

Et Cetera Literary Magazine



Huntington High School 2018-2019



Et Cetera

Huntington High School's
Literary Magazine

2018-2019

Editor & Club President
Julia Collins

Treasurer & Vice President
Rory Bocelli

Cover Artist
Joshua Silverstein

Advisor
Mrs. Dianna Cazzalino

Dear Reader,

Thank you so much for picking up our magazine. This year's edition, is a bit melancholic for me, as I am graduating this June. I will definitely miss this club the most when I go off to college, but I am so glad to have spent most of my high school years a part of *Et Cetera*. This club has provided me with friends, inspiration, and something to look forward to every week.

I think I'm brave in admitting this: I'm not totally sure what I want to study in college. It's not gratifying when it seems like everyone around you knows what they want to do in life. It's especially anxiety-inducing because I have felt that since I have ingrained myself in creative writing, that I *must* major in that in college. However, I have found throughout the year, that whatever I choose to do in the future, I still have my love for writing to lie back on. I will be satisfied with sharing my future works that I create in my free time between my friends and family.

Anyways, not to distract you with my personal issues, I want to focus on our members. I might be biased in saying this, but I genuinely believe that our club has some of the most interesting, creative, and thought-provoking minds. I was constantly amazed at the stories and poems that were produced off of a single sentence prompt. I have so much pride in the pieces we have created, and I am hopeful that there will be more made in the coming years.

Well, that's all I really have to say. I want to thank the club members, all of the other contributors, and the artists for submitting to us. I want to thank all of my friends and family for their continued support, and most of all, Mrs. Cazzalino (Mo!) for your guidance these past four years. I can't wait to pick up next years addition of the magazine when I come back home. Thank you again for choosing to read this magazine and supporting *Et Cetera*.

Yours truly,
Julia Collins
Editor of *Et Cetera*

Members

Ashanna Archibald	Naysa Escobar
Rory Bocelli	Neurchelange Antoine
Julia Collins	Sara Modaresizadeh
Mia D'Alessandro	Foster Sullivan
Irtana Deslouches	
Anna Koulakova	
Sasha Koulakova	
Maddy Kye	
Lea LaPonti	
Fionnán Malone	
Isabellarose Malone	
Lizabeth Loeza Mendoza	
Patricia Reyes-Canales	
Cori Thomason	
Colette Wagner	

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Et Cetera

Have you ever wished there was a club where you could express yourself?

Write down all your feels, creative poems, and share them?

Share your memes and art to the world?

Create an epic story and have it published?

Fool around and crack jokes 90% of the time?

Well then you should join Et Cetera!

Embrace your creativity with us!

We accept nerds and dorks of all kinds!

If you secretly are one we won't judge you!

We'll accept all of you with open arms!

Join Et Cetera for great fun today!

-Lea LaPonti

Advice

Be grateful for what you have.

Try and be confident.

Take breaks every once in a while.

Learn to love yourself.

Have some self-respect.

Don't let your pride take over.

Speak up.

Do your best in everything.

You're not perfect, but you are a queen (don't forget it!)

Be comfortable in yourself.

Food is solace in life.

-Irtana Deslouches

One, Two, Three, Four

One petal.
Two petals.
Three petals.
Four.
Petals spilling from my lips to the floor.

One drop.
Two drops.
Three drops.
Four.
Petals covered in drops of my blood.

One flower.
Two flowers.
Three flowers.
Four.
Petals become flowers hitting the floor.

Four breaths.
Three breaths.
Two breaths.
One.
Goodbye world and my unrequited love.

-Cori Thomason
Inspired by Hanahaki Disease

Mother

As I was laying down,
I took a deep breath.
As I open my eyes,
I try to turn my neck
to see the ray of sunshine from the right.
Suddenly, from the left side of my eyeball,
I see a female laughing.
She is injecting something into my IV.
Suddenly...

NO
NO
NO
N

-Sara Modaresizadeh

Cliff Hanger

It was a rainy September afternoon, and my bus was driving slowly up the windy road on which I lived. It stopped abruptly at the point on the road where the bus sat at an angle, and leaned towards a cliff. Lightning lit up the sky and I heard a loud crash of thunder. I could hear the bus scraping up against the metal barrier as it began to drive again; the metal barrier that separated the cars on the road from a deep cliff. I knew that it wasn't a good noise. I gripped the top of the seat in front of me, nervous of what would happen next. Sometimes the bus would bump the railing, but it wouldn't scrape against it for more than a second. This time was different. For what felt like ten minutes the noise dragged on, until it came to a sudden stop. Then out of nowhere the bus took a sharp turn in the wrong direction and flew off the cliff. I was thrown back over the seats and my head slammed into the back wall of the bus. I fell unconscious immediately.

When I woke up, I was in my bed, surrounded by my closest friends. But they looked different... older.

I turned towards my friend Alyssa. "What happened?" I asked calmly.

Hearing the sound of my voice, she jumped. "You're talking!"

"Why is that such a surprise? Usually you complain because I never shut up."

"Kendall, you've been unconscious for the last 2 years. We all thought you were dead." my friend James said, softly. "That's why we're here. See that machine?" he motioned to a beeping machine that I was attached to by wires. I didn't notice it before. "That's a life support machine. Your mother couldn't bear the thought of unplugging you in the hospital. She insisted that you'd wake up, even with the knowledge that everyone else in the accident had been announced to be brain dead."

My breathing became heavier. I was too weak to form words. "The-then where is she? Where's my mom? She'll be happy to see that I'm alive won't she?"

They stayed quiet. This worried me. Even after being out cold for 2 years, I could still tell when something was up with them.

"Where's my mom?" I asked, this time with more concern in my voice. Then, my dad and brother walked in, with sad looks on their faces.

"You're alive!" they yelled simultaneously. It worried me that there was so much shock in their voices.

"Why is that such a surprise to everyone? You guys took me back here because mom believed I would wake up. So now that I'm awake you're all so concerned. I don't understand."

It was quiet for a few minutes before my father spoke up, and softly, explained that everyone was surrounding me today because they were about to take me off life support. Countless doctors had come in and told my parents that they were wasting their time waiting for me to wake up. They didn't even know if I would be able to breath on my own.

“Stop.” I said in the middle of the explanation. It was too much for me to handle. I tried to get up and walk to my window, but I was still too weak. But even from my bed I could see the tree which I had climbed every day still swaying back and forth in the wind, and I could see the zipline that my brother and I would use to travel across the yard once reaching the top. I knew on the other side of the zipline was the treehouse my dad had built for us when we were kids. I then looked around my room and noticed all the quilts my mother had made me, in a neat pile. Then I remembered the question that nobody had answered.

“Where’s Mom?” I asked, sternly.

“Sweetie, she’s gone. When she found out we were going to take you off life support, she ran away. We found her near the cliff where the accident was. She was just... staring. Staring down at the remains of that bus. I called to her to come back home, and she turned and looked to me with tears in her eyes. I could tell she wanted to come back to me, so I need you to know that what happened next was not her intention. She turned back to walk towards me, but as she stepped toward the road, a car zoomed by. She lost her balance and fell backwards into the cliff. Her funeral was yesterday.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing.

“No.” I said, too quietly for anyone to hear. “No.” It was louder this time. I took every bit of energy I had in my body and lifted myself up, running down the spiral staircase towards my front door.

“Mom!” I yelled.

-Bella DiBenedetto



-Jaqueline Salgado

My Heart

I lost my train of thought again.
Yes, you came barging in. with your sweet smile
and infectious laugh-no focus.
Stay in the moment.
Your warm eyes ensnare me, a web.
One glance, and it's spark-s a match in my heart.
Nooo, STOP!
Breathe, you have work.
Your cocky but humble strut,
knocks me off my feet.
Damn, I finally got you outta my head.
I guess you live in my heart now.

-Patricia Reyes-Canales

Constellation of Ryn

Ryn was a wolf warrior in her pack. Her pack, the Mountain River Valley Pack, was invaded by their enemies, the Forest Shadow Pack. Ryn's pack wasn't always supportive of her. However, in the Park War, both packs tragically lost numerous members. Ryn was the last strong wolf; she and the Forest Shadow Pack's alpha fought. Ryn fought out her life and won the war. Later that night, Ryn noticed a constellation. A group of stars appeared that pictured herself. From that day on, Ryn knew and always knew she was a strong, brave, wolf warrior of Mountain River.

-Ashley Coleman

Kermit's Suicide

He stumbled out of bed, past the piles of crushed aluminum cans and broken mayonnaise jars, towards the bathroom. Cigarette butts were littered across the floor of his apartment. The kitchen looked like a bomb had exploded inside. The calendar on the bathroom door was scattered confetti on the ground, along with tufts of green fuzz and bits of blood. When he reached the bathroom, the automatic lights burned into his brain so he sat, blinking rapidly and cursing loudly, on his tiny toilet.

In front of the mirror he saw:

Sagged skin. Yellowed eyes. A frown.

It was hard for a puppet to look as washed out as he did, but he looked like he'd been cycling in the laundry dozens of times before being set on fire. Actually, that would explain the small burn marks scattered across his chest. He dug his stubby fingers into one of them and winced.

He checked a mayonnaise bottle for any of that sweet creamy substance. When he didn't find anything, he threw it aside, his scowl sending jagged wrinkles running through the fabric of his face. Glass now covered the floor, but he didn't care.

The body was in the bathtub.

Green and small, its eyes, with their X-shaped pupils, stared blankly into empty space. It was a dead Kermit the frog, with his fur roughed up and his yellowed eyes and his skin sagged. But he couldn't be Kermit, because Kermit was the bemused puppet standing over him.

He spotted something under the body and reached for it.

It was a note, which read, *"im real yolked,"* in half-legible handwriting. *This very helpful clue was also written in someone's blood, and it had a signature scrawled at the bottom that Kermit partially recognized.*

But then something shiny glittered from behind Kermit's dead body,



-Sasha Koulakova

so the other Kermit reached over Kermit's shoulder to take it. He pulled out a half-empty jar of mayonnaise, and whatever mystery there was was quickly abandoned. He sat on the freezing floor tiles beside the tub, staring blankly at the other Kermit while taking occasional swigs of the coagulated liquid from the jar.

After a long moment's pause, he said, in a hoarse, nasal voice, "So what're you in for?" The dead one didn't respond, but Kermit nodded in understanding, leaning his head against the toilet seat while taking modest slurps from the mayonnaise jar.

"I always wanted to-," he hesitated, "Yeah, sorry. I don't know how it is. Maybe you're lucky to be back here. I dunno." He took another big swig.

Then he remembered the note, "Hey, wait. What's with that note? It looked like Henson's signature, but he's been dead for a *long*, long time." Kermit was still. After an extended calm in the bathroom, the automatic light shut off, and he had space to breathe again.

"Why do you think he made me? Sorry, I mean us."

"It's fine. I think he just wanted to sell Wilkin's coffee. Why else would you make a mascot if not to violently tell gullible people to buy coffee in the 50's. We had a purpose back then, but . . . we're useless now."

"Do you think he loved us?" A fly landed on his eye during the deathly silence that followed. Kermit wasn't going to answer the question, it seemed.

He pressed on, "The note was in my handwriting, and I'm the only one cool enough to say *yolkled*."

". . . He loved the purpose we served. The idea of us. The success it brought him."

"What?"

"You asked if he loved us?"

"Sorry my- "

"Your head's all screwed up, man . I get it. No worries." Kermit opened dead Kermit's mouth for him and placed a cigarette inside. The lights flashed on again, but this time they didn't bother him as much. He looked down at the note.

"Whose blood is this?"

"Blood was all I had to write with before I . . ."

"Before you?"

"Died."

"Right, and why are you here?"

He let out a deep sigh, "We can't die."

Kermit finished his glass and placed it on the ground beside him. He couldn't die, and yet his corpse lay in the tub, unmoving. Unchanging.

He stood, ready to spend the remaining hours of the night figuring out what had happened to him the previous day. Or nights. He put on his clothes. He treated himself to a cigarette he'd found in the bottom of his sink to ease the ache in his swollen ragdoll-limbs as he pulled on baggy pants and a jacket. All that time, he avoided glancing in the bathroom, just in case he was still there.

When he finally closed the door to his apartment, he looked over his shoulder through the open door of the bathroom. And his worst fears were confirmed. He was still there. He would always be there.

-Sasha Koulakova

T-MINUS

I could see Mercury crash
before my naive eyes.
As he ruined my home,
good neighbors I've known,
and all of Asia in a horrid demise.

Mercury crashed --
Skies ruby red,
like a baby's face when she does cries.
Land ripping, folks running,
on a day all so sunny.
Burning like a fluid rain of lies.

On India he fell,
shocked me in Iran,
if only rich villains were wise.

As Mercury crashed,
for all gods I asked,
I begged, and I prayed,
"Oh why?"

-Rory Bocelli



-John O'Brien

Leech

In a pond I saw
A small leech asking for food
And so I gave him

-Lizbeth Loeza Mendoza

rather us all die than surrender this trench to the Germans. That was the most quixotic idea I've heard all day and I desperately fought off the urge to just put a bullet through his head. Against James's wishes, the rest of the surviving soldiers decided to just shoot him through the head and retreat to a more fortified position. Unfortunately, I didn't have the honors of ending the insufferable dullard's life because another soldier beat me to the punch and shot with their pistol before I could aim my rifle. We then proceeded to abandon the trench before the next wave of Germans arrived and made it to the nearest allied outpost before the enemy noticed. When we arrived, I reported to the leader of the outpost and told him that my commanding officer and the rest of the battalion were wiped out by the German advance. The commanding officer gave me his condolences and then gave a rousing speech about how we would be resurgent and take back that trench from those barbaric Germans. I was in no rush to go back to that somber trench, but I didn't mention that to the commanding officer. I just wanted to be done with this conversation and finally sleep in a place that wasn't a muddy hole in the ground.

After spending a few days in the outpost, I realized that the soldiers here were all tyros. They were in the backline because they weren't fit to fight on the frontline, but now that my trench was probably overrun with Germans by this point, this outpost would soon be the new frontline. At that realization I rushed to speak with the commanding officer of this outpost, his name was Henry, and warn him of the threat the approaching German army posed. I knew that the soldiers in this outpost wouldn't be able to survive a German offensive and asked Henry to request support from other nearby outposts. As I was explaining this to Henry, he seemed to take umbrage to the way I was describing his troops. As the exchange of words continued between me and Henry, the topic of the conversation veered from saving this outpost to the state of the soldiers in the outpost. Henry continually tried to defend the state of his troops and argue they were ready to prove themselves in battle, but I knew that if this outpost were to be attacked, that it would fall in a matter of days without reinforcements.

I start to feel a sense of vertigo thinking about the impending carnage that was going to unfold due to Henry's incompetence. This reminds me of what I had to deal with in the trenches with James's mistake. At that moment I realized what needed to be done. History would repeat itself once more, and this time I would have the honor. My trust in Henry was waning at an exponential rate and I knew this outpost needed new leadership. I quickly wrest Henry's pistol from his hip and before he could take the gun back, I shot him. After a few more shots to the head and chest to confirm the kill, I proceed to the communications tent to put in a request for reinforcements from nearby posts. While I was requesting reinforcements, the rest of the remaining soldiers from my old trench who were with me had the job of disposing of Henry's corpse. I will never again put my fate in the hands of incompetent leadership.

Epilogue: Reinforcements never came as all the other nearby outposts were also dealing with the German invasion. The outpost our story was focused on was eventually overrun and everyone either died or became prisoners of war. Luckily our protagonist lived, but as a prisoner of war. He lived long enough to personally experience one of Germany's famous camps, where he later died.
The End.

-ChaohanYang

The Rat and The Phoenix

The rat began working at the library because she'd needed a fresh start in life. The creeping vines, foggy windows, and beautiful flowers of its exterior had enticed her curiosity, and the maze of bookshelves within had set her heart aflame. At first, she came only as a patron, making a library pass and slowly making her way through its endless selection.

One day, she approached the front desk one day to ask for the location of a text on dwarves, and her eyes met the librarian's. She asked about the book, despite her nervousness, and the librarian, with her crown of feathers and wide, staring eyes, pointed her in the right direction.

The rat hadn't a home to speak of, except for a small, damp cave on the border of the city. She had no money, and no job, and up until that point she hadn't needed one. But after seeing the librarian, she needed one desperately. At first, she was a volunteer. Her long tail made it easier on the border of the city. She had no money, and no job, and up until that point she hurried to climb the massive shelves in the giant's section. Her quick instincts made it easy for her to evade the beings that lurked in the shadows of the botany section. So she quickly became a very useful volunteer.

Then, after a week or so, she needed help getting up to one of the floating shelves above the general area, so she had to ask one of the birds (parkour isn't *always* useful in an infinite library, it seems), and she took the opportunity to ask the phoenix to take her. That got them on speaking terms, at least. It was a wonderful start to their relationship.

Working in the library was the most fun she'd ever had in life. Instead of just surviving, she was doing something more with her life! Organizing books and information so that people could find it and use it was an incredibly satisfying task. And after meeting and talking to the phoenix, her resolve to do well only strengthened.

After three years, she grew bored. She worked there full time, and had committed every crook and cranny to memory. So she landed herself on a pro-

ject with her girlfriend (A rat and a phoenix? Astonishing!) and they worked on archiving the books on aquatic reptiles.

It was in the middle of the project that the rat dropped the box she was holding. The phoenix asked if she was okay. She wasn't. She was bored. She was tired. Her eyes, trained from birth to see into dark places, hurt from the constant reading.

She took a deep breath, staring deep into the magnificent gems of her partner's eyes. She poured her heart out- that she was bored, and tired, and her eyes hurt.

"Please don't go!" The phoenix asked, realizing what it meant for the two of them, "There's so much more to do here!" She was not bored. She was not tired. The fire would always rage inside her head. But there was no more flame left in the rat. The library would outlive her, she realized. Her partner would long outlive her.

The rat said her quiet, tearful goodbyes, and left the library. The exterior was the same as it had been. Windows covered in steam, sneaking vines, and luscious fauna. A life well lived, but she'd lost it long ago.

-Sasha Koulakova



-Sasha Koulakova

The Reality

It's been five years since their little girl was ripped away from them. There was no body found, no funeral, no formal goodbye. The case had went cold and the police had told them that it was time to "move on." How did one expect them to move on? That was their child. She's ten now, she *would be ten...*

Ellie Summons was five years old when she was taken away from her family. Their family home in Indiana was robbed on a dark and cold night, five years ago. The chilly wind that snipped at the noses of the passersby marked the night for eternity. Alice and Matt Summons were tied to their kitchen chairs as they heard the robbers rummage through their house. They had hoped that Ellie would not wake. Unfortunately, she did to ask her mom for a drink of water. When the intruders heard her call for her mother, they took action and grabbed the poor girl. Mr. Summons had broken free of his ropes and attempted to stop them, leaving the signs of a struggle. Mr. Summons had lacerations all over his face and internal bleeding when the police arrived on that dreadful night.

As the officers began to investigate the scene, Mr. Summons weakly said, "They took her...because I fought back. It's my fault." The Summons cried quietly as the police searched for clues in their now empty house. Just like that, Ellie was never seen again.

Today marks the anniversary of Ellie's disappearance and, the day that her parents have decided to let go. The case has gone as cold as the night she was taken away from them. Matt knows now that he is not at fault. However, Alice still struggles with her guilt regarding her own efforts during that day. As they lay on their couch on this somber evening, the phone rings. Mrs. Summons goes to answer it.

"Hello?"

"Why did you do it?", said the childlike voice.

"Who is this?"

"Why weren't you paying attention, Mommy?"

Alice gasps and immediately hangs up the phone, tearing up. "Who was that, sweetie?" asked Matt. She goes quiet, choking back tears, "It's nothing...really."

Suddenly, the phone rings again. Matt goes to answer it this time. She grabs his arm.

"Don't answer that."

"Why? What's wrong with you?", he exclaims as he rips away from her grasp. Matt picks up the phone. Dial tone.

“Alice, calm down. There’s no one on the phone. Why are you so shaken up?”

“It’s all my fault, Matt. You know it. I could’ve saved her...I could’ve-”

“Alice, you know you couldn’t have prevented that from happening. You need to move on, it’s been five years. It’s not good for you to be fighting yourself like this.” He looked over at her trembling body, struggling to breathe normally. He walks over to her and attempts to comfort her, but is swatted away instantaneously.

“Don’t ever say that to me again. You don’t know how *I feel*. I birthed her. She was inside of me, growing, for nine months. A piece of me is gone.” Alice says as she crumbles to the floor.

“Tell me who was on the phone.” Matt demands, “There’s always a phone call on *this* day, and it always leaves you like this.”

