

The Red Pen

by Madeline Murphy

I shiver faintly as the red pen is placed before me
It seems to burn through the desk
A glowing ember underneath the dull lighting of the classroom
I'm afraid, afraid to reach for it, knowing the torment it'll bring me
Yet, my hand seems to be drawn to it by unseen strings
Drawn by the teacher's voice, the puppeteer, the dictator of the class.
I raise the pen
I remove the cap, and with it I seal my fate
Before me is a sheet of crisp white notebook paper
It's painted with words, words scrawled in my chicken scratch
Words which are pieced together like a puzzle to form an answer
Likely, the wrong answer
I poise in my desk, red pen in hand
Preparing to edit my artwork, my lovely masterpiece
My hand quivers as I watch the red pen bleed across my work
It forms an x, an x which represents failure, disdain, and imperfection
And another, and another, and another
Those cruel and unforgiving red paintings now litter my original piece.
And I hand my bleeding paper to the teacher, the puppeteer, the dictator of the class
And with that paper
That bleeding paper
I am finally rid of that cursed red pen.