

# *The Decision*

By Connie Callison

Meadow Bridge High School, Fayette County

1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner (Grades 9-10)

Snow crunched beneath her fur-lined boots as she walked quickly down the unusually empty city streets. Maura's honey-brown eyes surveyed her surroundings and her warm breath hung in the cold, wintry air. Her speed picked up quickly as more and more of the white flakes fell into her black hair. She was only two blocks from the warmth of her apartment that she was determined to get to before the storm fully attacked. The rhythm of her boots hitting the snow-covered sidewalk was all that kept Maura going now.

She was experiencing a rough couple of weeks, thousands of thoughts were now buzzing in her head. Dozens of situations played out in her head, but none of them seemed to have the result that she was so desperately searching for. What path were you supposed to take when the rules were so unclear? The decision would have been so easy if the two choices were as clear as black and white, but they weren't. In fact, Maura couldn't even narrow down her thoughts to two choices, and the black and white areas in her mind had merged to form one gray confused mess. What could be expected of someone who had been exposed to so much in so little time?

Only three weeks ago, a time that seemed like an eternity now, Maura had begun a job that she had been working towards since she graduated from college. He was such an important man, one of the pillars the struggling city leaned heavily on. To be working for such an essential political figure should have been an honor, and at first, it had seemed like one. Having this experience on her résumé would have given Maura a shot at almost any job she could ever want. She just wasn't aware of how big a sacrifice she would have to make for that experience.

Maura walked faster, and tears started to flood down her face as she approached her apartment. The wind threatened to tear her coat away from her tiny frame as she reached the

steps at the front of her building. She struggled with her key for a minute before the door swung open and the warm air greeted her. If she could make it up to the second floor, she would be home and safe. Then maybe she would be able to make the decisions that were haunting her.

The first few days at work seemed to fly by for Maura. She felt so far behind everyone who seemed to have a perfect place to fit in there. They were all doing exactly what was expected of them to help the man who had saved this city. She wasn't even sure where to begin. Looking back, she had decided that her obsession with fitting in was probably what had caused that first week to seem alright.

Five days in, she had her first "real" conversation with him. Until that point she had been escorted in and out of his office and closely monitored like any guest to such a prominent figure. Finally, she had gained enough respect and trust to talk to him alone. At the time, that had seemed like a good thing. He hadn't been excessively obnoxious the first time he had her alone, just a little awkward and unexpected. She had pushed any doubts out of her mind, convincing herself that she just wasn't used to very affectionate men in the professional world, but in time things got so bad that they couldn't be ignored. He began to call her into his office regularly, always shutting the door behind her. Maura had never even imagined a co-worker flirting with her, much less her boss doing this. Just the thought of him began to make her sick to her stomach, but seeing him out of his office was much worse. She could feel herself tense up and become nervous in his presence, while he acted incredibly nonchalant.

Maura began to dread going to work. The days no longer flew by, but rather the hours seemed to drag on. She didn't want to give up on something she had worked so hard for, but sometimes resigning seemed to be the only logical option she had left. Finally, a plan began to

form in her mind. She would record one of her meetings with him. If anyone heard one of those tapes, there would be no doubt left in their minds that she was being violated as a professional.

Her plan had seemed flawless, but sitting in her apartment now with the tape in her hand, Maura wasn't so sure. Was this really what she wanted to do? A tape like this would most certainly take away any power he had. After talking to everyone else who had worked with him, it seemed like she was the only one that anything had ever happened to. What was so special about her? It would have been so easy for her to have him exposed if it had been anyone else. He had built this city up from next to nothing, and even more than that, he had always been one of her personal political heroes. She couldn't decide if he was a danger to anyone else or if she was the only person he hadn't helped. Could she really take down someone who was the life of this city?

Tears rolling down her face, Maura made the toughest decision of her life. She slowly walked toward her desk and sat down in the hard wooden chair. Her shaking hands reached for her laptop and cracked it open. In one slow movement, she found the mouse and clicked on the icon for a blank document. After reaching for a tissue and wiping her eyes, Maura's quivering fingers settled onto the keys. As her tears started to dry, Maura slowly typed her letter of resignation.