Alice thinks for a moment. Should she say the truth? Will she be deemed crazy? She opens her mouth, but nothing comes out. She sheds a few tears.

“My baby, my Ellie. She asks me why I wasn’t more attentive, why I let that happen to her... Now, Matt, please stop asking me the same question, I’m tired of this.” Alice lays down on the couch and shuts her eyes tight before Matt can say anything else.

“Mrs. Summons, I apologize but you have your story wrong. Do you know where you are?”

Alice opens her eyes as they adjust to the brightness of the white room around her. “Where am I? Who are you?”

“Mrs. Summons, you are in the mental asylum of Indiana in the psychiatric ward and I am your therapist. Your husband admitted you here five years ago when you attempted suicide after your daughter drowned in your pool. There was no robbery, Ellie drowned and you made up events to satisfy how you depicted reality. She drowned, Alice, and you wanted to be with her...despite what was at stake.”

-Adora Colay

*These are a collection of Found Poems
based on the article
“A Forbidden Word” by ABC News*

Word Evolution

Usage of the word...

“Nigga”

Racial long history of

Black Men

INFERIOR!

To whites.

Historically the usage of the word

“Nigger”

Was a hateful term to

BLACK MEN...

Generation Gap

New usage of the word

Means..

Brother

A term of endearment

-Jason Santos

“overcome”

WE are the **MASTERS** of **WORDS**.

the word was spoken to hurt you...

intended to **harm** *the psychology & social standing of black slaves*

A D A P T E D

no offense attached

BROTHER!

term of **endearment**

stripping *it of the hateful & degrading meaning*

black people **WREST** *control over how they will be viewed*

r e c l a i m e d.

-Cianna Batts

...Found Poems Continued

W H i c h O n e ? ?

Hateful and degrading
The word was spoken to hurt you
Hateful and degrading
Badnow, fightsbreakout
Hateful and degrading
Never use nigger

Revived and Reclaimed
No offense attached
Revived and Reclaimed
It's a casual thing
Revived and Reclaimed
Uses the word

-Shannon Kehoe

"The N-Word"

Revived-some says reclaimed.

Stripping it of the hateful meaning.

History does not agree.

PERSPECTIVE.

Troublesome word.

N-I-G-G-E-R, a term coined by white supremacists.

Meanings can change with context.

Hurtful memories, painful ones.

The general rule of thumb.

The word of the minute.

-Alec Codeiro

Pepita

The war felt infinite. Day by day, battle by battle, an unbreakable cycle. Through long journeys, without rest. Marching through the blistering heat and rain. We only have each other for comfort, laughter now a memory. A year has passed since the war began. A year without seeing family. But we are like family, no? I know their names and they know mine, but we don't know each other. How can we? Many die each day, dropping like flies, their bloody bodies etched in my memory without knowing who they were, without knowing the types of lives they lived. The unknown leaving their families behind.

We were young when we started. Young, with the chaos of fighting at arm's length, we were youngsters who were not going to quit until we won. Insane and proud. Two years have passed, and the march of death continues; the odor unbearable.

I wonder how mother and Pepita are. Has the war reached them? Are they safe? It's not worth thinking about that when my return. No, I have to come back, they're waiting for me. I can't fail them. They need me like I need them.

The coldness burns. Burns like fire. The weather can't stop it, so we continue to fight the infinite war. The objective: To take down an enemy base. We haven't made it to any base. We keep walking. We don't stop until we run out of ammo. The rations had diminished. Cold and wet is the worst thing you can be, but hungry too makes it impossible to bare.

Four years passed while I crouch hiding from the enemy. Bullets flying killing everything they touch. They have more men than us, more weapons, more energy. It was an ambush, and it will be the end of me. The last I heard about my family was that soldiers came and took everything. Pepita escaped and is on her way to our aunt who lives out of the country; she is being taken there by a man who will help her cross the border. Mother did not live to see the invasion.

I shoot at the enemy, I shoot at whoever I see without ever looking at their faces. They shoot me back and I hide again, I pray for my family.

The infinite war was finally about to end, but it seems like we aren't the victors. The mud dirties my hands, but they will never be as dirty as they have been this past four years. Nobody knows how many we killed, and at this point that doesn't matter anymore. What matters is to survive and to return home if we're lucky. But why would I go home? There's nothing there for me. The war continues.

I was in the hospital when the war came to an end. I was in surgery. They surrendered, a civil war having started in their country, but they left ours in ruins. I lost an arm.

I have been in this war for seven years, fighting until they took me as a prisoner the last two years. I'm not anyone important to them, so I just had to work. Those who resisted were publicly executed. Three years passed without knowing anything about my sister.

Today I received a letter. It was from Pepita.

- Lizbeth Loeza Mendoza

Pepita

La guerra se siente infinito. Día tras día, batalla tras batalla un ciclo irrompible. Tras viajes largos, sin tiempo para descansar, marchando tras calor y lluvia en cualquier terreno. Teniendo solo nosotros como consuelo, la risa como una memoria del pasado. Ya ha pasado un año desde que la guerra comenzó. Un año sin ver familia. Pero nosotros somos como familia. ¿O no? Se lo nombres de todos y todos saben mi nombre pero no nos conocemos ¿cómo podemos? muchos mueren cada día, cayendo como moscas sus figuras sangrientas recordado en mi memoria sin saber como eran, sin saber que tipo de vidas vivían. Nombres y caras vacías dejando sus familias.

Éramos jóvenes cuando comenzamos. Jóvenes con el caos de la batalla siempre cerca a mano. Jóvenes que no se iban a rendir hasta que acaben y ganen esta guerra. Todos Locos y orgullosos. Ya han pasado dos años y no para el desfile de cuerpos, el hedor insoportable.

Me pregunto cómo ha de estar madre y Pepita. ¿La guerra a llegado a casa? ¿Mi familia está a salvo? No vale pensar de eso sin saber si voy a regresar. No. No Debo de pensar así. Necesito regresar, me esperan allá. No les puedo fallar.

El frío duele. Quema mi piel con cada segundo que pasa. El clima no puede im-pedir la guerra, seguimos luchando esta guerra sin fin. El objetivo es acercarse a la base enemiga y atacar. No hemos llegado a ninguna base. Sigamos caminando. No es hasta que empieza a nevar cuando al fin paramos. Nuestra ración de comida ya baja. Friento y mojado es lo peor que puedes ser pero hambriento lo hace imposible de soportar.

Cuatro años han pasado y estoy agachado escondiendome de los enemigos. Los balazos en el aire matando lo que tocan. Tienen más hombres que nosotros, mas armas, mas energia. Era una emboscada y esto será el fin de mi. Lo ultimo que escuche de mi familia era que soldados llegaron y se llevaron a todos. Pepita huyó y se fue a camino con nuestra tía que vive fuera del país acompañada de un hombre que la llevara por la frontera. Madre no vivió para ver la invasión.

Disparo el enemigo y disparó al los que veo pero nunca veo sus rostros. Me disparan a mi y me oculto de nuevo rezando por mi familia.

La Guerra sin fin ya iba acabar pero se parece que nosotros no somos los videntes. El lodo ensuciaba mis manos pero nunca van a poder ser más sucias que los últimos cuatro años. Nadie sabe cuántos hemos matado y en este punto no importa solo importa vivir y ir a casa si aun tenemos suerte. ¿Pero a que volvería a casa? Ya no hay nadie allí. La guerra continúa

Estaba en el hospital cuando acabó la guerra. Me estaban operando. Se rindieron por una guerra civil que comenzó dentro de su país pero dejaron el nuestro arruinado. Perdí un brazo

He estado siete años en esta guerra peleando hasta que me tomaron como prisionero hace dos años. No era alguien importante para ellos entonces solo tuve que trabajar con ellos los que resisten los mataban públicamente. Pase tres años sin saber algo de mi hermana.

Me llego una carta. Era de Pepita.

- Lizbeth Loeza Mendoza

The Black Hole

Everyone is scared of something: snakes, spiders, heights. Mine is the dark; except it's not just "darkness." I have a fear that at any moment I could be swallowed up by an irreversible, pitch black darkness. It's irrational, but no matter what I do, I can't rid myself of this unidentified phobia. Throughout my entire life, I had never encountered any incident that would spur on this illogical fear; it's just always been here.

Living alone has its benefits, although it is not ideal in a case of emergency, when no one is there to help you and keep you safe. I've always doubted any sort of disaster could happen, as I live quite close to the middle of nowhere, and an intruder seemed unlikely. It was just me, alone with my thoughts and dreams...

Out of nowhere, I began to have horrific nightmares every single night. The first odd dream I had, I was in the forest, running from something. I scraped my skin against overgrown brush, and a low branch I had not seen before fell and cut my forehead, but I still kept running. I tripped over a rock, gashing a wound in my shin. My vision got blurry, and it grew darker and darker...

I finally woke up, cold sweat dampening my forehead. When I went to wipe it however, sweat as well as dark crimson blood were left on my hand. In my drowsy state, my sleep-riddled mind was not able to comprehend the significance of this. It was only that morning when I woke up with blood all over my sheets that I realized something was wrong...

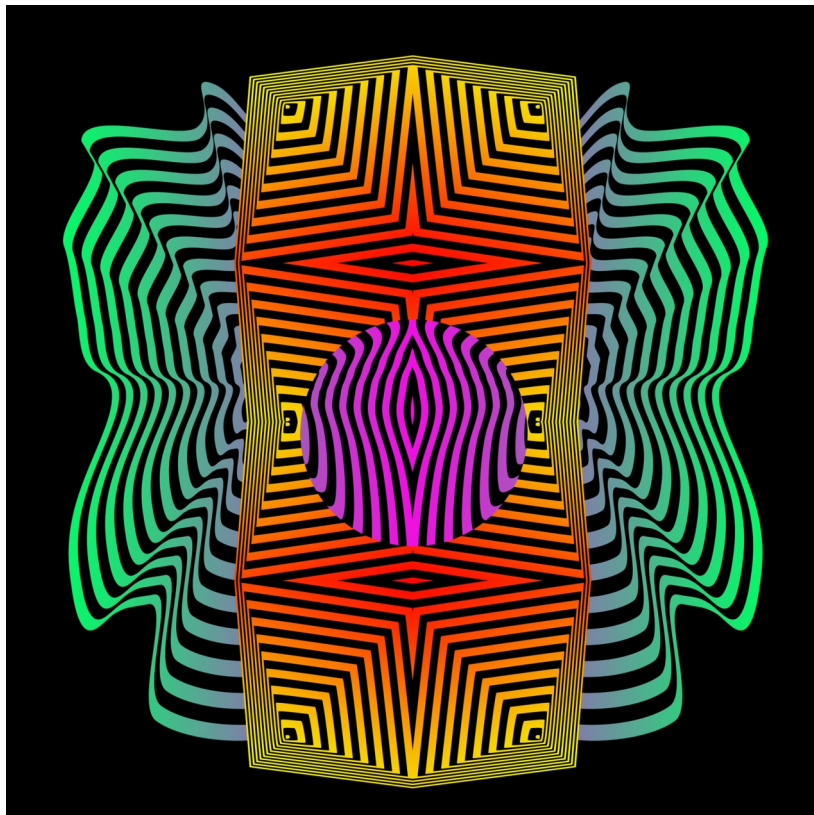
In the next dream, I appeared to be in a dank old basement with a scarce amount of lighting. I stood up and walked through doorway after doorway, trying to find an exit. Before I reached one particular door, a heavy metallic stench filled my nose, and when I turned the knob, three unknown corpses lay on the floor, covered in fresh blood. The smell became sickening, and the last thing I saw before I fainted was blood dripping from my hands. When I awoke, my sheets were once again sordid, but this time the blood wasn't my own.

Every night, nightmare after bloody nightmare would haunt my subconscious, always leaving me with my fears heightened and my sheets soaked with blood. My dreams seemed too unusual and realistic to regard as a "bad dream," and the frequency of these dreams made the situation all the more strange.

Over the next three months, my dreams only proceeded to get worse and worse. I dreaded each night. Eventually, as the rational part of my mentality began to deteriorate with sleep deprivation, I decided to never let myself fall asleep long enough to experience these realistic nightmares, only allowing myself a few hours to sleep each day. I made it through each day in a haze. I barely ever stopped to rest in fear that sleep would overtake me and I would be drawn in yet another hideous nightmare.

After about two straight days of no rest, when my legs unfortunately gave out and I fell to the floor, a pitch black, faceless figure appeared in the corner of my lounge. It was the darkest black I had ever seen, as if all light had been sucked from its presence, leaving in return an empty creature. As the figure slowly approached me, it seemed to swallow up any source of light. I tried desperately to get up and flee, but my legs and arms felt paralyzed, and all I could focus on was this emptiness slowly consuming me. The terrible mass of utter darkness finally approached me, and with one swift motion, my worst fears had come true, and I was enveloped in an irreversible, pitch black darkness.

-Chloe Buffone



-Alexander Bonilla

What Being In Love With You Is Like

You leave me breathless with your actions.

Yet, I stay because you fed me oxygen.

You leave me defenseless with your words.

Yet, I use you as my shield from insanity in the world.

You leave me in despair with your words.

Yet, I try and try to make things work with you.

You leave me broken with your actions.

Yet, I give you all the pieces I can find for you to mend.

-Hannah-Elise Morett

Tick Tock, Tick Tock

“tick tock, tick tock,”
said the clock.

Swinging back and forth as if it was dancing,
but stayed still in one place and never moved.

I stood there watching it,
the sun went up and down and it was still dancing and not moving.
As I tried to catch up, the stabled clock still dancing, said:
“tock tick, tock tick” as I went back in time?

-Neurchelange Antoine

The Devil Cries

He was beautiful.
He was charming.
He was arrogant.
He was sweet.
He was kind.
He was everything I ever loved.
And he was mean, oh was he mean.

His soul filled every crevice of my being with silent promises of kind words and soft touches.
He brought warmth and safety and love. But his cold was something different.
A blizzard in July. And his love would vanish. In its wake it left guilt and destruction. And I was alone.

“You could have done more,” he’d scream.
“What else could I have done?” I’d ask.
But he stayed silent, glaring at me with such hatred I never knew was imaginable.
He’d leave and I couldn’t breathe.

He was an Angel.
He was a dream.
He was a rose.
And he completed me.

But he was the Devil.

“You were never there,” he’d accuse, with his hands around my throat. I never knew what happened after. I’d close my eyes and shut off, his yells drifting away. In the end, he’d be in tears. His wails shook the room. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry.” he’d say, each word laced with guilt.
I know I shouldn’t, I know this is wrong, but I’d open my arms and welcome him back his warmth returning once more.
“It won’t happen again,” he lied.
I needed him.

He was Heaven.
He was Hell.
I hated him.
I loved him.
And he loved me.

So I stayed.

-Lizbeth Loeza Mendoza

A Silent War

It was a mostly sleepless night for Nathan Paul; although he remembers some faint dreams about his fishing village Palito Bay. Nathan was no stranger to long sleepless nights. He has lived most of his 15 years with a constant struggle of insomnia. Besides this, it was a mostly normal morning for Nathan.

He was awake bright and early before any of his family. In a slow and tired state, he made his way to the back door and out onto the back deck floating on the water. He sat in a chair that he kept on the deck and looked out on the water. The small engines of the tiny fishing boats on the water were heard as he felt the waves slowly rocking the deck. Fishing is how the village stays alive. Nathan and his father made their living fishing and taking their catches back inland to sell.

Once his Father awoke, him and Nathan set out to the water in their small boat. Nathan felt a tug on his line and his catch surprised them both. The color of this catch was something they had never seen before: a color that they could not describe with words. Although Nathan kept quiet about it, he had seen this fish before. He was not sure how but he recognized it, but he insisted that they have to throw it back. His father was reluctant, as he wanted to see how much money this "one of a kind" fish would bring. His father placed the fish in a bucket with the rest of the catches of that morning. As they made their way back to the house, Nathan sat next to the bucket of fish steering at the back of the boat. While his father wasn't looking, he tossed the astonishingly colored fish back into the water.

He was expecting his father to be quite angry about his actions, but he seemed to have no recollection of the fish by the time they were back at the shore by the house. As they made their way inland to sell their catch for the day, Nathan was silent. He knew something about the fish he caught meant something. He now remembered where he saw the fish. Last night as he drifted in and out of sleep he saw it in his dreams. He tried to shrug it off however and just call it a coincidence.

Nathan's next night was a rather unusual one. He had actually fallen asleep for some time. His dreams that night were vivid and again surrounding his village, but this time much more than a special colored fish appeared. Nathan found himself underwater. He felt an extreme heat and pressure, then before his eyes, a massive underwater volcanic eruption sent toxins shooting out of the ocean floor. To the sound of a bang he woke up, and the fear from the dream persisted despite the fact that he is now wide awake. He got up and looked outside, but everything was calm and peaceful. He went back to bed, but the vividness of the dream stuck in his head prevented him from even closing his eyes to try and sleep some more.

When morning broke, Nathan went outside again and sat in his usual chair on the floating deck. Everything was normal for Nathan until he and his dad went to go fishing again. No fish were biting their hooks. They tried to look down into the water and see if they could find any fish. However, the water was murky and grey, and there were no fish in sight. With no catches they simply went back to the house and had to take a day without any income.

After another sleepless night, Nathan and his Father awoke to find thousands

of dead fish lining the shores. Shocked by this site, Nathan went into town to see if he could find out if anybody knew anything about the sudden deaths of all the fish in the bay. The grim appearance of the water raised suspicions, but nobody could give him an answer to his questions.

Out of luck, Nathan began walking home. He picked up a news paper on the way home. The front cover read "Underwater Volcanic Eruption Devastates the Bay". Nathan was shocked to see that for the second time he had seen one of his faint dreams become reality once again.

When he got home he sat next to his father on the couch. He wasn't sure how he could bring this up to his father. He sat quietly for a while thinking of what he could say that would convince his father of his suspicion of his dreams altering reality. Upon mentioning it to his father was sceptical -- as anyone would be -- and simply told him that it was his imagination. Nathan pleaded with him, and tried his hardest to explain that it wasn't his imagination. Something about his dreams are altering the real world.

With extreme frustration, Nathan stormed out of the room and retreated to his bedroom. In a sad tone he said to himself "Why me?" He was a mere normal teenage boy living in a small fishing village. Out of everyone in the world why did this strange gift have to become his? Where did this dream of destruction come from? Nathan was hesitant about going to bed that night. If he could dream of something that could jeopardize his entire fishing village, what could he cause with a worse dream? The fear was all too much for Nathan.

He kept his lights on and sat up in bed, fearing he could change his entire life for the worse if he fell asleep. For night after night Nathan refused to let himself fall asleep. As the nights went on however, he knew that he could not keep this up forever.

After countless sleepless nights, his Father became increasingly worried about Nathan's increasingly poor health and tired looking appearance. He questioned Nathan about why he was doing so badly. Still bothered by his father's lack of belief in his gift, he explained that he cannot even try to go to sleep in fear of another one of his dreams coming true. Again, just as before, he was doubtful. Rather than leaving this time annoyed at his father, Nathan thought of a way he may be able to convince his father to believe him.

He replied to his father's doubts with a proposal, "Tell me something to dream about." he said. His Father decided to play along and not irritate Nathan any more than he had already. He paused for a bit and thought long and hard about what to tell Nathan to dream about.

After a moment he replied "Bring me my long lost dog." The dog he was referring to was his as a kid. It was long dead by now. Nathan knew his dad was only playing along to avoid angering him but regardless he agreed.

"You'll see your dog tonight."

Nathan knew however that this would be a tough task to make happen. Assuming he could sleep at all, he had no idea how to control his dreams. He simply planned to fall asleep and hope he dreamed of the right thing.

That night when it was time for Nathan to go to bed he knew he shouldn't have a problem sleeping now because of his lack of sleep over the past few days. As he closed his eyes he immediately knew he was going to fall asleep fast. He began slipping into a dream that seemed to take place at his home.

He heard the words "Ok, ok this is good!" and may have even spoken them as he fell asleep. He saw himself and his father in the house at the kitchen table at night with a single light in the corner dimly lighting up the room. Both him and his father sat in silence. Neither said a word for what felt like forever. Nathan was not completely aware that he was dreaming. He looked around the room and all looked normal until he looked at the clock. The hands appeared to be moving backwards and changing direction and moving all over the place. He looked at his hands afterward and they appeared warped or misshapen. As this didn't seem right to Nathan, he knew he must be dreaming.

