



JUNIOR YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL

WINNER

## WHY KEILANI LOVES ARIZONA

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I don't exactly know if I love this state. But I do have to say, it's not a bad place to call home. It's so... diverse. Not only in its population but also in what carves it out to be different. There are towering skyscrapers built of glittering glass right next to little suburban homes and small, family-owned restaurants. Arizona is a place of determination and prosperity, made from the hands of people who saw a wasteland and decided to see what they could build off of it.

In fact, I always stare at the window when there are stretches of undeveloped land or untouched desert, and I can't help but think of the people who saw nothing and thought they could build anything. I wonder how these pioneer men and women would react if they saw a bustling, crowded city where their wood fence and covered wagon used to be. There are some nights, too, when I lay in my bed, in my house, in the middle of my stereotypical neighborhood, and I wonder if they looked out the window and saw nothing. Nothing but grey-green and shades of brown as far as the eye could see.

But more than the people and what we built, Arizona has also stitched together a beautiful gown for herself. As I said before, it's so diverse. Some places are completely barren, with trees and bushes growing in on themselves, the only placeholders in a flat world. A few miles away there are mountains and cliffs with their faces jagged and unforgiving, adorned with boulders and cacti. And then we have the canyons, and they're all different. Walnut Canyon, for instance, has the ruins of houses carved into the side, offering a winding river and a necklace of dark pine trees covered in snow. But then we have the Grand Canyon, cloaked in all her earthy sedimentary colors and offset by a streak of bold deep blue and faint green shrubbery, not to mention the steep red cliffs of Sedona or the almost alien purple-red feel to Antelope Canyon. The whole state seems as if it were carved by a master artist and then painted lovingly in the same way.

Aside from the incredible wonders of nature, the weather is also magical. I know now why the boom of thunder is compared to drums, that deep rolling feeling that seems to reverberate through your very bones. Before that, though, lightning crackles through the sky, filling the night with its spiderweb of neon. And while it doesn't rain often here, when it does... Rain rides on the whipping wind, shooting through the sky like bullets. The air holds a weight to it, pinned down by the smell of creosote and a blanket feeling of the overbearing heat. It's during these great monsoons where time feels slightly altered, the heat and the wind filling your heart with that sickly-sweet smell of a long-awaited storm. But on nights where the wind is cruel and there is no rain, a great wall of dust rises up out of nowhere, blocking the sun and sky to swallow everything it sees in its entirety. Sometimes lightning accompanies this, lighting up the brown cloud in an image that inspires something. I don't quite know what just yet, but it sure does inspire something.

So that's why I'm not sure if love is the correct word for this. But to see a place filled to the brim with wonderful phenomena... Maybe awe is the correct word.

Either way, it's beautiful.