day of her birth. The memories played on the backs of her eyelids like a silent movie. Every so often she would smile, remembering some pleasant sensation of her past, the sweet, milky smell of her mother, the calming way the darkness wrapped around their bodies like a blanket.

Nearby sat a girl as perfectly opposite as could be from the peaceful, introspective Lyra, and her name was Scribbles. She lay sprawled out on her back with her feet pressed against the wall, using a saliva-moistened finger to carefully trace the outlines of her toes onto the dusty brick.

The two girls were as best of friends as any, completely inseparable. To the others in their cell, there was never just Lyra or just Scribbles; they were always Lyra-and-Scribbles, Scribbles-and-Lyra. In fact, it was Lyra who had named Scribbles, who, like most of the girls, could not remember the name her mother had given her. Lyra was a rare exception. She was one of the few who could remember the name her mother her given her.

From above their heads there came a deep, slow rumbling. Any other sound of its low volume would have been drowned out by the constant chattering of high, feminine voices. But the girls' ears had become finely-tuned to recognize this particular pitch of bass vibrations, and to them it meant only one thing: *Food*.

In half a second, there was not a single girl still squatting on the ground. There was a sort of stampede as everyone pushed in the same direction. Lyra and Scribbles, who had been sitting close to the trough, were among the first to reach it, and had reserved very good spots for themselves, right by the faucet. Their hands gripped the metal rim of the trough tightly, tense with anticipation. Their faces were grave and focused.

The rumbling was growing steadily louder, and the big pipes running down the wall began to shake and clatter. Not a word was spoken as everyone listened to the familiar sound, many with heads cocked slightly, like wolves listening for prey.

Abruptly, the rumbling stopped.

There was a moment of complete silence and stillness as everyone stared wide-eyed at the faucet. It seemed to hesitate, but then, finally, it released its load.

There was a wet *splat* as the first heavy glob hit the metal bottom of the trough. It was quickly followed by another blob of goo, and then the faucet began vomiting up its payload. The huge trough was quickly filled with sticky, greenish-brown goo.

The girls let out a high, feral cry of glee and dug in. They sunk their hands into the trough and began shoveling out heaping handfuls of chunky slop. In seconds their faces were coated in slime from their noses to their chins, dripping off in sticky globs.

The cell was filled with the sort of grunts, snorts, and sighs that could only be made by a mob of gluttonous animals greedily engorging themselves. Lyra snatched a chunk of meat, swallowed it whole, choked on it for a moment or two, managed to work it down her throat, and then reached for another. But Scribbles got to the hunk of meat first, snatching it up and attempting to shove it down her throat. Lyra screamed with hysterical fury and lunged for the handful of slimy meat halfway into her best friend's mouth. For a few moments the two girls battled ferociously over the meat, bawling like screech owls and attempting to scratch at each other's faces with short-bitten fingernails. Finally it split in half, and each girl crammed her share in her mouth and returned to digging through the gooey trough.

As they gorged themselves in a lake of revolting slop, their faces stretched taut with delirious, ecstatic smiles, there was little difference between fifty or so human girls and a sty of pigs, blindly glutting themselves, blissfully unaware they were slowly sealing their own fates a little more tightly with every bite.

And the strange thing was, no one felt the least bit hungry.