As soon as he made his realization, things became normal. His dream was now in his control. He turned to his dad and said "You wanted your dog didn't you?" His father said nothing. Nathan thought hard about the dog, and the more he thought the closer he could feel himself to making it appear. He heard a faint growl and then a bark and finally the door to the room opened and in came the dog. Nathan felt accomplished, like he had proven himself. Just as these feelings came over him however, things became less in his control it felt like. His vision slowly started to fade and then soon after did his hearing and the more this happened the room started to change. Everything appeared as if it was melting. With the unexplained sound of a loud bang everything went black and Nathan found himself in bed awake, his heart pounding, the fear of the dream still with him.

All was silent for a moment as he looked around the room. Clearly his insomnia caused him to wake up. After a few moments, he still didn't hear a sound. He got out of bed to find where his father was. Before he entered the kitchen, he felt a slight draft. Tons of cold air was rushing into the house, and from this he knew something wasn't right. He dreaded to think what was around the corner in the kitchen.

There he found an open door to outside and nothing but a pool of blood on the floor. It took a minute, then like a punch to the face, the reality hit him. His father was gone. Nathan did not know what could have happened to his father, but little did he know that when his dream was interrupted by insomnia the dream stayed in effect. The dog he dreamed of became something bigger and darker, and was now unleashed on the town. It was the middle of the night but Nathan had to go out and see if he could find his father and whatever took him.

He didn't bother with shoes or anything, he just stormed out of the house. He heard some sort of growl similar to the one from his dream in the distance with the crunching sound of trees limbs snapping. Whatever he unleashed it was massive and way too much for anyone to handle. So Nathan

decided to try and fight it a different way. He made his way back to the house and went back to his room trying his best not to look at the pool of blood in the kitchen refusing to believe his father was gone. He went back into his bed and tried to close his eyes but the horror of the situation didn't allow him to fall asleep.

“Come on you have to fall asleep” he said to himself. After a while he was able to at the very least feel a bit drowsy. Just as he began to vaguely dream however another loud bang could be heard in the distance. A moment of silence followed with another bang a few moments later, this time much closer. Nathan began to panic. He began begging to himself “Fall asleep. Fall asleep now!” Things seemed to go silent yet again until a massive force blasted through the wall of Nathan’s bedroom.

A massive dog like creature greeted Nathan as he looked to see what happened. It looked at him and stood still. It could sense the fear in Nathans eyes. In an instant, it snatched Nathan right out of bed and lifted him high. The creature put its hands around his neck and began to choke him. Nothing could be heard, except Nathan's struggle to breathe. This continued until the life had been squeezed right out of him.

That it seemed was the end. It was a tragic end, no doubt, but it would happen again and again until this gift was given to someone who could learn to use its power. From Nathan it was be passed on. Along with the wielders death, follows everything they created. Everyone has their imagination of the better place that the earth can be, but without the help of the right wielder of this special gift, all of those goals will never be achieved.

-James Crugnale



-Payton Coneys

A Letter To My Dearest Body

To My Dearest Body,

I'm sorry. I'm sorry for all the smoke that has been in and out of your lungs too many times. I apologize for all the nicotine, tobacco, and other drugs that have circulated you and made you feel sick. I'm sorry for the cigarettes that I have smoked on the days I felt lonely. I am so sorry for the hurtful and negative things that I still continue to think and say about you. My condolences for the foods that I have forced into your system and brought down your energy. I'm sorry for the scars that I have made on you on my worst nights, making the blood from inside drip slowly down my wrist. My apologies to all the opportunities I've had to get you in shape, but instead, I slumped back down into my bed. I'm sorry for the sleepless nights where you never got a wink of rest. My deepest gratitude for the blacks and the blues that have formed upon my thighs and arms from the hits you have taken for me. Through the emptiest times, I've taken my anger and sadness out on you, and I'm so sorry for that.

I also want to say thank you. Thank you for the consistent fighting you do for me. For the blood running and bumping through my veins that keep me alive. I am grateful for the heart that still beats for me and only me. Thank you for my radiating soft skin and my lovely locks of hair I like to play with every day. Thank you for my alluring brown eye and my boney fingers that I adore. The amount of work you provide for me is implausible and I am a complete miracle to even be alive today thanks to you. You're there for me more than anyone else has. Your white blood cells attack intruders from ever harming me. The legs I walk on, the arms I use to write this, that big brain of mine function in ways I can't even imagine. You stitch yourself back up when you're hurt, and get up anytime I've fallen. You allow me to cry and love and hurt and no matter how mean or abusive I am to you, you're get me up in the morning.

-Colette Wagner

Heelys

I'm wearing Heelys
They are super convenient
But I bust my ass.

-Foster Sullivan

I'm done

Tell me the truth
And leave the bullshit
At the door.
I want to explore.
I don't need your baggage,
I have my own.
Speak to me with compassion,
Forget hate and pettiness.
Offer me respect,
I'm human too.

-Patricia Reyes-Canales



-Jacqueline Salgado

Sleep Deprivation

“Goodnight Mom, Dad,” I said, taking another sip of coffee.

“Goodnight sweetie, don’t stay up too late,” she said, while my dad nodded in agreement.

They both kissed me on the forehead and headed upstairs, shutting off the light that illuminated their rise to the threshold of sleep.

Yawning my way there, I arrived back to the last lit room, sprawled with my growing mountains of homework, organized chaos doubling in my head. Readjusting my hair, I sat down in my normal chair, the one reserved by me at family dinners, only this unwelcoming feast of paper and eraser shavings is not part of a well-balanced diet -- quite the contrary. As I adjusted myself, I noticed my reflection in the window behind my back. Despite the translucence, I could still see the exhaustion presented on my face. I turned around, growing uneasy as I continued to stare out into the darkness looking for myself.

I begin my chemistry homework somewhat optimistic, but only a few minutes in, my brain already hurting after trying to reach for information that wasn’t taught to me. I grab my laptop, hoping to find videos to which calm the frustrated voices in my head. After 30 minutes, eyes sore from blue light, I come across a Kahn Academy video. I hear my mom’s voice in my head, “See if there is a Kahn Academy video for it,” to which I always respond by telling her they’re either nowhere near the subject matter, or too vague. I skim through the video, jumping to random parts, and realize that this one might work for me. Starting from the beginning I watch with all my focus.

About six minutes in, I hear a faint rustling outside. I shrug it off, as I always hear my dad complaining about raccoons after seeing the aftermath of their nightly visits.

Slowly, by seven minutes in, the rustling grew louder almost as if it crawled up my back, straightening the hair on my neck. I then remember the window behind me. My legs and my jaw tensed as my head quietly raced. I was prone to overthink, but the thoughts could not escape me. I grab my phone, trying to act normal, in case I need to reach the authorities.

I turn around, waiting to see a face staring back at me, but my warped reflection is the only thing I see. It stares back at me, the overhead lamp creates an aura around its head, illuminating both of our flaws. Tired mouths, dead eyes, and premature wrinkles through distorted doubles. I reach around for my cup of coffee, not taking notice of the demonical darkness seeping into the room, and I take a sip of the coffee, looking back at my reflection. The beady-eyed echo stared back at me, tilting its head as I turned mine, blinked as I did, staring back as the shadows encompass us.

I blink hard, realizing the contrast between the lit room and blackness was debilitating my eyes. I turn around and see the Kahn Academy video was up, I shut the computer, giving up. It's 10:30, but my night is far from over.

I begin my Spanish project, which is fairly simple, only tedious. It re-

volves around an assigned Hispanic “scary” myth or short story, with a poster presentation and visual representation. I was assigned El Sisimito, basically the bigfoot of Latin America. According to the myth, the creature is covered head to toe with fur, as scales to a fish, with no knees and backward facing feet. Supposed hunters say that deep in the rainforest when you see his footprints, although they may appear to be facing away from you, he is closer than you think, as his footsteps appear to be backward.

I stand up, move to the head of the table, adjacent my reflection, and spread out my poster board, preparing to glue the small paragraphs I wrote about the creature. The bushes stir once again. I brush it off as I had before, turning on some music to calm my nerves. I grab the glue stick and try to focus on my work. I glue two sheets down before the rustling leaves grow louder than the music. I brush it off again, it's 11:00, and I can't afford any distractions, I have so much work ahead of me.

I have so much work ahead of me.

So much damn work ahead of me.

“I'll be dead by morning,” I tell myself before I slap my face twice; there's no wasting time mourning my own eventual loss (cause of death: sleep deprivation).

I force myself to look down and only focus on the project, the face of an ape staring back at me. I grab the glue sticks, knuckles white with tension, and glue the next few paragraphs on the poster. I had given up on remaining neat, who gives a crap anyway? Questions like so flow through my head, whose sharp edges hurt as they ramble in my skull. I continue nonetheless, the deep-rooted susurrus of the wind clouding my thoughts.

Midnight, a beautiful word for a melancholic juncture. It's a time you can feel, no clocks involved, a stage that represents the darkness you fear. I think of times I spent with friends, reaching deep into the night. The flash-light-lit dance parties on the park grounds, each of us queuing a favorite song to dance the night away, until midnight. Midnight sends a chill up your back as if then, and only then can all the “bad things” happen. We disperse and arrive back at our houses jaded and fall asleep shivering.

My focus returns back to the project, now frustrated with the time. I should be in bed right now, I'm so tired. Tired. A word so close to tried but it failed to keep its composure. I grow angrier, angry at myself and school and teachers and life itself.

My teacher wants a visual representation of El Sisimito? I'll give her one. I grab the black colored pencil and begin drawing. The lines are thick, deep and fuming, almost tearing through the paper. Soon, the outline of a dark, hairy man began to take shape, contrasting the pure white paper. He grows in size and the anger grows inside. My pencil travels across the paper, shaping jagged lines until I tore, right down the center, forming a chasm between the well-worded paragraphs and the monster I created on my paper. I break down, crying as loud as I ever could, angry, salty tears streaming down my face, permeating the paper.

Finally, my breathing slows. I look up at the mess I've made, though half of it I didn't make myself. From the kitchen, I see footprints- dark, large, muddy footprints. But to my horror, they're backward, slowly creeping up behind me. I reach for my phone, tempted to call the authorities, not sure of what to do. But its too late. I hear slow breathing behind me. Hot, metallic breath. My voice is too weak and dry to scream. I feel warm slobber roll down my spine. I feel the hair standing on my neck intertwine with his engulfing odious hair.

I stand there paralyzed. Whimpering, I see his hands wrap around me, slowly covering me, suffocating me with hair. He absorbed into his dense skin, choking me with hair. I see his eyes, bright white, whiter than its smile, as I slowly fall backward.

I wake up, my head pounding. Someone's hand is on me. Before opening my eyes, scared of what I'll see, I swing.

"Whoa, someone's cranky," my mother's sweet voice says. I open my eyes, burning in the bright sunlight.

"Honey, you must have passed out," she says, running her fingers through my hair, "I'll grab you some coffee."

I look up as my dad says, "Huh, did you see or hear any raccoons last night? It seems like they had ripped up the backyard."

-Tessa Stanley

He

He was a sight to be beheld. He was both the summer and the snow. Around him and the green graveyard filled with life, the world was dead. Everyone was stopped in their tracks, paused for a minute, frozen in time. Around him, nobody knew. But he was the sun. His face was as fresh as a drop of rainwater, his eyes a book filled with pages and pages about everything and nothing at all. He took a deep breath, a daffodil tucked behind his ear that heard no sound, and stood up. The earth began to restart. Each organism came back to life. When he stood, people in cities walked again. He was the sun. But nobody knew.

-Mia D'Alessandro

Rope

In the game of tug-of-war we each get a side of the rope.

Standing a distance away we wait for the other person to make the first pull.

You pull I come closer, to the end.

Your lips I crave on mine to taste innocence and touch clarity.

You I crave; I want you.

You I pull closer. You do as I desire but as the last minute falls upon us,

I back away.

Scared of getting attached or falling in love.

Emotions circling, whiplash twisting my mind to be oblivious to what's going on here.

Exhausted from feeling lonely and empty inside, I draw you to me, slowly

Closer, and closer

My anxiety still haunting me.

One step closer. One step back.

One step closer. One step back.

We don't really talk about what we're dealing with here

Bottled up emotions are safer than hurting someone to satisfy ourselves,

having the guilt leave our chests.

Bury them until we realize this,

We do care for one another but...

Maybe one cares simply too much and the other too little.

The rope snaps

breaks

pulls a p a r t by each strand, until it's unraveled.

As the last string breaks, it leaves our knees scraped, and eyes filled with tears.

"I wish things were different."

"Well, I wish you were here."

-Hannah-Elise Morett

2019 Town of Huntington Youth Writes 3rd Place Winner

Mother Dearest

It was late, near 1 o'clock in the dark of the night. It was very stormy out, gloomy as one would see through the naked eye. I would have never expected the phone to ring this late in the evening. My husband and I usually don't get many calls, even when it's daylight. We don't have many friends. People think we seem crazy or look "not right", but my husband and I just laugh at them.

Ring Ring.

The phone's ringing just won't quit.

Ring Ring.

I try to ignore it, but I realize it won't stop. Cautiously, I pick up the phone.

"It is 1 o'clock in the evening, why must you call at a time this late? Call me back in the morning."

I slam the phone against the hard, oak wood table. The dark bags under my eyes resemble the night sky, as I have not slept in days. It is the time of year when I begin to feel a certain strange way.

"Harold, did something happen around this time years prior", I say with a shakiness in my voice. I could blame it on a case of seasonal depression, or maybe something I ate, but something inside of me is telling me that's not the case. It feels as if there must be something like a memory, a recent memory even, that is keeping me restless and in agony.

He is asleep, out cold, and nothing, not even the sounds of a car crash could wake him up.

Ring Ring.

The sound somehow manages to get louder, ear piercing almost. My tired, lifeless looking body does not want to answer the phone, but I know in my head that if I don't answer it now it will never stop.

"Who is this and why are you calling my house this late at night?" I say this with all the anger in my body.

The voice sounds familiar when it says, "Hello, Karen."

It can't be who I think it is. Could it possibly be my daughter? Now I realize what that crazy feeling I have been having is. My daughter is not missing any longer. My sweet gorgeous daughter has returned to me once again.

"Sweetie, tell mommy where she can find you", I say as the night grows darker and darker.

"Don't call me sweetie. Fifteen years ago you tried to kill me. You may have think you got away with it bu—"

I break her words, "No no no, I love you. Why would I ever do that?" She is the apple of my eye. Her gleaming red hair, her brown eyes as dark as the night, her ten fingers and ten toes that take her all over the world, she was perfect. She is perfect.

"Karen, mom, whoever you are today. You are a monster. I am never

coming home again. I know if I were to return you'd be standing in that same oak doorway with that same shiny knife and that same maleficent grin."

The line goes silent.

The memories come back to me and flood in like a tsunami in a tiny town. 15 years ago today, I attempted to kill my daughter. Am I crazy? I don't remember the night very well except the screams and sounds of horror. Was I taken over by some spirit, possessed even? There's no real, tangible way to tell. If I wanted her dead so badly, how could she have escaped?

There's no sure way of knowing what happened and why it happened. Some questions in life just cannot be answered. What drives someone to do unspeakable acts? Why must the world be filled with so much hate? Am I the cause of that hate?

My long, deep thinking becomes quickly interrupted by the sounds of my husband waking up and walking over to me.

"Who were you talking to?" he asks me.

"It was our daughter Harold! I promise you it was", I try to make him believe me, but based on the look in his eyes he does not.

"What are you talking about? That can't be true. She disappeared 15 years ago and she couldn't be found." He checks the call history while saying this to me.

"Karen, you might wanna check this out", he says to me with a look of confusion in his eyes.

I pick up the phone and look down at the call history. There were no calls made tonight.

-Rebecca Hoffmann

Textbooks

The textbooks are just fables,
washed off most of reality. Painted tales
and quests; left out loss and regrets.

-Patricia Reyes-Canales

How's Life?

Even I would like to answer that question. It's the same routine, no excitement.
How do you want me to answer that question?

Wake up, take a shower, get dressed.
Head down for breakfast. It's already 6:50, no time or you'll miss the bus.
It's PE day and you forgot your gym clothes.
O there goes that homework that was due yesterday. You made it to the bus.
Yay, you made it. Go to school or as I would like to call it, HELL.
I mean it's no biggie. It's the same routine anyway.

Then, why are you asking me how is life?
You ask me that question everytime and every time I tell you the same answer.
When are you going to give up?

True, I have a life, but I'm not living. I'm dead?
How can you be dead and alive at the same time? You'll ask?
Well it's easy, I'll tell you.
I am living on the outside, but dead on the inside.

Later on in life, I will say:
"Only if i did this", "I regretted not doing that".
I'll be living, 90 yrs old, old and lonely, regretting the things I did not do.
Wondering where I would be if? Just if. I should've done it.

How's life?
I'll answer you.
Well, life is nothing but hell.
I mean, I died, I was dead, yes dead.

I just wished I enjoyed the young days.

-Neurchelange Antoine



-Payton Coneys

If I

If I deafen my ears, will you listen to me?
If I lose my sight, will you focus on me?

-Patricia Reyes-Canales

The North Star

In the wake of the night, my demons come to haunt me. It's always 3:15 AM when the bell strikes in the faint echoing of my mind, ding-ing...dinging...dinging. For some reason I wake up at this hour drenched in cold sweat from head-to-toe; panting, sobbing. For some reason, this is when I miss him the most as if I can almost feel his hands slipping further and further away from mine...

Flashback to June, 1941

White tulips, white roses, baby's breaths, camellias, dendrobium orchids, spider mums--all aligned in the most beautiful rows across the pavillion like clipped angel wings. Mother swore the sun had never shown that brightly since the day the Great War ended and when the "stars at night seemed to cheer in patriotic delight." She always mentioned the North Star being a white object boldly glistening up in that night sky, almost as if to say that it was there with us celebrating, too. Through the North Carolina heat I was standing in front of a mirror, gazing at my white lace dress; the dress where it symbolized everything I had ever wanted. His touch, his stare, his unconditional love. I was marrying the man who held my hands at the edge of the dock, twinkling lights high above the canopy, kissing our sadness of yesterdays into beginnings of tomorrows. On that day, I knew, and dammit I swear, I would forever be his. "Do you like it?" I whimpered from the anxiety racing in my heart. Without hesitation, all three of my bridesmaids hollered,

"Oh my golly gee, do we *like it?* You look *nothin' more than Mother Mary herself!*"

"A goddess, a 20th century goddess."

"Lord knows we all wish to have your figure, darlin'."

I let out a forced giggle to conceal the fact that I just needed to throw up a lil' from the thoughts circling my head. I let out a sigh, running my hands down the sides of my hips, accentuating my figure fit tightly into the cloth.

"Oh, I just wish everybody could be here. Auntie Lily, brother Mac...Joanie, your boyfriend--"

"Please, give it a rest!" Joanie remarked, always being the comic relief in a tense situation.

"It's not the same, girls."

"We know, darlin'. But we all know there's no other way for y'all to do this. It's now or never."

Suddenly I felt arms grasp around me, sending a shock of joy up my spine with the words that followed:

"You're eighteen and beautiful. Eighteen and gonna take on that great, big, no-good world, huh?" I turned around and threw my arms around Mother. Cuddling into her neck, I heard her hum to Nat King Cole's "I Love You for Sentimental Reasons" as we swayed back and forth.

"Are you ready?" Joanie asked, peering over Mother's shoulder to my nestled face.

"Never felt more ready in my entire life."

Four wine bottles, a ceremony, and a reception later, he carried me to the edge of the same dock where we clashed our lips together for the first time and spun me around until we were breathless from laughter under the stars that cheered in patriotic delight. And after I kissed Richie Montgomery on that prom-

ising mouth, God only knows how long we danced through the night;
and it was on that night that I swore we were invincible.

Flashback to December, 1941

“I’m home!”

I didn’t respond.

“Honeybee, where you at?”

I still didn’t respond.

I heard him enter in and out of every room before coming in to find me in the den.

“Ah, love! I found ya,” he smiled and rushed over to kiss me. I didn’t kiss him back. “Hey,” he whispered. “what’s goin’ on, yeah?”

I kept staring at the newspaper in my hands, the same page displayed that seemed to be screaming at me in bold, black letters.

“Oh, my Jesus,” Richie grabbed the newspaper out of my hands and read in a quivering voice, “Pearl Harbor’s been attacked by the...the Japanese in the late mornin’.” He finished the article, fading in and out of several sentences in disbelief.

I stared at the vast space ahead of me in utter silence. I couldn’t let him go.

“Don’t you get what this means, Richie? This is war, see. This is goddamn war.”

“Well...well, I don’t need to go--”

“Yes, you do. We knew this was coming,” I replied, making it obvious my throat was choking up. “We knew this was going to happen. It’s why we married.”

