

# Virginia Frank Writing Contest

A continuation of The Fault in Our Stars By: John Green

Side Effects of Death

Written By: Faren Sak, 8th Grade

No one warned me that the side effects would hurt the worst. I hated him for the emptiness that filled the place I had for him in my heart. It was wholly and entirely gut wrenching. My best friend, the one person that I shared a heart with, has died. The Osteosarcoma that eventually consumed Augustus Waters gave me a more agonizing idea of pain than my tumors ever would. I naively believed that he would live forever, but thinking that you will live forever is really just another side-effect of dying right?

This was the way I felt until the day that I received a letter from Van Houten. A letter I was not going to be reading. Every time I saw the crisp envelope sealed with an eye-catching red wax sitting on my countertop, I immediately threw it in the trash. He must have anticipated this because I continuously received the same letter three more times over the course of a month.

Every time I saw one of those letters, the edges of my eyes pricked with tears and my stomach churned threatening to release its contents. I realize that my feelings were not for the spite I felt towards the author Van Houten, but because he forced me to remember what dying felt like. I wasn't even the person who died. Sometimes, feelings become so strong that they can't be ignored any longer, they become irrepressible. Like when I realized I loved Augustus. When he told me that he loved me.

I realize at this moment that my current feelings are irrepressible as well. Through blurred vision I pick up the fourth identical letter and tear it open. Its contents spilled out over the counter just as the flood gates that I had worked tirelessly to contain released themselves. The tears paving trails down my cheeks as they leave salty streaks that blur my vision. I could practically hear Van Houten's gravelly voice as the letter began.

*Dear Hazel Grace Lancaster, I previously believed that your faith in me was misplaced and then again faith usually is. Yet I have come to realize this wasn't one of those times...*

The letter continued as Van Houten informed me of his new sequel. A sequel to *An Imperial Affliction*. The air that my oxygen tank worked so hard at maintaining exited my lungs with such force that my body shook. I gasped for breath sucking it in just as I did this information. My hands shook as I clumsily grasped for something to stable me. I felt paralyzed with shock. All Augustus and I had wanted was for an ending and now here it was. Unlike him.

Augustus left me with glass shards. Memories that reflected the best and the worst times. Memories that felt wonderful but left deep cuts that were never to be healed. Memories that made you want to develop sudden onset amnesia, yet you knew they would forever be carved into your soul. As if they were roots, buried deep and unmoving. Only, the realization that a sequel had been written uprooted those roots. It also came with the understanding that I could never read Van Houten's ending. It wasn't meant for me, I didn't deserve it. Augustus did and he

wasn't here. But what if he would have wanted me to know what happened? I already knew the answer, he wanted me to know *his* version, the version Augustus wrote for us.

My back slides down the side of the island that has remained sturdy in my kitchen my whole life. I can hear my heart as it rapidly beats against my chest filling my ears with a rhythmic pounding. I almost feel Augustus over my shoulder. Triggered by the thought of his presence, I think of something. Just as I had shared *An Imperial Affliction* with Augustus, the sequel should be too. Van Houten was coming to believe that death didn't mean the end, at least for those who hadn't died including himself and I. I will read Van Houten's ending, keeping part of Augustus alive and providing him with an ending that he deserved. An ending to *An Imperial Affliction* and an ending of his own because his had come too soon. I will continue *his* dream. Carefully this time, I open the contents that lead me to a website where I would become the first person to officially read the answers that Augustus spent his life searching for.