Richie gawked at me, almost in a state of shock.

“If I don’t wanna leave the love of my life, then I don’t have to!”

“You kiddin’ me? You HAVE to, Richie! You were enlisted months ago. Any minute now we’ll be gettin’ a call from somebody tellin’ us you’re drafted. I don’t care what you say. It’s the American thing to do.” By this time I began to drown in my own flood of tears, thinking about the fulfilled yesterdays and broken tomorrows. “It means nothin’ if you don’t.”

“I love you.”

I never said I love you back. He knew how much I loved him with all my might and soul, but those three words couldn’t ever live up to how much I felt for him. To my surprise, for the first time in our relationship, he seemed to expect me to say it back. He continued to stare at me. Typically when we fought, *if we fought, he always knew he was wrong and walked away in denial. But at that moment, he knew I was right, and he couldn’t walk away. He had to walk straight into the fire.*

And into the fire he went.

The day he got drafted, his Ma, Pa, sister, and me waited on the bench of the train station. Parents and siblings and spouses and children all cried to

wish their sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers goodbye with American flags in their hands. Mrs. Montgomery couldn't speak without breaking down. Mr. Montgomery was proud of his boy, gazing at him with twinkling eyes in hopes that he would become the best colonel in all of the Navy. I stood behind all of them, emotionless. I didn't care if he was their boy, or if he was a true American Navy Seal, or transforming into a "real man." He was *my boy, my Navy Seal, my real man, and there he was boarding onto that train of the unknown future. I couldn't bear to look at him, either. He was dressed head-to-toe in full uniform, blue button-down and all, ready to take on this no-good world we lived in.*

After kissing his family goodbye, he walked over to me and clasped his hands into mine. Lifting them up to his lips he kissed them with such passion, I was not even sure our wedding was even a thing! He was a proud Navy Seal in those moments getting dressed, coming to the station, seeing his buddies, and saying goodbye to his family. But for me, he wasn't a man anticipating the war. He became a child with tears filling up his eyes, knowing what could happen to him once he faded into the distance. I finally placed his hat on his head, and he smiled at me with that great, big smile of pearly whites and hope.

Leaning into my ear, he whispered, "I love you." And onto the train he went with that unmistakable All-American smile of duty and determination. The whistle blew and soon the puffs of smoke clouded the station, already covering some of the men's faces from the crowd.

I remember thinking: *No. No, this can't be it. Richie Montgomery, I love you. I said it, ok? I goddamn love you.*

Before the train chugged to the exit, I threw off my heels and began to run. I ran, ran, and ran, and oh my gee, I really don't know if any Olympic athlete could have ever matched my speed; but I ran with the train, barefoot, like a madman. Some men on board caught me and started to whistle, which only motivated me to just *go faster.*

I thought: *He must be in this window.*

No.

This one.

Not this either.

"Honeybee!"

All of a sudden, I saw my love ahead of me, the blaring sun shining ever-so-patriotically over his All-American smile. I kept running to try to match up to his window for one last kiss, to tell him I finally loved him. I'd do anything just to tell him. But it only took me ten more feet until an officer spun me around like I was a criminal.

"No! Richie, baby, please! I love you! I love you, I love you, *I love you!*"

But it was too late for him to hear me cry out.

All that was left of him was the sun and the clouds of smoke from the exhaust of the train.

In my heart, I like to believe that he heard me. But what pains me like no

other is that he never got to hear me confess my love for him, even if that eternal ring on his finger told him so. He never got to hear me cry out in pain, to ever feel that passion in my voice, to ever know that he was safe to conquer any evil thing out there in that no-good world. I never got to tell him that I was lucky to do the honor of letting him go into war by placing his hat on his head. I never got to wipe that tear off of his left rosy cheek. And I never got to tell him that I was carrying his baby inside of me.

Flash forward to September 2nd, 1945

For the next three and a half years I watched baby Richie grow into a little boy with blonde, wispy hair and blue eyes like his daddy's. It was hard at first to look into his eyes without reminding myself of all the times I woke up at 3:15 in the morning in cold sweats thinking about his father, trying not to wake the little one up asleep like a lamb in his crib. Or trying not to think about how for these three and a half years I've been staring through my window, looking into every restaurant, anticipating every houseguest, waiting for a knock at Christmas, reading every newspaper article, and watching every television program in the hopes of seeing, hearing, or even feeling him and his warm presence again. And yet, I will never give up that hope.

I place the apples onto the wire basket, waiting patiently for it to be measured by the clerk behind the counter. Grasping onto little Richie's soft hand, I remind him that, every time he runs errands with me, he gets a chocolate chip cookie.

"That'll be \$1.65, ma'am. Would you like that cookie, too?" The clerk asks. I noticed him staring at me from the moment I stepped in line, but I dare not ask him to stop.

"Yes, please." I peer down at my little boy. "See? Mama never disappoints." The clerk, his nametag reading "Tom" chuckles and hands the food over to me. Before I could walk away, he calls out something I thought I would never hear in my life.

"Say, aren't you that gal who ran down the train station a few years back? Right when the war started."

I am absolutely astonished and I know he can see it on my face.

"Is this a trick question?" I laugh.

"Well, if I got the wrong gal, which I'm sure I wouldn't mistake that beauty for nothin', then I'm sure a fool!"

"I'm afraid I am that gal."

"Oh, mighty and sweet baby Jesus! You know I thought you were gonna be in the papers? We talked about you for days at the barracks," Tom remarked excitedly, perceiving me almost as a celebrity in MGM or something.

"Please, sir. There was nothin' glamorous about that runnin'. Barefoot and all."

"No, no. I know what you were doin', see. You not foolin' nobody. You were like

the gal of our dreams at war for all the single fellas. Or the heartbroken ones. Some of us saw your figure, but the rest of us with a head on our shoulders saw the beauty in that run, see. It was for your man.”

And he isn’t wrong. But little did he know it wasn’t just to see Richie for the last time; it was to say I love you for the first time, the aching in my heart that made me into vast nothingness for three and a half years straight.

“I’m quite flattered, but--”

All of a sudden, the one television propped up in the front of the store blared out something that caught every shopper and clerk’s attention.

“BREAKING NEWS: JAPAN SURRENDERED, WAR ENDS!”

I drop my food. Everybody starts to cry, scream, and hug and kiss each other out of pure and utter joy. We did it. We won. I know that this means we now have peace. I know that this means there’s no more fear. I know that this means our country can build up again. But, all I’m thinking about is *him*. *This is it, he’s coming home. I can finally kiss him again, cry all over him, thank him and God, and have him hold his baby boy for the first time.* My hand is still covering my mouth as I feel the hot tears stream down my face.

“Mama, what’s happening?” Little Richie asks innocently, not knowing what may happen very, very soon.

I couldn’t find the words to say, but I did find myself looking at Tom, who is acting so nonchalant, which, to my surprise, is strange for a reaction out of a recently retired soldier. It is as if nothing happened, just him with a soft smile plastered on his face. Yet, for some reason, that smile seems reassuring.

Little Richie tugs on my shirt to respond to his confusion. Even though he still wouldn’t understand, I reply with, “This is it.”

People rush past me, waving American flags in their hands as people did before at the train station.

“He heard you, ya know.”

I look up.

“Ex--Excuse me?”

“He heard you.”

I felt like fainting on the ground right then and there, more than what any victory of a war can do.

“He wouldn’t stop talkin’ ‘bout it for days. He really loved you.”

My hands are shaking. My face is puffy. My heart is racing. Could this really be true? How does he know that was him?

“How do you know?”

“How did *I* know? Well, if you were there you would surely know, no doubt.”

Thank you, God. I lift up my baby boy and hold him tightly and close to my pounding heart.

“Is he comin’ back?” I wail. “Please. That’s all I needa know. Please, sir.” I grasp onto Little Richie even tighter, my heart racing faster and faster in anticipation for his answer. For all these years I’ve been waiting for this exact moment. All these years of watching and waiting and praying, I’ll finally get my answer. But all he could reply with is, “Look at the North Star tonight.

You'll get your answer then."

I don't even know how I fell asleep that night. But I did. And yet again, I woke up at 3:15 AM, except I wasn't drenched in cold sweat and hot tears; instead, I was greeted by a bright light high above my window. I pull my curtains back and see that North Star shining in patriotic delight, like what Mama said about the night the Great War ended. It seemed to sing in both glory and pain for the men that were lost and the victory America claimed that will make every dedicated soldier proud.

Wait. I remember something.

This...this is the star me and Richie saw at the edge of the dock! The one that twinkled like what Mama described. This very star we saw on our first date and our wedding. I want to hug this star. Kiss it. Tell the star it means everything to me. Tell it I want it to come home. All of a sudden, I hear Little Richie babble from his crib beside my bed. Picking my blue-eyed boy up I bring him over to look at the star. His little hands pull back the curtains and he gazes directly at the star without my direction. His delicate finger points up to it, almost as if he is showing me something, but I know he feels the same way I do.

Because for the first time in a long time, I feel safe. I feel comforted. I feel invincible again. And for the first time ever, I felt all three of us together, as a family. As one.

-Ava Waxenberg



-Morely Gomez

February 14th

He gave her a rose.
Leaned and kissed her on the nose.
Oh, how her skin glows.

-Lea LaPonti



-Jacqueline Salgado

What Hurts More?

What hurts more? Pretending we'll last or figuring out how we'll hurt each other before we start?

What hurts more? Caring too much or giving too many chances?

What hurts more? Knowing you're toying with me or knowing you love someone else?

What hurts more? Letting you leave or forcing you to stay?

What hurts more? Loving you or forgetting you?

What hurts more? Trusting you or leaving you behind?

What hurts more? Forcing yourself to bottle everything up or forcing yourself to forget it all?

What hurts more? Faking your sanity or letting insanity consume the last shreds of your soul?

-Patricia Reyes-Canales

High Strung

In the entropy of toppling books and bustling shoes running around the house of wood floors and carpeting, one reveals a caged butterfly, much to everyone's relief and dismay.

They stop for a moment and pause at the blue butterfly, fluttering, untouched by the house's urgent rush.

-Anna Koulakova

***The following three pages are a collection of poems inspired
by the following Langston Hughes' poem "I, Too"***

I, Too

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

-Langston Hughes

I, too, sing America

I am an Immigrant
Is to hard understand
People because English
Is not my native
Language

Tomorrow I will be
Understand whatever the people
Tell me and no one
Will laugh at my
Way of speaking English

Besides, they gonna
See how life make
Surprises

I, too, am a person

-Lenis Villatoro Rubio

We, too, speak in America

We represent our LGBT siblings,
And you're no one to say you're su-
perior.
You put a lot of challenges in front
of me,
But my brothers and I start to laugh
when we overcome it.

The day after today will come,
And that will be the time when eve-
ryone
Sees the truth. After today we will
build our own nest in America,
Where all of our descendants will
breather freely.

We, too, are America.

-Erlyn Flores-Reyes

I, too, sing America

I am a little girl
With dreams and hope
With difficulties, but
Always strong

The future is a mystery
Without rules, but with lessons

This is a dream
Every opportunity is a privilege

Besides
The people can see the amazing
Soul that i have
And how brave I am
To fulfill my dream

I ,too, sing America.

-Patricia Campos

I, too

I, too, sing America
I came from the other side
I'm an immigrant,
But i can say that one day
Everyone will see that we are all the same.

I know that tomorrow,
We can all be friends and
That we can all see each other as
Brother and sister,
I Never underestimate the power of dreams and the influence of the human
spirit. We are all the same in this nation: The potential for greatness lives
within each of us.

People do not decide to become extraordinary. They decide to accomplish
extraordinary things.

I, too, am America

-Angelica Hernandez

I, Too

I, Too, sing America.

I am the young generation
I am the future of the country
I am an immigrant looking for new opportunities, just like a
bird flying on the sky.

I am the future of the country, where i hope to one day live
with no discrimination and everyone be treated with the same
love that God loves us.

I am the person who one day hopes to see that every human
is treating each other just with the same love that God love
us. And seeing each other with brotherhood and sisterhood.

I, Too, am America.

-Ever Salinas

I, too, sing America

I am a Latina
Who works hard
Who have many dreams
To make it reality
Who has overcome
Many challenges of life
Learning a new language,
A new culture, everything was new.
But one day you will see me
Sparkling like a star
Because every Latino
Is a star waiting to sparks.
I, too, am America

-Karen Avila

I am not the future.

I am not the future.
They have that weird expectation,
I do not like that,
But it is okay.

Because I am not the future.
My time is valuable,
There are better things to work in.
All that I have is today.

So, let me tell you something
I am the present!

-Daniela Ramos

The Puzzle

Clara got out of her cab outside her apartment building. It was drizzling outside, it was somewhat chilly for a night in March. Clara walked into her building, the building was older looking than the rest of the buildings on the block, it was in need for some renovation. The apartment was cheap and in okay condition. And that is why she chose to live there. Clara stood outside her apartment as she searched her bag for her keys. The only sound in the hallway was the jingling of her keys as she found them. Clara had few neighbors that she barely knew, few people lived in her building, due to an incident that occurred fifteen years ago, a young girl was found dead in her apartment. It was big news because there was no evidence of foul play. The only evidence was that the girl had a bloody nose before she died. Which was barely evidence at all.

Clara walked into her apartment to see piles of packed boxes. The only stuff she had was a green couch, a coffee table, and moving boxes. Clara decided to order some food for dinner. Her kitchen was empty and she had no idea how to cook anything without it going up in smoke. Her order would arrive in about an hour. To pass the long wait for her dinner she decided to unpack some of her things. As stuff piled around her, she opened a hall closet to tuck away her linens and pillows only to discover a box already in there. Clara has never opened this closet before and was surprised that there was something in there.

She said aloud to herself, "Wow, this must have been left by the old tenant. Let's see what's inside." She took the box off the shelf and set it on her coffee table. It was a shoebox, except it was too light to have shoes in it. The box was sullied with dark spots and looked very aged. She rattled it to see if there was anything inside. She heard the jostling of several small pieces of something. Clara opened the shoe box to find a puzzle, she decided to procrastinate on unpacking and work on the puzzle instead. She found a lamp in one of her boxes and pulled it out. She plugged it in and it slowly flickered on. Her apartment didn't have the best lighting. The lighting fixtures were out of date and gave off a faint yellow light on the white paint of the apartment. She sat down and started to work on the puzzle. The drizzling outside turned into a steady rain. The dripping water made soft tapping noises on the fire escape of the building. Clara found the puzzle strange. The pieces were very worn and had almost no color to them, which made the puzzle difficult. Some of them were also stained red. She shrugged it off and continued to work on the puzzle. The puzzle almost had no picture to it, which was disappointing. The corner Clara had been working on looked to be white with a soft yellow tinge to it.

Her apartment was silent. The only noise being the constant tapping of

the raindrops, which grew louder as the rain got heavier. Clara kept getting distracted. The tapping threw her off, and when she wasn't hearing tapping she was hearing the creaks and weird sounds her old apartment was making. Clara grew very disoriented, as she worked on this puzzle for what seems like hours. A puzzle that barely had an image, but she had to know what it was. Clara was in such a frenzy she didn't even notice or care that her nose started to bleed. She scoured her table for the right pieces, she was becoming frantic, the picture was starting to form. It was a white room with a green couch. Similar to a couch that Clara had. The outline of a girl started to appear as she worked on it. The rain grew louder, and the tapping was so loud that every other noise of her apartment was inaudible. She had a few pieces left, Clara felt numb with panic. The girl in the puzzle had the same features as her, same clothes, same hair. She pieced together the last part of the puzzle. The face. She placed it into the puzzle and stared at it. The face was blank, nothing on it other than blood. Clara felt as if she couldn't move. The tapping of the rain grew softer and softer as Clara stared at the puzzle, not moving. The rain became a drizzle once again, and that's when Clara heard it, the breathing. She looked up to see a large man dressed in all black looming over her. Clara screamed.

Rob pulled up to the building. He was annoyed. He put the wrong directions into his GPS which caused the hour wait to become an hour and thirty-minute wait, Rob knew his tip was going to be low or he wasn't going to be tipped at all. He got to the apartment the order was addressed to and knocked on the door. No answer.

“Pizza Hut. Your order is here.” No answer. He knocked again, harder, and the door creaked open. Rob decided to go in, he didn't feel like waiting all night. He walked into the apartment and froze. Rob was so shocked he dropped and spilled the food all over the floor. She was hunched over a cleared coffee table with blood spilling out around her face. Rob called the cops. Rob gently leaned her on the couch behind her, to feel the girl's pulse. Rob got a little relief, if she only had a nosebleed, she could have passed out. However, he felt her neck. Ice cold. No pulse. Clara was dead.

-Gianna Prosseda

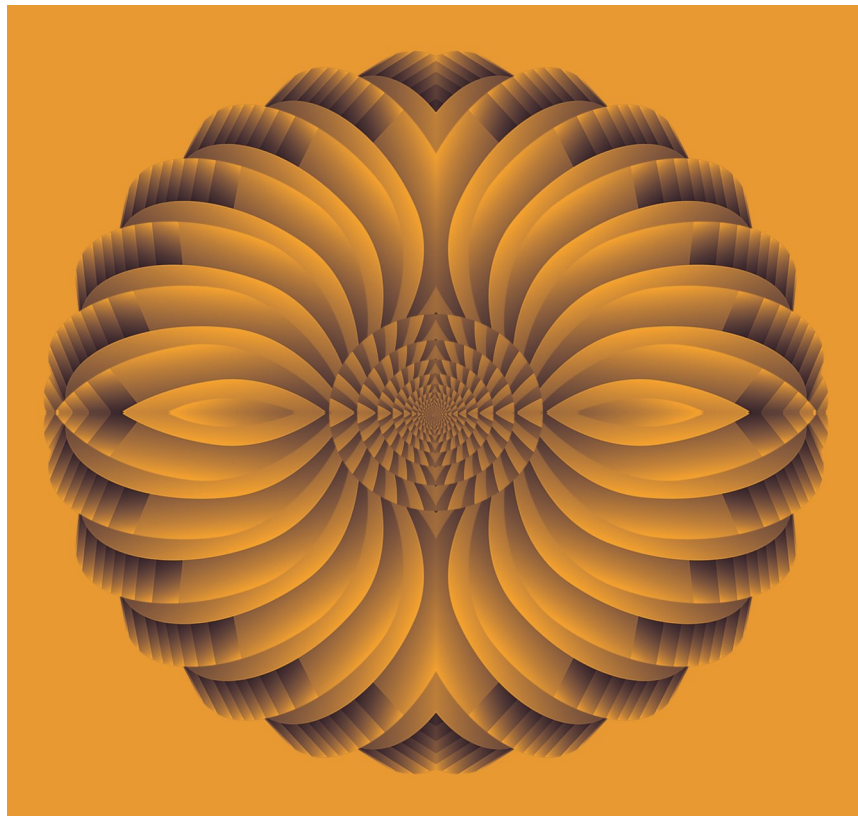
The Myth of Redheads

My family is descendants of fire. Hades picked me to become a human because I saved his life. An evil and opinionated soul named Chuck tried to kill him. Before this happened, I was playing around in the lava pit. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the soul Chuck sneaking around. Chuck was acting like a brigand. I decided to followed him. While I was circumspect of the situation, I noticed something shiny and cumbersome in his hand. I couldn't figure out what it was. I was very curious so I just kept following him. All of a sudden, I saw Hades in the distance. Chuck was sneaking up behind him. I realized that the shiny object was a knife in his hand. There was no dilemma for me. I knew what I had to do. Chuck had to be stopped. I leaped towards Chuck to stop him from killing Hades. With one touch, the soul of Chuck burned to ashes. Hades wanted to reward me with something special. He offered to turn me into a human. However, I did not want to leave my family. I asked Hades if he could change my family, too. He granted my request. During the transition from fire to human, Hades decided to keep our hair red. Red hair is unique. My favorite description is that our hair is like fire. Hades said we will always represent the burning flame and be his children. From this day, all redheads will be like a burning flame and ready to turn evil into ashes. I have been blessed by Hades. I am part of something special.

This myth shows how redheads came to be humans on the planet. The fiery hair of a redhead represents a human who will not look the other way when evil is about to happen. When redheads see something wrong we act. The moment I saved Hades from death, at the hands of an evil and opinionated soul called Chuck, my flame burned brightly. After Hades made us human, we showed him that are red hair makes us stand out but we still fit in. Hades continued to change other good flames into humans with red hair. Today, there are a lot of redheads in society. Hades purpose for making more

flames human was to show that if you do something great in your life you should get rewarded for your work. A redhead will always stand out in the crowd. Since a redhead gets noticed, it is wise to do the right thing. My flame will never burn out. Many lessons can be learned. All humans, redhead or not, need to take care of each other. The way you want to be treated is the way you should treat others. The only god involved in this myth was Hades. Hades is the god of hell, my ruler and my creator. Without Hades, I wouldn't be alive to represent redhead humans. I am full of fire ready to diffuse good will.

-Shane Walsh



-Josefina Fasolino

The Key to Being Human

The clay,
The dirt that manifested my hands, head, and feet.
We're all made in the image of God.
It's the life that holds my body
The breath that keeps me going.
Every blink an importance,
Every movement an emotion.
The matter of life and death all depends on me.
That is the key to being human.
The faith keeps me going,
The love is overflowing.
Being Human has never been so hard and so fun at the same time.
The risks and limits,
The lies and truth.
The messages that are said
When one is old and young.
That is the key to being human.
The joy of every newborn life,
The sorrow of every drifting soul.
The uncertainty that is held in our minds.
That is the key to being human.
The fleeting lives we so live on,
The memories that we hold on,
The wars we've started from beginning to end.
That is the key to being human.
Motivation, disguised by laziness.
Beauty behind deceit.
The insecurities that people hold on to.
That is the key to being human.
The mistakes in the beginning, that shall be carried on till the end.
The pollution of our hatred and carelessness,
That seem to never end.
That is the key to being human.
Our choices in life define who we are.
The agony, the pain, and the scars.
The happiness and emotions that we bare.
That is the key to being human.
And so our paths are unknown,
The mysteries are endless.
The vast cosmos spread.
Our curiosity flourishing to the unknown depths of space.
The knowledge is our power,

The evil that we share.
We hold back our desires,
Both good and bad alike.
Some hold it in forever,
While others kill quickly at night.
The strength and weaknesses we possess.
The creation of man,
Both a blessing and a burden that everyone must share.
That is the key to being human.

-Irtana Deslouches

I'm in Trouble

To be honest, I'm in trouble.
I miss you.
Yet every time I see you
I get tongue tied.
I want to spend time with you.
But every nerve in my body says stop.
'You're a pain in the ass.'
So just let him be.
I don't know.

-Patricia Reyes-Canales

Hitchhike

The sun's scalding rays beared down like the light of gods on the sandy decor surrounding the road. Arizona was the abandonment of America, where the cool and accepting go to rot and dry. Leather hard skin and glazing eyes, a biker rides down an infamous Turnstyle Road. Besides that, it was your average 1950's summer day.

A road like that one is meant for no amateur. The shining light beats down so fiercely in the mid afternoon that it reflects off the sand and traffic signs. Drifting down the street, a person's world can very quickly turn to a pure white opening. Combine not being able to see with the poor pavements, and you get a lot of rumors.

He had heard the stories about the road nearby his town, within the past few months eleven drivers - in all sorts of vehicles - had crashed and died. No matter who it was, these were stories of high fascination and wonder.

The towns folk were paranoid and awfully suspicious when the incidents began. After every accident, they found the scene in the same way: A crashed vehicle and dead driver, but nothing around to smash into. Some people began to talk of a massive and durable bighorn sheep roaming the area, and a kid said he saw it get hit and walk away unscathed. While this could be possible, no one had actually seen this giant ram, and the child's story was but a tall tale.

Another rumor was that rock slides were occurring, and the collision with a stone would be backed with so much energy that it would obliterate the car and instantly turn to dust. This is how it kept going, mud pits, cracking roads, poor malfunctions in rubber tires, and tons more nonsense. Everyone was making up their own answers to the anomaly.

And thus gossip spread like butter in a non-stick pan. And yet, the truckers and bikers believed a hefty none of it. They all got a good laugh out of the fear of the locals, and you couldn't go to the nearby truck stop without hearing an insane story.

This young biker in particular seemed confused by the tales. He had been away from home for a few months, and had just returned from some cross country travels. While peculiar, he drove on the roads just as he used to. No amount of sunshine, debris, and folk stories would deter him.

So at three in the afternoon on an Arizona Sunday, he rode that familiar road on that new bike of his. Dressing up tight and secure was important in a desert like this, as the blowing sand and rocks was nearly enough to split your face open. Not to mention it's impossible to drive with your eyes closed, so the young man's face had on a sturdy helmet with two layers of eye protection. One was from the head gear itself, the other was a pair of mirror shades.

He drifted by on the torn up dirty road, when he drove quickly past a dark skinned woman pulled off to the side. She was in a familiar pose, sticking her thumb out in the direction she was going. Unsurprisingly, she was looking to hitchhike. Slowing down the motor, the lad made a U-turn driving onto the sandy dirt. A cloud of minerals kicked up behind his wheel as he did

a donut and drove slowly back up to the woman.

As he approached, she bounced up and down on her heels. Her black curly hair flipped up and down against her head like puppy dog ears. "Well I thought no one would pity ol' me!" She exclaimed with relief. She swiftly pranced over to the motorist and held him by his shoulders. Suddenly, he found himself balancing by his toes on the edge of the bike as the woman pulled the front of his body over the handlebars to get a closer look. He seemed surprised by this, but easily complied with her. "Aren't you a kind one?" She joked placing her hands on the "cheeks" of his helmet.

He averted eye contact with her, coming off as a bit distant. Despite this, he mumbled a quick "Where ya heading?" in a deep, nasty growl. She let go of him, playfully pushing the boy back into his seat. He bobbed back and forth for balance, but once again did not seem to care much.

"Gila Bend. Got folks there." She chirped, lively as a lark. She hoisted up her bag, which now he could clearly see was a guitar case, and kept talking. "You don't have to go all the way if its out of route, but a lift would be nice." She walked around the side of the bike, and rested her elbow up against his thigh. With this, he shuffled a little away from her on the seat.

"You've got a mighty grimy lung there, huh?" She toyed with him. Raising a hand, he touched his adam's apples, and shuffled further against the leather seat. He shook his head, and patted on a small white box in his breast pocket.

"Cigarettes is all..." He trailed off again. His voice sounded like he ate the whole Arizona wild for breakfast, and his throat hated him for it.

The woman lightly patted him on the shoulder, and spoke much softer now. "Bad decisions can cause bad happenings, but it's nothing to be afraid of kid." She leaped with strong force, and landed behind him on the bike seat. Not having a seat belt, she settled up against his back, wrapping her arms around his waist. He seemed so embarrassed that he pressed his head against the handle bars, making his guest laugh with delight. She teased him, "Lighten up a bit!" In response, he straightened up and swallowed his heartstrings. As the engine purred, the girl tilted her head to see herself in the mirror. "Name's Simone. Don't think I said it."

With a ripping sound, the two were off on the road. Simone definitely had rode on a motorcycle like this before, as after a few moments she removed her hands from the boy to tie her hair up. Her natural hair was already frizzy, but the amount of dust that was pelting them both made it even worse. Pulling a hair tie off her wrist, she tied up her hair in a bun while keeping balance with her legs. "You like that?" She called forward, to which he playfully poked Simone with his elbow.

They scorched past a road sign, and Simone could barely read the word Buckeye painted in white. He pointed two fingers out like a gun, and pretended to pull the trigger. "Born and raised." he announced, and then gestured right back at himself. At least Simone caught a local and not some cross country bumpkin.

The road itself was fairly empty, and they were cruising with little care.

Every now and then, a local trucker would honk and wave at him, yet he did not respond. Simone, however, was happy to; she wished every last one “happy trails!” The best the boy could do was when an older man shouted, “That your new girlfriend sonny?!” Once again, he ducked his head, and it was far less funny at 50 miles per hour. Simone actually dragged him up by the collar, and shouted at him to not be so stupid. The trucker laughed, “Oh! So it’s ya wife!” and he quickly fell behind the two.

Eventually, they pulled up to one of the few train tracks going across Turnstyle. The bridge fell as they rode up, so the two stopped. Simone brandished something from a part on her guitar case for holding a water bottle, and showed it off in the mirror. He had almost forgot she had it settled on her back. “You heard anything about this? I figured so much since ya live here.” He cocked his head to the mirror, and was taken back.

It was a newspaper from a few days prior. He read the top carefully, “June 13th, 1950, Tuesday. 11th Victim of Mysterious Road Accidents Found on Turnstyle.” He seemed to let out a dreadful sigh, perhaps even pained, and shook his head no. Simone wanted to press him, because he wasn’t a particularly good liar. It showed in the way his shoulders slumped and he feared the ink on the page that he knew something more.

Then Simone considered why. With a second of thought to his quiet, but cold reaction, she realized that his involvement might be of a foul kind. Yes, she quickly came to the conclusion that he must know the victims, since they live so close to him. Her eyes fell to her lap, and she was empathetic. “Sorry, I didn’t think I’d hit a soft spot.” He gave her a nod and a look back, though she could not make out his expression through the hefty glass.

“Truth be told, the relative I am visiting should know.” She admitted, “I don’t even know why I asked you.” Inquisitively, he hummed as if to ask why. Simone caught the cue, “Well, she does all of this nifty scientific analysis on the area. Truth be told, she has geothermal trackers that work over long periods of time.” Her smile came back as she rambled on, “If we can find a body, we can track the heat energy of the person who killed them. Hopefully, it’ll put an end to all this madness.”

As she wrapped up her sentence, she noticed the boy had been trembling. Furrowing her brow, she wrapped her hands around his waist again, this time to hug him. “And, maybe, end the suffering of folks like you.”

What she got was not a heartfelt reply. All so suddenly, the boy grappled Simone by her hands, keeping her stuck close to his waist. The fierce grip of his leather hands crushed her fingers, to which she howled. They bent and twisted underneath his grasp, and no amount of struggling was doing anything.

Using his free hand, he revved the engine, still in front of the fallen barrier between dirt road and train track. Simone turned her head to the side, and saw the lights and smoke flying closer from the rail. Kicking her legs and begging for mercy, Simone screamed “What are you doing?”

With a slash and a rip, the boy shot forward with Simone pinned to him.

They swerved left, and bounced across the train tracks like marbles. When they landed back on solid ground, Simone looked back and saw the massive freight charge by. But it was only for a moment, as the boy went faster still. This was all done driving with one hand.

The speed limit was disregarded ages ago. The alluring purr of the bike had turned into a horrid predators roar, and Simone could not escape his unnaturally strong grasp. She shook to and fro, and shook her shoulders to bash against him. "Let me go you lunatic!" She screamed for anyone to hear.

No one did. If someone could hear her call for pity, they would be horrified by what followed. He craned his head up, and twitched. No longer quiet, but just as deep and gross as before, he screamed "Quiet!". With a lunge backwards, he forced the bike to go even further and faster. The dust in the air pushed Simone off of his shoulders, the sand hitting her like shrapnel.

Leaning forward, she managed to look ahead and saw upcoming traffic. In comparison, the trucks and cars on the road were nothing more than slow and deadly hazards. With Simone's vocal cord tearing screech, which was drowned in a sea of car horns. The boy weaved and bobbed between the middle of the road between the chaos. He slivered like a serpent, avoiding all the vehicles as they blared on their horns. In the midst of it, Simone noticed there was a slight break in the cars to the left. Without a second of thought, She kicked out her right leg to the dirt, and pulled as far left as possible. Catching her captor off guard, the bike flew to the left and crashed.

Simone wobbled as she tried to stand. The friction from driving her leg into the ground left her limping and unable to stand straight. Yet, despite everything, she pulled herself over to the insane boy. As a tiger creeps upon its prey, Simone crawled over on all fours. She rose up to the best of her ability, and heaved outward.

"You best have a good reason for all this." Simone said, grasping him by the shirt. The boy did not move, and something wet slapped against Simone's leg. Looking down, a moist and bloodied cord was hanging from his shirt. It was cut open, and now rested upon Simone solemnly. In her bout of confusion, she took his helmet off to an even more shocking sight. His face was flushed white, eyes were black and purple with exhaustion. There was blood dripping down his forehead, but that simply was from the crash. Indeed, something else had happened.

Simone turned back to the crash site, where another oddity arose. The bike had been left untouched by it all. There it was, in perfect condition, flat on its side. She looked back at the boy's unconscious body, and murmured "Who even are you?" Then, crawling up her back like a spider, there was a deep purr.

The bike had come on, and the engine was revving. It was inconsistent, like a breathing motion. The wheels split in half, and the actual rubber tires folded inward to two arms. Limbs and feelers arose from the bike's seat, as it came undone to reveal a horrid grey thorax. The headlights flipped back to reveal a pair of antennae and compound eyes. They were slit, and looking at

Simone.

The motorcycle never was one in the first place. Unfolding from its camouflage, a gigantic mantis like bug arose, making the same purring sound of an engine. It flicked out its tongue like a snake, and it seemed the match the cord attached to the mysterious boy. The creature showed no emotion, but uttered in a familiar deep voice, "You will not be leaving."

Adrenaline shot through Simone, and her legs moved before her mind did. The mantis skidded after her in a sharp U-turn, trying to land a talon through her chest. Simone rolled onto the ground, and grasped for her aching leg. Her eyes lowered below the beast's legs, and saw her guitar case on the other side of it.

She concealed a smile. Up with a flash, she tried to slip underneath the overgrown bug and get to her case. Before she was even halfway under, smaller arms from its midriff grabbed Simone by the tank top. She was hoisted upwards and tossed the other way.

The bug marched over, and stared down the instrument case. It lifted it gently with its giant arms, and slashed through the fabric with its teeth. There, the acoustic beat against the sunlight. The mantis turned back, and dangled the guitar from its strings. "No guns. No knives." It snarled as if to mock her. "You could do with a better weapon." He chucked the guitar towards her, having it smash against the ground in an explosion of oak. Yet, Simone did not seem foiled, and reached into the heart of the broken instrument.

"Glad to see you are stupid." With a sheen of stainless steel, she pulled out a unique looking handgun from the rubble. She laughed, despite the situation, "But you'll have to think deeper than that." A high pitched sound blared from the gun, and sent the mantis into shivers. It screeched uncontrollably, unable to bring itself to move. Now reaching into the neck of the guitar, Simone grabbed a syringe. She charged at the stunned creature, and stuck it between the eyes.

Pushing the serum in, the insect faltered and collapsed. There it laid, subdued and frozen, ready to be examined. Simone brushed her legs off, and sighed. "Guess I'm not seeing Auntie." With a bout of anger, she kicked the monster in the head. Maybe next she could teach it that kidnapping is not polite.

The happy air was broken with a groan, and she turned back to the boys body to see him lightly stirring. She walked over, not afraid but also not unarmed. Looking over him, his breathing was strained, and he was hardly awake. He clutched his stomach, and he gritted his teeth in pain. Shaking his head, black shoulder length hair dancing against him, he spoke in a new, young, and fearful voice. "Oh my god," He trailed off gently, "Christ almighty." His eyes glazed open, and he looked at Simone. "Is it out?" He asked, fumbling for the tube in his chest. "Please tell me its out."

He was still sickly and bleeding, but he seemed to be doing better. Simone didn't smile, but replied, "Yeah. You brought me a lot of trouble."

“I had no control.” He admitted, plagued with guilt. Shakily craning a hand up, he reached for Simone. “Help me.” He pleaded.

He tugged on her arm. It was a weak and gentle pull, like a baby holding onto an adults finger. This was unlike the ferocious grasp from before, it was feeble and kind. She took his hand, and gave it a kind stroke. “Yeah, don’t worry kid.” She told him.

“What’s your name?” She asked.

“Donny.” He croaked out.

“I’ll get ya help, and get that thing into a cage, how about it?” Simone asked him. Without words, he smiled a tired smile, and nodded.

-Rory Bocelli



-Payton Coneys

hide

Don’t change your priorities, you don’t owe an explanation-
real life requires tough skin, she’s hurt, but I’m losing patience.
And if all they do is talk about how it’s wrong,
if there’s just constant talk-
mayhem,
all the melodrama,
all the broken hearts and shellshock,
a glass half-full could be a cage-
you’ll make it feel like home,
I’ll make sure it’s locked.

-Mia D’Alessandro

Not My Mother

Dear Mom,

You always told me to be the best me that I can be because nobody else can. You said don't follow what other people are doing ,and do what you want to do in life. Be what you want to be. But what do I want to be? There are a plethora of things that I can be. I can be a doctor, a pilot, a teacher, an actress, or even a garbage woman. I never really thought about what I wanted to be or what makes me happy. I mean I love the idea of being an actress, but I can't find the will to get up on stage in front of all those beaming judging whose eyes stare deeply just judging me. What if I mess up? What if I fumble over my words? What if I fall and everyone starts laughing at me? I know these fears are apart of the acting world, and I know that if this is what I want to pursue in life I just have to accept it. But I find it so hard to break out of this comfortable shell where I'm alone and no one can say anything about me, spare the way I feel. But Mom you're so different. You know just about Everything, based on what I see. You know what you want and you know how to go after and get what you want. You always had a bright mind which shows off your intelligence. You don't care about being the odd one out, or stepping outside your comfort zone. Even when you're wrong you have a way of making it sound like you're right. Sometimes I wish I could be like that. If someone told me that you were once like me I would say "Not my mother!" If you were like me, I would find it odd because I just would like to know how? How did you break out of the shell?

-Ashanna Archibald

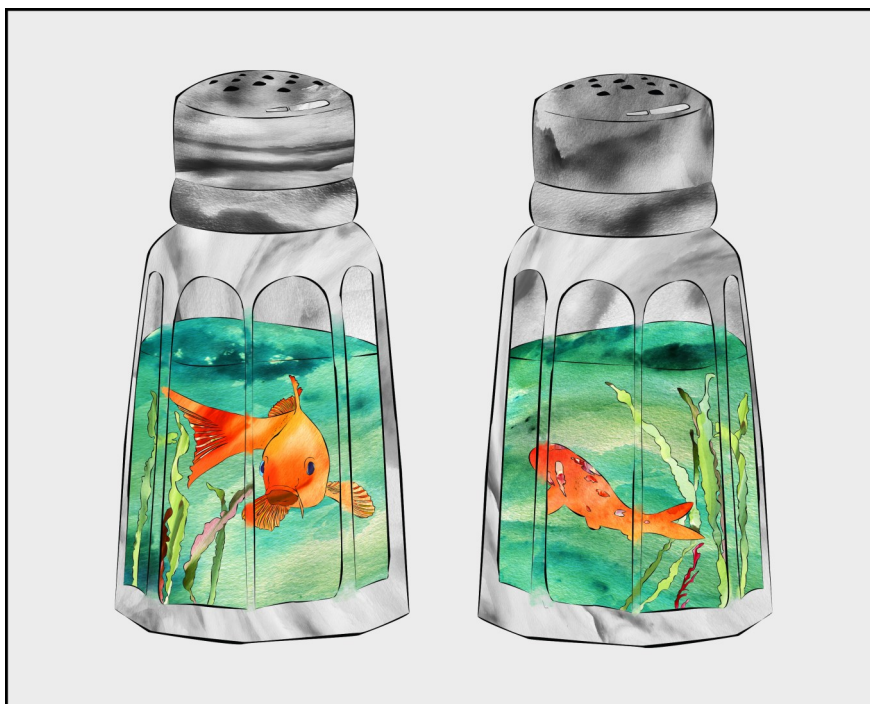
A Whole New World

she sat in the corner by herself,
Everybody pitied her.
They bullied her and laughed at her.
I pitied her.
she'd always has her headphones on.

I went to talk to her.
she looked happy?
I asked her how she felt, she smiled.
She put one of her airpods in my ear, and the other one in her's.
As she did, she said, "welcome to my world."

The sound was one I couldn't explain, one I've never heard before.
They were talking, but I couldn't hear them.
All I could hear was that sound.
The world of music captured me.

-Neurchelange Antoine



-Hannah Bailin

The Girl Who Spoke in Colors

She spoke in vibrants
The bright reds and blues and yellows
Lips spilling rainbows across the sky

She spoke in pastels
The pale pinks and cyans and creams
Lips spilling clouds blocking the sun

She speaks in monochrome
All black and grey and white
Lips spilling raindrops and thunder to the floor

She will speak in vibrants
With the bright reds and blues and yellows
Because after rain there is always a rainbow

-Cori Thomason



-Payton Coneys

I am Yours

The girl in the painting stared at me with her bright vivid blue eyes. The painting was alluring me, it drew me in. It was a general set up in the art museum. It was a colorful painting that was oriented next to a very simple image. The painting was located in the corner of the room. The walls were a clear coating of white, which made the painting stand out even more. There was a girl in the painting. She looked to be a teenager. She was positioned in a strange manor. Her body was sat up straight, her right leg was in a pointed arch, while her left leg laid on the floor. Her arms were crossed over her chest covering her breasts. As for her head, she looked straight at me. Her eyes glowed, in a way. Along with her eyes, her body was cascaded with designs. Each body part had a pattern of its own that each were different in their own way but it all came together so perfectly on the girl's body. She was painted gold. Her body was covered in gold while the patterns on her body each had colors that varied. Each swirl and shape all managed to somehow lead to her face and it led me to her eyes. She was hypnotic. I could feel her staring at me on the flat canvas on which she laid upon. Her beauty was mesmerizing and the colors had made it apparent. Each stroke was an enticing enchantment on its own. I was captivated. I could not take my eyes away from the girl.

It was sudden. I saw a movement of some sort. I could see the texture of the painting start to move. The patterns started to move. She blinked. She looked in each direction until she designated her eyes toward me. Her eyes which were once so still now rested upon me, and I could feel it. I could feel her staring. Her gaze stiffened. She then suddenly moved her shoulder. The movement then continued through her left arm. Her arm became mobile. She moved her right and unclenched her bare chest. She placed her arms up as if she wanted to be carried. The painting then made a small bump that faded. It made another then another. Each bump came from golden hands which were turned to fists. She was pounding against the canvas from the inside. She hit the canvas continually until there was tear. From that small, she ripped it open. Her body gleamed more than ever before. There was a light dimmed slowly. She moved her head slightly to the left. Observing me once more. She then laid her arms out at me as if she wanted to hug. I could see she was coming closer. She situated her hands on my shoulder and she began to take hold of me. She came closer to me until her face was an inch away from mine. She paused for a minute giving me a chance to look at her face more closely. Afterwards, she placed her lips towards my ear. I could detect her breathing. An actual painting was breathing. She opened her mouth slowly and gently whispered in my ear, with her soft, sensual voice. "I am yours".

-Irtana Deslouches

Adrenaline

10/22/XX

After being created approximately a month ago (actual first date of vital signs being recorded was September 1st), our current project is going well. Using a method of ecto-biology, we have successfully created a submissive human-esque creature. We have kept him (let it be noted that while he has no genitals, his appearance is masculine, so we have been referring to the subject as him.) in complete isolation. To assure proper health, he is kept under a specific regimen intended to raise an adrenaline and near feral destructive force. As of right now, we intend to sell this subject to the "highest bidder" upon his full initiation. This meaning that he will be gifted to whichever of the two warring border states around us can gift us the most money. Anything to perpetuate this conflict further.

Now, to create a humanoid creature was a soft task for our industry, but also a highly illegal one. His origin will not leave this building, lest we face incidence. He is not fully human, and relies heavily on stem cells. We utilize a variety of classified methods to age him rapidly, he is physically the age of 26 now. He seems like he has capacity to speak, but does not seem to be literate. Steroids similar to the types used within livestock have also been used to make him physically fit.

The following tests we subject him to will be recorded.

10/24/XX

Our testing procedures are immensely simple. We present the subject with two "puzzle chambers" every day. Some tests have a very easy to reach solution, and are intended to be completed within minutes. The other half of the tests have no actual solution, but they give off the illusion that they can be solved. To note, it is not a case of a solvable and unsolvable puzzle every day; It is done in a random manner.

He has reacted completely as intended to these tests. While originally below the expected time of clearance, he can solve the easy puzzles. We reward him with better food and a more comfortable cell, and he seems to enjoy it. However, when he cannot solve an impossible puzzle, we place him back in confinement with the lowest standard of feed. Both the annoyance at the puzzle and the dismay at his conditions have made him excessively angry every single time.

At the estimated peak of his outrage, we flood the current chamber he is in with a "conditioning gas" which has a chemical formula I am not legally allowed to write out. This gas reacts with a strand of receptor that is not cur-

rently active within his body. Due to him being highly induced with adrenaline and in a fight like response, we will be conditioning him into a state of pure violence and rage upon when this receptor goes off. Upon concluding the conditioning phase, we can administer another gaseous chemical which we simply has coded as an “anger based agent”. Upon this drug being inhaled, he will fall into an uncontrollable rancorous state, and attempt to kill anything he sees. This is, according to our hopes.

Time will tell.

10/25/XX

The tests have hit a snag. Our gassing system somehow has malfunctioned, and we cannot remotely send the conditioning gas into any chamber. However, we must proceed in anyway possible, and a man was sent to administer the gas manually. Proper precautions were enacted, we dressed the volunteer in military grade safety equipment and gave him a full body shield. Yet, this was not enough.

I watched the entire incident from the cameras. When the administrator entered, our subject was huddled over a part of the test he shattered out of rage. He had been at it for twenty minutes, and sweat was matting his hair to his forehead. His hands trembled over the broken pieces. When he heard another person enter the room, he did not even stop and stare.

In a moment, he ran towards the administrator. The size of the shield did not matter, he tore it away and tossed it aside. The administrator was pinned, and our subject let out an ugly, howling scream. It was horrific, and I definitely will not forget hearing it ever again.

Good news, in the chaos the canister of conditioner eventually fell and cracked open, releasing its fumes at the most angry our subject has ever been.

Bad news, the administrator never made it out the door.

10/27/XX

A short update today, even a moment taken from the security footage could be catastrophic. He has grown restless, and we still have to do man based administrations.

Three staff members have died, excluding the initial incident. He is a brutal, vicious killer. The details are gruesome, and I pray for everyone on this mission with me. No one volunteers anymore, we are chosen to give the gas in a lottery. Either we do it three times in a row successfully and switch, or the person dies.

Please do not be me.

10/28/XX

Its four in the morning, but I must document this. Instead of sleeping, tonight he has huddled himself off into a corner. This is not the concerning part though. The subject is speaking fluently. All he is doing is reciting the chemical names of the conditioning gas and the anger based agent.

Who told him? Some spiteful worker before their untimely death to his hands? That wouldn't make sense, there is no way he could properly comprehend the complex syllables and sounds of a long chemical strand. Either way, we are not allowed to even say the name of the chemicals. I am always here, I always have the audio on. No one has said it before now. How does he know?

10/31/XX

He's gone.
The drug is gone.
We don't know what happened. I wasn't on shift at the time, but when I arrived he was gone. No one in the security room saw him escape. I suggested mayhaps he ran during a transfer between chambers, but evidence showed that could not have happened. In the footage, he enters the puzzle chamber, but on the recording of the puzzle chamber he never arrives.

There was no possible room for him to flee between those shots.

11/5/XX

He's here.
Forgive me, god.

[NO MORE PRESENT LOG ENTRIES]
[CREATE A NEW ONE?]
[YES] [NO]

-Rory Bocelli



-Abraham Rodriguez

Beautiful Baltimore

“There was a time before you and there will be a time after you. Though these bodies are not our own, you need to walk tall little man, walk tall...”

...

“Why do you have to say that Marcel? Can you stop getting so philosophical with him? He’s only seven.” The man sighs and sits back on the beat-up leather sofa, shifting slightly to find a comfortable position. He peers down again and looks at the boy, before saying something. “Maybe you should widen his horizons, right Malcolm?” He says this while waving his hands outwards for emphasis. He then reaches down to fist-bump Malcolm, who tries to hide his grin. “Jesus, at times you act like his brother rather than his uncle.” The woman sighs, pulling her curly hair into a bun, and rubs the front of her forehead. She mumbles something offhandedly, before turning to the young boy. “Malcolm, baby, you have any homework tonight?” “Yes, mama.” The boy sighs defeatedly and heads towards the small dining table, his open bag dragging on the floor behind him.

...

“Malcolm told me some kid asked him something at school today, Alana.” He pauses before he speaks again, “The kid wanted to know why he doesn’t have a dad.” Alana sighs and rubs the bridge of her nose. “What did he say?” “He didn’t say anything. He didn’t know what to say.” Marcel sighs, and there’s a beat of silence. “He also told me that his school’s having a father-son day.” Another beat of silence passes. “Can’t you go? You’ve had no problem with going before? They’ve - they’ve understood in the past.” “Alana, you’ve let this haunt you for so long. You have to come clean and get over this.” A flash of anger crosses her face, and the small kitchen now has an air of tension in it. “I.. I have gotten over it. I-I’m going back to college to get my nursing degree--” “You dropped out of Dartmouth because of him.” “It was the circumstances! You still don’t understand!” “Yes, he was a white boy who slept with you because he was in love with you, and it’s just the circumstance that caused you to raise him alone with no support, right?” Alana looks up to meet Marcel’s eyes. “You have to move on. It’s been seven years. He needs a strong mama. Where’s the old Alana?” He looks away and shakes his head, moving slowly to grab his jacket. “Where are you going?” “I want to say goodbye to my nephew, I have work today and I need to call for a cab.” Alana watches from a distance as her younger brother moves to the younger boy. He grabs the pencil on the table, writes a solution to the boy’s math problem. Malcolm looks up and the two share a brief exchange of words, and Marcel ruffles his hair. He then heads to the door, looking down and avoiding eye contact with Alana. The door opens and then shuts loudly, shaking the t.v. remote off of a nearby end table. He’s gone, and a cool rush of air is all that remains.

....

“Hello beautiful Baltimore, my name is Will Butcher, and you are watching the wonderful KWB News. It is currently 8:07 p.m.” The small t.v. blares. The generic studio is vast and the one man sitting at the desk is slowly joined by another man. The man is older, with balding dark hair, contrasting with the younger man’s neatly parted blond hair. He has a bright smile that seems to permeate through the camera and seem like he’s actually smiling at you. The older man turns towards Will, and asks, “Hey Will, how’s your family doing.” The two slowly fade into a boring conversation, and Malcolm loses focus, looking down into his microwaved T.V. dinner. He looks to his side and sees his mother. A few tears roll down her cheeks, and Malcolm asks, “What’s the matter, mama?” “Nothing baby, go eat your food.”

-Fionnán Malone



-Payton Coneys

Before The Snow Day

I constantly thank God that my house doesn't have a security system. When my parents bought our house, my dad also bought three huge Dobermans as a housewarming gift for my mother. They figured that the dogs would suffice as a means of protection and defense. However, the dogs have zero qualms against me and my two younger sisters- they grew up watching over us, following us around like large and hairy shadows. So when I turned 15, I began to sneak out of the house, and bypassed our security with a few treats and a little belly rub. It's a scene that played out dozens of times between all of us kids, but our loyal Fido's were eternally trusting, and maybe forgetful as they grew up, but I digress. One night I was preparing to sneak out at around 11pm, an hour after our curfew. I was putting on my jacket as my bedroom door knocked softly. *Tap. Ta-ta-ta tap.* It was my sister, Marlene. I tiptoed over to the door, and quietly opened it, revealing her disheveled appearance, ratty old pajamas and messy hair. "What?" I sharply whisper. I could hear both my parents snoring away down the hall, but both were notoriously light sleepers, and I didn't want to take any chances.

She put her hands on her hips, as she said, "I'm just trying to look for you, *brother,*" knowing I hated to be called that. I usher her in and closed the door, and she continued, "Just wanted to let you know that I got Cerberus pacified, so now's a good time to leave." Shocked, I said "Oh, thanks. Did I ever tell you there's a party..?" She smirked, as she said "My sisterly instinct has been strong these days," but then she rolled her eyes and admitted "I heard that Spaz is throwing a little something, so I figured you'd get on over there." I nodded, saying "You're sisterly instinct sure is correct. Aight, I'll see you later," I said over my shoulder as I pry open my window and began to climb out of it. "Don't get arrested." Marlene whispered strenuously, as she turned off my light and quietly left my room.

I also constantly thank God for the tree that is planted right outside my bedroom window, the perfect escape route for a house fire, a home invasion, or when I need to go to a party. I quickly shimmy down the tree, and stuck a clean landing onto the frozen ground. I took note of the absent snowfall, but figured that it would begin sometime in the wee hours of the morning. I then briskly walked by the side of my house, and make it onto the sidewalk and out of the view of the yard within a minute, without needing to sneak past our adorable guards.

It was only a five minute walk to Spaz's house, but walking through these streets at night is plenty scary. It was clear that I was on edge, as when I felt a sudden clap on my shoulder, I spun around and threw a wild punch in my assailant's direction. "Yo, watch it, it's just me, you idiot," said my friend, Violet. "Oh my god I'm so sorry I-" She interrupted me with laughter, saying "Nah, nah, it's my fault for surprising you. I forgot that you get so scared walking around at night." She then moved in front of me, and said "Well, now you got me, so no more worries, alright?" She then began march-

ing back down the block, as I sighed and followed her. As the thumping of bass and the shouting of adolescents grew louder, our steps accelerated faster. Finally, we turn the final corner and approach Spaz's mansion. I can already see the clues of a party, streamers hanging from the balconies, strobe lights catching the reflections of the elegant windows, and, of course, dozens of young teens roaming around the vast lawn. "Wow," I simply said, and so I turned to Violet, and asked "Shall we go in?"

Just to note, we don't call him Spaz as an offensive thing; we call him that because he quite literally, is one of the craziest and most hyper kids in our grade. When he wasn't sitting outside of classrooms after the teacher finally had enough of his shenanigans, he was constantly cracking jokes, fidgeting with whatever is in his hands, or performing epic pranks. The tales of his tricks deserves a whole volume of stories on their own, but that's not what I'm here to talk about. Anyways, I walked into the front door, and immediately was thrown back by the entropy being thrown into me. Of course, Violet is not bothered at all, and runs right in to greet all of her girlfriends. I quickly gather my bearings and walk in after her, shutting the door behind us. "Hey man, welcome back to Casa de Blanca! Glad to see you here." Spaz approached me, sunglasses adorning his face even though it's dark as hell, and a red plastic cup in his hand. We perform our not-so-intricate style handshake, and then I say "Yeah, you know I would never miss this for the world, man." He laughed, and I asked, "What's that in the cup, some exotic fruit punch?" smirking, knowing he was serving our favorite drink. "Yep! Want some?" I nodded and he ran off to fetch me a drink. Meanwhile, I walk around the living room, where all the action was happening. The music was on full blast, and the room was stuffed with young and sweaty teenagers desperately trying to make something of themselves. I pushed through the crowd, saying hi to some acquaintances, I even started swaying to a particular song I like when it started playing. Spaz came back into my vision, showing the cup into my hands, before he turned around, grabbing a microphone and shouting at the DJ "Turn the music down!" The DJ slowly dialed the music to a pleasant hum, and everyone stopped moving to face our Great Overlord. "Now," Spaz began, "we are gathered here today to celebrate Creeksdale High's first snow day of the school year!" He stopped momentarily to let the masses cheer on. "We will sing," we cheered, "we will dance," more cheering "and most importantly, we will PAR-TAY!!!!!" We erupt into cheers as the DJ turns the music back up and the party resumes. I drank all of my punch in one gulp, and then I went into party mode.

The next two hours were a blur of dancing, socializing, a little bit of flirting, and just living my best life. I retire to the kitchen after a while, feeling my adrenaline start to crash. I sit at one of the islands, resting my head on the cool granite surface. "Hey," a voice popped up from behind me, "tired already? My god, what have you done to James, you imposter!" Me and Violet laugh, and she took the sit beside me. "I'll admit, I'm a bit tired too." "Oh my god, what have you done with-" She lightly punched my shoulder, smiling.

There was a comfortable silence between us for a few minutes, a calming atmosphere, contrasting from the loud and chaotic vibe ebbing from the living room. "So," she asked, sitting up as hair fell in front of her eye, "How do you plan on spending this snow day after this?" I shifted in my seat, thinking for a moment, before answering "Uh, I'll probably sleep, and then hang out with my sisters and the dogs while my parents blow out the driveway." Violet hummed, as she said "I'll be taking a well deserved mental health day while my parents are at the hospital. Duty calls, even in the face of a blizzard." I muttered a "cool" as I stand from my seat, and begin to search the kitchen for some food. I wasn't sure what I wanted, but I thought I would know when I see it. "You want anything?" I ask Violet as I grabbed an orange. "Let's split that." I sighed, but relented. I walked back to the island, peeling the orange as I went.

While we were both eating slices, Spaz walked into, still dancing along to a track playing from the outside. "What up party people," he made his way over and stole a slice from my hand. "Here, I'll make you guys some actual food." He threw some frozen pizza bagels onto a plate and nuked them for a minute, before pulling them out and placing it in front of us. "Bon appetit!" He shouted in a shitty French accent. Violet rolled her eyes while I laughed and digged in.

This pleasant scene was interrupted by shouting, and not Spaz level shouting where he's doing it for comedic effect, and not the kind of shouting that happens at parties. This shouting was sharp, cutting into our bones, and there was more than one voice that were responding to each other with curses and biting insults. "Oh no..." Spaz ran out of the kitchen, with me and Violet not far behind. The source of the argument, it looked like it was caused by someone spilling a drink on someone else. Now these two idiots were screaming at each other like one of they actually died.

Violet sniffed, and then said "Do you smell that?" I realized that distinct scent: alcohol. I grabbed Spaz, resisting his squirming and growled "Did you really serve beer here? You dumbass-" "What? What are you talking about? Those guys broke into my parents liquor cabinet, I locked that thing! Shit, I gotta-" With our luck, we heard the faint sounds of sirens winding up Spaz's curved driveway. Cops.

At that moment, the adrenaline kicked back in, and I acted on instinct. Only problem was, so was everyone else. The living room became like a myriad of antelopes trying to escape a pride of lions. I also stalled for a few moments, not knowing which way I wanted to go. I saw some people running upstairs and ducking into the various rooms, keeping quiet to hide from the cops. Others were remaining still, dropping their cuts and asking their friends if their breath smelt of alcohol. And of course, the absolute imbeciles that thought it would be a good idea to run out the front door and ambush the cops themselves. While I was still standing, whipping my head all around, Spaz knocked into me. "Dude, run, just run, get outta here, I

don't want you in trouble, just run, run, ru-"

"EVERYBODY HANDS UP AND FREEZE!"

The gruff voice of a police man sounded from the foyer. Neither of us bothered with salutations before we ran in opposite directions. Spaz ran towards the direction of the cops, while I ran in the opposite way, into the kitchen. There would be sliding doors that led to the backyard, which was dark and full of trees. Great cover. I run in and see Violet sitting at the island, eating the rest of the pizza bagels peacefully. She smiled at me, and I just ran outside to get the hell away from the situation happening in this grand mansion. I make a beeline towards the woods, I've taken this path many times to avoid Spaz's noisy neighbors. It was long and tiresome, but it leads back to the road to my house. I spent about ten minutes sprinting through the forest, relying purely on my memory and instincts to get through the dark trees and wilted vines. After that, I slowed down, actively reminding myself to breathe. I stop completely and sit down on a tree stump, collecting myself. I pull out my phone to turn the flashlight on when I saw the time, it was almost five in the morning. I groaned, but I turned on my flashlight, which lead me to my next revelation: there was no snow on the ground. Not even a light dusting. I balked, and just stared at the ground. *That can't mean...* A buzz brought me back to earth, it was from my other sister, Clare. "Ya better get back home now lol." I slowly get back to my feet, and trudged the rest of the way back home. I struggled to climb back up the tree, not wanting to face the reality that would be waiting for me inside. My sister opened the window for me, and pulled me in. I was barely back up on my feet when she said "So...I hope you finished your physics homework." She giggled and then left my room, not even closing the door. My siblings sure hated me that day. I threw my jacket off, put on some sweatpants, and crawled into bed. I was still sweating, and I was so tired I could pass off as actually sick. My alarm went off, as did my phone, and as my parent marched in, I put on the sad sick boy facade, and finally fell asleep, as I should have always been.

-Julia Collins

A Babies' Creation

“As you know, I have left to my private lab as of recently. But, fear not, I am well. Can we meet, please, I have a surprise for you. Dear, I have fixed the issue you see...”

Eventually, she leaned back from the letter to her husband. Finalizing the e-mail, she pressed send and rolled her wheelchair away. Grinding and grinding against the floor, she went over to the lab desk and stared. Here sat a petri dish, and those who were none the wiser would think this was just water. In fact, it was a lone synthetic zygote.

Judge as one would, but the scientist had been coddling the cell for days now. Keeping track of past tests, none of her work had ever gotten this far. Lest she forget the past deaths, and the children that could never be. Moreover, a past accident left her an infertile paraplegic, so her attempts to bear a child would never see fruition.

Now, she does work a well paying job, but lacks all family besides her husband (who she never sees). Of course, it hurt her. Particularly, she was caught between blaming God and Science for taking a loving life away from her. Quality is all that mattered now, everyone else believed there was no time for love. Radical thoughts would be expressing a need for companionship.

So, she worked in secret. Taking some stem cells, she had been attempting to grow a human fetus. Unsure of her results however, she had chosen to stay with her experiment for weeks. Virtually, no one had seen her, but it wasn't as if they would worry. Worry was for the frail.

Xeroxed data papers was all she had for company, and even then she had no results to show.

You can only imagine her happiness on that night. Zygotes no longer had to die, and the cell grew into an embryo which would soon enough become her first son.

-Rory Bocelli

Wheels

There once was a guy from the High School
His fresh pair of shoes made him feel cool
He heeled all around
Without making a sound
Then he slipped and he fell in the pool.

-Foster Sullivan

A Day Without My Phone

Waking up this morning wasn't easy, my alarm woke me up at 4:55. Although it was time to get up, I dismissed it and said, "I still got time, I'll get back to sleep." Then I went back to sleep. Before my brother woke me up, he took a shower, got ready and called me at 6:00am. I said, "I've got time," and went back to sleep. 5 minutes later, the next snooze, and the next. It was already 6:15 and my brother had given up. My mom, my dad and Grandma called out to me too. I ignored them and said, "I have time". I pulled out my phone to watch a little show on YouTube, the show was about 45 minutes. 5 minutes into the show, I realized it was 6:20. So, I relentlessly got up, took my facial care bag, and headed to the bathroom.

I knew I had no time, but I still said, "I have time." My face and shower took me about 15 minutes. Finished, I rushed to my room, pulled out a pair of jeans and searched for a t shirt. It was about 6:40 when I was done. I said, "I have time," so I made instant coffee and sat down. By the time I was done, it was 6:53. I thought I had everything I needed, so I rushed to the door. It took me about 30 seconds to find the right key to lock it, and by then it was already 6:54. I rushed to the bus stop, it was around 6:55, I thought. In less than 30 seconds, the bus came. Now I was sure of the time. As I got on the bus and took a seat, I opened my backpack to take out my phone and realized that it was gone! I realized that I had forgotten my phone, my wallet, my watch, and even my water bottle. By the time I realized I couldn't get off the bus to grab it for if I did, I knew I would miss the school day.

I wondered how the day would be, it was a strange day already. As I got to school, I realized I wasn't ready to do anything. I was still hung up about my phone that I'd forgot. I sat in the school lobby waiting for the bell, since I had no way to tell time. I said that I would look at the clock, but I had forgotten my glasses at home too, and I can't see anything far without them. Now with nothing to do and feeling bored, I pulled out the book we were supposed to read for homework about 3 weeks ago and finally started it. I used Sparknotes to see what was happening in the story, I've never read the book since I thought it sounded boring. And it was, so I closed the book, pulled out my notebook, and started writing. I didn't know what time it was then. A while later, the school warning bell rang. I packed up everything, except I held my notebook in my hand and started walking to class.

I wasn't ready to hear what I heard from the teacher. What happened to my grades? For the first Time I got and 86! My class average went to down; I could see my whole average going down. By then, I knew that this wouldn't be a good day.

Everything just had to fall apart, just because I forgot my phone. I said, "nothing else could go wrong today", but then again, everything seemed to be still be going wrong. How could I have done my work but still failed? I decided to give up on school for the day. So I said to myself, I'll google some jokes then

watch some movies on YouTube, and listen to music. But I remembered that I had forgotten my phone. I wondered what time it was, I was ready to leave. I didn't know what period we were in as I couldn't keep track of time. It wasn't what I expected, I still hoped that today would get better.

As I was walking down to my next period class, I remember that I had lunch. As I was heading down to the cafeteria, I saw my crush in the hallway. Normally I try to avoid him normally by pretending to be on my phone, or talking to my friends, but I couldn't since I didn't have it. I approached him and asked him, "Could you tell me what time is it please?" Normally we wouldn't talk because I am afraid of him finding out I like him. He is in about half of my classes. He told me what time it was. Then I said, "I have time to get to my locker." Then he surprisingly as asked "I have time, where is your locker?" I answered, "by the science hallway". He said, "that's where I'm heading, I'm going to lunch". We had the same period of lunch, it's not like I didn't know or that he didn't, we've seen each other in the cafeteria before, or I'm pretty sure we did.

On our way to my locker, we didn't talk that much, but it seemed like much more since we don't talk to each other often. When we arrived at my locker, I gripped my notebook, the one I put there 2 periods before. It was about 2 steps down from the door to the cafeteria. Before we went in, I asked him if i could borrow his phone to call my friends. He let me borrow it and asked me if I had Snap. I gave him my username and we went into the cafeteria. He got the same sandwich as me. We sat in a large group, and when he was done, and ready to leave, I wanted to say "bye". Before I could speak he whispered to wait for him after school. I loudly said "BYE" to him since I didn't want my friends to ask too many questions and makes a fuss about it. Since they didn't even know I liked him, although I had been hiding it from them for at least 4 months.

When he left, my friends still asked me a bunch of questions. Then I remembered that I didn't do my homework that was due next period. I asked my friends what time it was, they told. There was 20 minutes left before the



-Neurchalange Antione

end of the period, so I said, "I have time," and I rushed to finish my homework, and went to class.

At the end of the day, I went to my locker to put away some books. I didn't know what time it was, but I knew my bus would leave very soon. I hopefully looked around, didn't see anyone, so I picked up my backpack and said, "I don't have time," as I rushed outside looking for my bus. During the bus ride, I put my head down. When I arrived at my stop, I got out and went home. When I got there, I had found my phone exactly where I left it, but it had no charge since the charger wasn't plugged in and I had been listening to music in the morning before school. I was so eager to see if my crush had texted me. About 2 hours later, my phone was fully charged, but he didn't message me. Maybe he had something to do, or maybe he forgot? I couldn't help but recall what happened during the day. Now that I could tell the time, I went on and did the things as I was supposed to do. As I worked, I couldn't believe that a day without my phone would turn out this way, then I thought, if I wasn't so lazy and kept saying, "I have time", then maybe I would have never have talked to him and these amazing things would have never happened.

Right when I was ready to go to sleep, I saw that he messaged me on Snap. He wrote, "U up? Can you talk?" I knew I should go to sleep, or finish the show I was watching on Youtube that I had started in the morning, but instead I replied "I have time."

-Neurchelange Antoine

My Worth

My world is breaking apart
and you are watching from the sidelines.
Everything is falling and crashing down but there is no sound.
Only I can hear everything.
The wars that have raged inside me,
for years it has been there.
defeats are rare and only minimal.
Where there is the light,
I cradle the darkness for it is my friend.
It is cold, but comfortable.
Oh, how comfortable it is.
My only friend of which I see.
The cries and the pain stab me like piercing
knives.
Can I make it?
What right do I have to question myself?
Was I not put on this earth to be blessed by
all the tiny miracles?
Was I not born to make a change in this
world?
Why do I question my own existence as tears
fall down on my face?
Can I truly be free from all of it?
Can I be the bird that flies away from it all?
But am I just giving up?
What right do i have to give up after so many
have sacrificed their lives just so I could be
here.
What am I doing?
Am I worthy enough for anything?
Am I worth anything?



-Abigail Simon

Yes.
Yes, I am.
I am worthy of it all.
I can not let such questions defy me.
I cannot swim in a pool filled of curiosity without knowing who I truly am

first.

My past does not define me,
My future does not take hold of me,
And the darkness is only in my mind.

I think I can make it.

NO,

I WILL MAKE IT.

If others have succeeded before,

Why can't I?

Of course I can.

I can do it all.

I must break my bonds with ignorance,
I must break the chains that hold me back.

I am capable of it all.

My wars have driven me to insanity but here I stand, still sane.

My cries have been screamed to the peak but I am still silent

My selfishness has been tossed aside but I caress it ever so lightly.

I must leave the darkness that consumes me
and take hold of the light that has reached out for me.

It stings.

The light stings;

it burns my throat,

My heart is soaked in flames that cannot be put out.

But it feels warm.

The flames feel so warm.

I can feel it caressing me.

Each truth is painful but it only lasts for a second.

The light takes hold of me.

It picks me up and guides me.

It walks with me.

It gives me a new robe and crown to wear for it knows that I am worth it.

I am worth so much more.

And I'm glad I finally realize it.

-Irtana Deslouches

A Collection of 10 Word Stories

He had a broken heart until the girl in Art.

-Lea LaPonti

She took everything from you. What do you have left?

-Fionnán Malone

Ten words, not enough, sadly only ten, finally the end.

-Lizbeth Mendoza

The pain started small, growing fast, then it went dark.

-Cori Thomason

Perspective is key to living life. Go see the world.

-Irtana Deslouches

Love can seep through the cracks of a broken heart.

-Mia D'Alessandro

Darkness clouding my heart made an easy vessel for him.

-Cori Thomason

He was lying on the bloody floor, so it goes.

-Neurchelange Antoine

“Any last words?”

“Tell my cat, stop eating my food.”

-Irtana Deslouches

“Welcome to Hell” she said; I entered my high school.

-Neurchelange Antoine

Love is a lie, but I enjoying lying with you.

-Irtana Deslouches

Somehow too much and too little for me to say

-Julia Collins

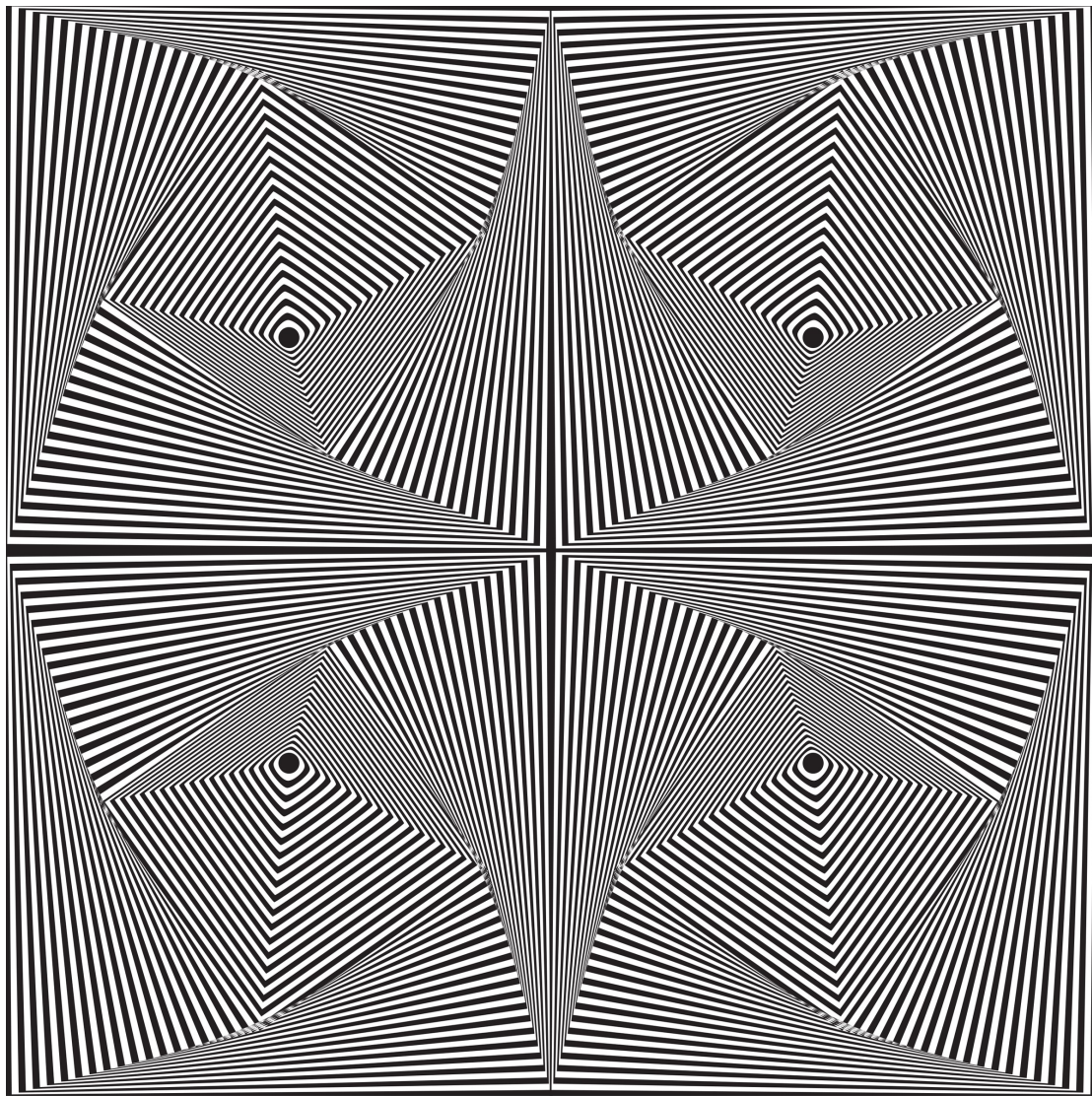
...10 Word Stories Continued

I saw five snowmen dancing outside my house at 3AM.

-Lea LaPonti

A blank page is all that I am to-day.

-Irtana Deslouches



-Shaleaq Delgado

Trapped: The Life and Times of Emma Hawkins

Have you ever been cornered in your own mind, or been sent to a madhouse to rot? Well I have. Or in my case it was an old apartment under a highway in New York. It had the most horrible, rude, difficult, and depressing people you could ever meet. For about four months, I lived in the back of a small apartment avoiding any social contact. The apartment was on the last floor of the building. Some people would even say it was the highway itself, but the noise didn't bother me. It was the voices and thoughts in my head that bothered me. Thoughts like, "Am I ever gonna have a real family? Did my dad abandon me here?" It sickens me that one can go to bed at night and carry on with their life knowing their own blood-line is suffering from sadness and neglect. It boggles my mind that he can maintain strong relationships with his other children, but not me. I wasn't good enough for him. The only thing I want to know is an explanation as to what I did wrong. What made me so different from the rest? What did I do to make him bring me here with his brother who I didn't even know? An annoying child who talks all day, and two irrational violent women, whose main weapon is emotional abuse. Every single day, they would do something, anything to make me feel not welcome. Their passion was remarkable; they had an inexhaustible supply of hatred, expended daily, which burns fiercely year after year.

My Safe Place

My room was my safe place. I'd spend hours on my laptop just trying to avoid this nightmare called my life. I can still hear the pounding on my door, and the screaming demon telling me how "I ruined her life" and "if I didn't open the door she would strangle me to death". She was filled with hatred and anger, no matter how much I tried to get along with her. She would still beat me senseless and apologize afterwards. The first weeks, I forgave her, thinking she was just having a rough time. I thought that she would eventually start to like me. And, some days I thought we were bonding, but then came the violence and the sobbing. After a few times of getting hurt by the same person physically and mentally you learn that a person as violent as she is, is just not okay. She was a person full of loathing for others, but mostly for herself. There were days when I couldn't get myself out of bed. The pain that she had brought upon me was worse than anyone could imagine. My mind was full of her hate and words, and my body was damaged as can be.

Her mother was no different, even though she didn't assault me physically. She would stand right outside my door screaming, listing the ways that my life is a total piece of trash: telling me why I had no friends, no family, nor life of my own. She would always end up crying by the side of the door telling me the *wrong reasons that her daughter married my uncle. She would stay there for hours just trying to make me feel bad, trying to get inside my head. But my room was my safe place. Even though it was small, loud, smelled like bleach and had cobwebs in the back closet, it was still the only place where the demons wouldn't set foot. It's where I could zone out the rest of this crazy world.*

Or that's what I thought...

The Stranger

Around three p.m., every other day, the family would leave the house to take her child to soccer practice. Meaning, I had two hours to finally get something to eat, shower, and grab provisions so I wouldn't starve for the next forty-eight hours. Living in this house was hard, but manageable. By the fifth week, I already knew the routine. Seven a.m., I'd wake up to the sobbing by my door, eight a.m. I'd make myself breakfast with the provisions I had grabbed. Nine a.m., I'd hear the pounding on my door telling me to "open or die". At eleven, I'd put my headphones on and zone out everything and everyone; there I would pass the time until her child would appear outside my indoor window, tapping it slowly with a frequent, scary motion.

Everything was going as planned, they had just left and I rushed out of my room to prepare myself a nice plate of pasta with some parmesan cheese. Just when I was starting to eat, I hear voices outside the front door, I stay quiet so I could try to hear who it was. I couldn't make out much, but I'm pretty sure they were whispering something about a coffin. I didn't really pay attention since it didn't sound like the family. I continue to enjoy my pasta, when the door knob turns. Blood rushes through my veins. "They can't be back so soon" I tell myself. The door opens, so I hide under the table. It was a stranger full of rage, she was screaming, "How could you do this to me?" Over and over again. I didn't see anyone else come through the door. Who was she talking to? Where was the rest of the family?

Staying quiet under the table was the best option right now. I couldn't call the police because my cell phone was on top of the kitchen counter. "I know you're here" she yelled. She probably saw my food on the table and assumed the person she was looking for was here. She looked similar to my uncle's wife with who I loathed, but she was taller, skinnier and looked tired and wasted. Who was this woman? Why did she have a key? Who was she looking for?

I hear footsteps walking towards me, and stopping right in front of me. Does she see me? Does she know I'm here? She got down to take off her bright pink stilettos. I can finally see her face.

Oh my God, it's her, it's the demon women, what happened to her? She starts to cry and yell out in pain. I hear the utensils moving around, I think she's eating my pasta. A red substance drips from the table. "Did I get myself a glass of Kool-Aid?" With a bang on the table her arm drops from above, and a note is released from her hand. She's dead.

The Note

The note was written on a folded yellow napkin, I couldn't bear to grab it. Seeing it just some inches away was so tempting, but I was too scared to come out of my hiding place. What if she wasn't really dead? What if she was just trying to trick me again so I would come out and she could strangle me?

I feel buried, but I'm not dead. I can't breathe. There is something dripping on my shoulder. I assume it is blood. What is that sound? Is someone here? No, the sound is me crying. There's a dead women right above me.

Goosebumps trailed over my entire body. She hasn't moved, so I finally get the courage to stretch my arm towards the napkin. I get up from under the table, and see her unconscious. She isn't breathing, she isn't moving. I turn towards the window, to

see if there is anyone outside. I open the note and read:

“I know you’re under there”
Xoxo. Auntie

I turn around to see her standing right behind me. And then all went black.

Where am I? I wake up in what seems to be an old hidden room; it was small, dark and it smells of filth. Hearing rats running beside me wasn’t the worst thing right now. I hear people near me. I get up from what seems to be a pile of clothes with an unsatisfying smell. I try to shout “here I am, find me!”, but my lips are sealed with some kind of glue. The pain of trying to open my mouth was horrible. It was just like the seventh grade when if I spoke I would get hurt by the older kids in my class. I was forced to stay quiet.

My mouth hurts from trying to open it and my legs are immobile from pain. What happened to me? I lay down once more on top of the dirty pile of clothes trying to think about what to do. What feels like hours pass, and with it a million terrible thoughts. The voices are back...

Finally a dash of light comes through a small hole in the wall. I do my best to get up and see what’s on the other side of the hole, but when I took the first step it seemed like I was walking on glass. I immediately fell to the ground with a big scream. Blood filled my mouth, it tasted like metal. When I screamed I must have taken some glue off and with it a part of my lip. The light is gone, I grab my hair in agony and cry myself to sleep.

She’s Back

A knock on the door wakes me up, enhancing my state of hysteria. It’s her, I just know it. She’s doing the same routine as she used to do when I isolated myself from her and everything around me. She’s mocking me and trying to make me miserable.

“Knock knock” she says.

I’m going crazy, it seems like I’ve spent an eternity here. I can already feel my insides crumbling, my rage overflowing, and my sanity coming to an end. She has caused me emotional anguish, and with it physical damage. Is it not enough to be stuck in a dark small room, with an unbearable silence, and this unsatisfying solitude?

She starts pounding on what sounds like a door. I can hear it, but where is it? I try once more to get up, but no luck. Getting to the pounding noise before it stops seems simply impossible. I’ve tried my best to drag myself towards the sound more than once, but every time I got closer the sound got further; it is exhausting.

“Your gonna die here” whispers a female voice in my ear. “Who is that?” I ask in fear “You don’t remember me?, I was the only one who had your back during those hard times last year with those mean, horrible bullies and told you to give a solution to your pain by covering it with more. I was your best friend, your companion, your other half”.

I recognize that voice, that terrible voice that used to make me go crazy at night. She’s not my friend. I don’t hear her voice through my ears, but through my

mind. She's my nightmare; every time she would come back I would experience sleep paralysis and throbbing pain rushing through my whole body. I thought these attacks had come to an end, but I was soon to learn that that wasn't true.

"Why are you here?" I ask that so called friend. "I never left."

Immediate silence filled the room. A small pinch of light shines upon me. I feel a severe pain on my arms. I look down to see what's hurting me so badly, and my wrists are pouring blood. Rage and discomfort fill my soul. I can't resist the pain. A scream is released, my mouth is unsealed and with it parts of my lips.

Everything... Affects Everything

I'm laying in a huge pool of blood. My lips are bleeding and my wrists are as well. It doesn't stop, it only gets worse with time. What am I doing to myself? What have I done? A migraine has come to join the party; I feel like my head is going to explode. I tried my best not to cry, but I'm not made out of stone bricks, the more I tried to avoid my problems, the more it drives me insane. After a few seconds of mentioning to myself reasons why I shouldn't cry, waterfalls flow down my eyes. All my emotions are crashing together. Pain fills the room and the light shining above me has vanished. The darkness has taken over, and my misery has become entertainment for those hearing my every thought and my every tear. They enjoyed it all.

"Our work is done here". it's the voices.

For a few moments all my senses had disappeared I had officially lost hope in my life, in my dad in myself. I'm done holding on, this isn't life, it's hell.

The Light

I can't feel the migraine anymore, but I'm still sobbing. I have a beast in my gut; it's eating my insides and with it my soul. There's nothing I can do anymore. I close my eyes to try to seek a smile. Even though my life is death, there's always a good side to the picture. I imagine what it would be like if I had a real family: I would wake up with a kiss on the forehead from my dad and have breakfast made by my mom. I shouldn't be here, imagining it while laying in my own blood puddle. I should be with them, having a normal happy life. My eyes slowly opened, I knew I had to face my bereavement, but I never thought I would be mourning my own soul.

While my eyes are opening I see a small dot of light in the distance, is this "the light"? Is this my time? I gently get off the pile of clothing and drag myself towards the light. What is it? As I got further, I started to take control over my body once more, it felt raw and fatigued. As I hear a pounding noise in the distance start to get louder, I come to a conclusion that my hearing is back as well. I'm now walking towards the light, my wrists are no longer bleeding, my mouth no longer tasted like metal and my tears had dried off, I was vigor once more.

I finally got to the light...

Finally

I got to a white small table in the middle of nowhere, and on top was my "light". The screen of the phone was illuminating the dark room. I had received a

text message from my dad? “My dad!” I immediately grab the phone from on top of the table entered the passcode and read the text.

“I’m sorry for abandoning you, I love you and I want you to live with me, my wife, and kids. I’m coming to pick you up by dawn... be ready.

Love, daddy”

The hidden room was now filled with color and light. I could see clearly once again, and I realized I never left my so called “safe place”. The wounds had completely disappeared, and for the first time in months I could feel the sensation of happiness, a smile was now covering my face. I was happy.

I quickly shoved my clothes into an empty suitcase, and rushed out of my bedroom door. Without saying a word. I ran straight through the living room, grabbed a bag of chips from the kitchen and went right out the front door. While rushing through the building halls I hear my aunt in the distance, “Emma, Emma, come back!”

The excitement was bursting out of me, after a long time living at that mad house I was finally free. I didn’t even try to stop when my aunt was calling my name worried what was gonna happen, I didn’t stop for nothing. I was finally getting my happy ending, a family, a house where I would be loved and a father who cared.

As I leave the building I could see my dad on the other side of the parking lot with a smile on his face as well. I was so happy I didn’t care about anything else but him and getting to his car.

“Stop!” Says the creepy voice inside my mind. “You didn’t think I’d leave my job in the middle of it, did you?” My head felt like a screw driver was now being plundered inside my skull. I had to stop, the pain was dreadful. I could hear my dad honking like crazy. After a few seconds my pain had completely vanished. But as I look up the only thing I could see was a red Bugatti rushing towards me.

She did it, she finished her job.

My Final Words

“You don’t know what goes on in anyone’s life but your own. And, when you mess with one part of a person’s life, you’re not messing with just that part. You can’t be that precise. When you mess with one part of a person’s life, you’re messing with their entire life. And not just theirs, but every single person that knows that person. Everything affects everything. Your experience of your journey through life boils down to the chemicals in your brain. Happy, sad, mad, etc.

Our time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out who you are”. - Emma Hawkins

-Naysa Escobar

Katherine and the Cat

We all know Zeus, his wife's and his affairs, but no one has heard of Zeus' affair with Gaii. She is a goddess and mother nature. Zeus and Gaii were in a secret relationship for a total of six months but the baggage stuck with Gaii for nine months. She was pregnant, she decided never to tell Zeus about the child, and continued to keep the child in secret her whole life. On May 21st Gaii had a perfect and healthy baby girl, her name was Katherine.

As Gaii raised Katherine in secrecy, Katherine was raised all alone in a huge house with a white picket fence with a red front door never to be opened by anyone, except Gaii. Katherine had long rich black gorgeous hair and the most perfect skin. When Katherine was very little she didn't struggle with a life without friends. Katherine lived in a normal village in a normal neighborhood, she watched people walk by her house but never interacted with anyone but her mother. When Katherine came of age she began to question her mother, "Mom, why can't I go out into town and make friends?" she asked. Gaii responded, "Oh child, you must stay hidden so your dad can never come after you." Katherine accepted her mom's response and went to her room for a long restless night of sleep. Katherine went to sleep that night with tears coming down her face like a stream on a stormy night.

The next morning Katherine watched her neighbors enjoy their free lives. Katherine had had enough, she wanted a friend, a companion, anything that she could have that was alive and breathing. Katherine breached through the door to her mother's bedroom. Knowing Gaii would admonish her later for entering her room she continued her plan, Katherine looked for magical tools that she could create a living creature with. Leaving Gaii's room with a fluffy material, a long floppy stick and four little circles that kinda looked like feet. She circumspectly placed them on the table in a circle. Katherine knew to create a living thing there must be blood, so Katherine added her own which she would soon regret.

By adding her blood she would soon become the abstract creature Katherine desired. All of a sudden Katherine screamed in pain, dropping to the floor. Her bones snapped into new positions, her eyes changed to green with small pupils, her new body had formed a tail, but her long dark rich hair became a soft coat of fur over her new body. Katherine had failed to make a new friend, but she succeeded in making herself a strange new animal.

When Gaii had returned home, she had only found a animal and not her daughter. After Gaii realized what Katherine had done she held the animal and said, "Oh Katherine what have you done? I shall grant you your wish and set you free into the world as the animal you have become. You will be known as a cat and your father will never find you this was. It will be like you never existed." Gaii then opened the door and set her daughter, now a cat into the world.

Years passed on, and Katherine had evolved and her creations of her species had grew bigger and bigger. The average house cat and the fierce lion you see in a zoo are all descendants of Katherine. Thanks to Katherine's fear of living alone forever the cats were created. So the next time you see a cat with dark rich fur, call the name Katherine see if it turns around and looks at you, her immortal life as a cat lives on to this very day.

-Shannon Kehoe

The Paper Bag

There's a monster under my bed who haunts me every night. It's loud and it's scary. It frightens me. I can hear it scream slightly. Every night, it growls at me. The monster says he wants to play, but I do not want to. It stretches out one arm in my direction, but I stay far away. It's slimy blue arm ends with razor sharp talons that could cut through my floorboards like a knife. It's eyes glow in the dark, watching my every move. I grow sleepless.

One day, my parents finally asked, "What's wrong?" I told them about the monster, but they just called me "crazy," and said that "that's all in your head." I wish it was just in my head, but I knew it was real. I felt it once. Awhile ago it grabbed onto my leg. I felt its coarse, sandpaper like hands. Its nails dug into my skin. That night, I saw its face. Its goblin face. His mouth was wide open, his jaw was locked. His teeth were as sharp as needles. It was terrifying. I tried to show my parents the bruises on my legs from the monster, but they thought I was exaggerating about an accident that I had. I tried to show them reason.

My next course of action- I had to make them see the monster. Without thinking, I took the closest thing near me, a paper lunch bag, so I could show them what the monster looked like. I left the table to get my art supplies. I got crayons, colored paper, glue, scissors, googly eyes. I quickly colored, cut, and glued everything to the plain brown paper bag. It was finished. I did my best. It was the monster. It was smaller and kind of cute, but it fit the image. I ran up to my parents and showed them the bag. I described to them how it really looked with the help of the paper bag. I told them it was all slimy but dry on its hands. His eyes glowed a piercing yellow and its mouth was big and wide. My parents looked at each other then laughed. I didn't like their laughter. I took my bag from them and ran to my room.

In my room I clenched the paper monster close to me. It was a lot better than dealing with the real one. I heard footsteps coming up the stairs. It was my parents. They asked if I was alright. I stayed silent. They looked at my bed, and said they would check under it just to be sure. Together they got close and both kneeled down. They lifted my comforter, peeked, and said there was nothing there, until suddenly-. The monster's arms came out. It grabbed my parents' legs just below the knee, causing them to fall backward, and it dragged them under the bed. Their screams were loud, they clawed their way toward freedom but failed miserably. It grew silent. The monster growled. I sat there in the corner holding my paper monster in silence. Tears falling down my eyes. While looking at the monster's glowing eyes. I knew I was next.

-Irtana Deslouches

A Secret Behind a Door

the door
opened.
vomit hit,
the water coming up
over her cheeks.

A best friend,
a confidant, rushes in
offering a hair tie,
a damp washcloth,
a hand to hold,
A shoulder to cry on?
Arms to embrace?

Leaning together they
try standing,
but crumple to the
cool tiles in bliss,
a plus sign
the focus of luminescent smiles.

-Mrs. Cazzalino



-Payton Coneys

Maternal Enigma

“And now, the recent news of the execution of Rachel Dorothy Clover, the prolific serial killer that reigned over the Seattle area during the 90s. Over a period of eight years, she killed an estimated six people, before being caught in 1999. She-”

Adam shut the radio off. He didn't need another reminder of why he's driving to his mother's estate.

Adam never met his mother. He had known about her since he was a toddler, his aunt made it clear he was not her son. Adam never knew who exactly his mother was until he was in his early teens, when he had found pictures of his mom while researching criminals on death row. He came running out of his room sobbing, and was hugged by his aunt for the first time since he was small.

“I'm sorry baby, I was going to tell you eventually. When I felt you were ready.”

Still sniffing, Adam asked, “What did she do?” Aunt Becca stilled, and then led him to the den. She left for a few minutes, coming back with two steaming cups of tea. Adam took the cup, sipping it with shaking hands. Chamomile, his favorite.

“Your mother, Rachel, was amazing. She was a model student, an amazing athlete, and the best big sister I could ask for. I don't know how or why, but after she graduated college, she refused to...settle down for quite a few years. I mean, she would work diligently in her day job, but she would party intensely on weekends. But when she pregnant with you, she changed! She stopped going out, she got promoted, and she moved out of our house and got herself a nice apartment in the suburbs. She really changed for the better. However...” She grew quiet, tilting her head towards the floor. Setting her mug down, she continued “She was connected with several murders in Seattle when you were about a year old. She confessed and she was locked up.”

The two sat in silence for a few moments, before Adam tentatively asked “Why?”

This time, Aunt Becca started to cry. She pulled Adam close, and the two sobbed together for quite a while. Eventually, Aunt Becca croaked out, “I don't know, hun. I don't think I'll ever know. But, look at me.” Adam turned and stared into his aunt's bloodshot eyes. “Our lives are not cut and dry, white or black, a duck or not, there's a lot of ambiguity out there. That's why I am going to suggest this to you: do not make assumptions on a surface level. There is always something else going on in the deep end.”

With that, she stood up, wiping her face, and asked with a smile, “Now, how about we go get some ice cream?” He immediately got up. Adam could never resist ice cream, not even with the weight of Aunt Becca's words on his chest.

Adam spent his high school years in a state of internal tug of war. He

was constantly flipping between wanting to believe what his heart and his Aunt said, that his mother was innocent of the killings. He stayed up late researching her case, combing through every single little detail he could find, that could prove him right. *All of the evidence is circumstantial, he often thought to himself. Fiber and hair evidence? She wasn't rich, they knew she bought the cheapest clothes possible. Oh, and she had black hair, like every other human on this planet. Anyone in the city could have killed these people.* He kept the one photo he had of him and his mother, a Polaroid of her holding him on the day of his birth. Her countenance held the fondest emotion Adam has ever had anyone give him. She caressed him, in a way that no one has, and maybe ever will. He was convinced no cold blooded murderer could look at someone the way his mother did.

But the his head would start turning, and he considered the possibility that she could have been a murderer. *Okay, so the evidence is flimsy, but why did she confess then? She had a great life, great friends and a young son, why would she incriminate herself if she was innocent? She would've gotten the same sentence had she been found guilty, so why? Why would she so easily give up, and turn herself in, and leave everyone behind, leave me behind?* It never added up, he could never prove his mother as guilty or innocent. And in a way, it didn't matter. She was locked up in a maximum security prison somewhere in the Rockies, and was going to die there.

He once played with the idea of writing to her, or even visiting her, if that was possible. But whenever he took out pen and paper to write a letter, or opened up a browser to look up visiting hours, he stalled. How would he open with a letter, or ask Aunt Becca to come along with? He couldn't. He couldn't think of a way to open the letter, or what he wanted to ask her, and he couldn't ask Aunt Becca to fly them out to see her. So, he tried to make himself content by focusing on the time he was with his mother, a time he does not recall, but he had proof of, the single photograph pinned to his corkboard.

Adam knew something was up when Aunt Becca didn't come rushing to greet him after he got home from the airport. He walked through the first floor, before he saw her in the den. She looked up, and said "Hey," with a small smile.

"What's up?" Adam asked, noticing the paper in her hands.

"So," she began, "after our grandpa- your great grandfather- died, your mom got inherited his estate. It's this big plot of land up north, and now since your mother is..." Adam nodded, knowing what Aunt Becca was implying. "The estate is now yours."

He stood in shock. She stood up, showing him the paper. "This is her will, she made it when you were a few months old." He stayed stagnant, not knowing what to do. How had he gone his whole life without knowing about this will or this estate?

"Wait, so, she had a whole thing of land, and yet she chose to live around here..?" He finally asked. Taking the paper from his hands, Aunt Bec-

ca explained, "It's in a pretty rural area, the nearest town is about half an hour away. There isn't much to do up there, so she just used it as an occasional weekend getaway." She walked out of the den, beckoning him to follow here. She led him to the kitchen, where she picked a post it note off the table. "You don't have to do this right now, you can rest up for now. But, if you feel like you wanna go up any time this week- or over the summer- here's the address." Taking a glance, she continued, "that's the town nearby. In case the house is too rundown to stay the night."

"What do you want me to do up there?"

"Just check out the condition of the house, determine the repairs it needs. I'm not expecting for you to know what you want to do with it. You're young, you're a good-" She stopped, taking a breath. "You don't have to decide anytime soon. I'm gonna order some takeout now."

Adam chose to go the day after. None of his friends were home at that point, and he couldn't bear to sit in the house alone all day. *I'll only go one night*, he thought, *and then I can let this all go*. He packed lightly, only bringing his phone, a change of clothes, and some money for a motel, just in case. After he hopped into his car, about to turn the ignition, Aunt Becca walked out of the house. Adam let her walk over, where she handed him the picture he had left in his room. "You forgot this," she simply stated. He gingerly took the picture, and lightly set it down on the console. "Thanks," he said curtly. When a moment of awkward silence passed, she said, "Well, have fun up there, and remember, even after this visit you don't have to choose to do anything. Call me when you get there." She leaned into the window to give a quick peck on his temple, and then turned and walked briskly back to the house. With that, Adam turned his car on and headed to his destination.

It was still relatively early in the morning when Adam arrived at his mother's- or his- estate. After driving up the long driveway, he parked in front of the house. At a quick glance, it seemed in decent shape, with a sub-par paint job and ivy growing up the sides. He called and left a message for Aunt Becca, and reluctantly got out of the car. He took note of the external state of the house; old, dilapidated, chipped paint and vines. He fumbled around for a bit, searching for the key. He unlocked the door and pushed through into the foyer. He immediately started to cough, about twenty years of dust had been unsettled. *Great, should have brought a duster*. He walked in further regardless, and was relieved to see the entire mansion wasn't covered in two decades worth of dust. Most of the furniture had been shrink wrapped, and some of the rooms were sealed off. Throughout his journey, Adam checked for signs of disrepair. Creaky hinges, water damage, rotting wood. The house seemed to be in mostly good shape, nothing a few repair guys can't fix. I just might be able to pay for this out of pocket. Finally, he picked a random bedroom to sleep in for the night. It was relatively large, it was certainly bigger than his room at home. It featured a king bed, a wardrobe, and a bay window overlooking the vast land behind the manor. He

pulled out his phone, hoping to call for some pizza, but there was no service. He sighed, realizing he had to drive out to find some food. I guess it beats sitting in a old house all alone, he considered. With that, he exited the house and got back into his car, picking up the post-it note for the nearby town. His hand brushed against the Polaroid of him and his mother. As opposed to every other time he had held the photo, he felt a chill run through his body.

Adam ended up staying for lunch and dinner at the town. He found a pizza parlor, and a little diner that looked good, so he spent time in between walking through the park and watching a movie. He finally drove home, with a full stomach and a pastry for the ride home the next day. He entered the house again, intending on just going to sleep, but was sidetracked when he saw something sticking out of the bottom of the bed. He slowly crept down and pulled the item out, which turned out to be a long, wooden box. He opened the small golden hatch, and was met with about half a dozen leather bound books. Opening one up confirmed his suspicion, they were journals written by his mother.

From what he could tell, the journals ranged from when she was in college, to around the time she was arrested. The journals were all pretty thick, Adam knew he did not have time to read them all. He decided to read the ones that dated around the time she was “active”. After reading the dates of the murders, he didn’t find anything suspicious. His mother mostly talked about her feelings, retelling time spent with friends, funny stories from work. Nothing like what he expected from a serial killer. He picked up the latest journal, the first entry being the day she found out she was pregnant.

“I simply can’t help but feel the greatest amount of joy possible for one person. I cannot wait to meet my little one.”

“I got my first ultrasound today. I can barely make out the shape of the baby, but I’m already in love.”

“I found out today that it’s a boy! Now I can narrow down the names on the list.”

The entry on Adam’s birthdate just read *“Happiness.”* He balked. He was nearly convinced that his mother was not the monster history has made her out to be. The pages flipped to the end of the book, the last entry out of all the journals. After taking a glance at the words, he tensed up.

“Nothing can last forever, I guess. I can hear the police downstairs. Too bad it had to end here, I was just starting to have fun. Well, I guess I can take satisfaction in knowing that they will never find all of the bodies...”

He dropped the book, hyperventilating. He instinctively shoved the open box under the bed, and ran out of the room. After nearly falling down the stairs, he slowed down. Through his tears, he noticed one of the sealed off rooms. If his estimation was correct, that door led to the basement. So, after a few unsuccessful attempts, he broke the door down, and stumbled down the stairs. He turned on his phone’s flashlight, looking around the empty and desolate area. Finding nothing, he turned and was about to walk back up the stairs, still shaking, when he spotted something peculiar under

the staircase. Almost considering walking away anyway, he approached the object. His flashlight confirmed his suspicion: it was the skeletal remains of one of his mother's victims.

In a flurry, he ran back upstairs, out of the house, and into his car. After an agonizing amount of time spent crying, he finally picked his head up and began the car. Before he could speed down the driveway, his eyes caught the photo he had always kept with him. But after what he had discovered inside the house, he couldn't stand to look at it. He picked it up, along with another item, and stepped back outside. Holding the picture for one last time, he brought it to the lighter, and let it catch fire. Seeing it waver in the wind, he let it go, and watched as it flew back towards the house. Getting back into his car, he saw the picture land on the front porch, and from his rearview mirror, he saw the mansion engulfed in flames.

-Julia Collins

Mrs.

Dear tiny size 7 wedding band,

Not so small that a child would wear it, but dainty enough that it only fits on my husband's pinky. Your white gold shines bright, illuminated in the moonlight on the rare occasions I grace nightlife with my presence.

Thank you for your protection. For speaking for me when I can't find the words: when my body sways to the rhythm and my mouth is full of juke box lyrics, when I'm surrounded by my girlfriends, and I don't want any trouble.

Thank you for reminding me everyday that there is someone who loves me, even when I falter in loving myself.

Thank you for not symbolizing my last step, nor a notch on my bucket list, but showcasing that I have a partner with whom I can travel the world.

Your traditional patriarchal and dowry connotations may have bound other women like chains, but I know that you represent a choice for me and not a burden. You're everlasting, unbreakable, and I love wearing you.

Always,
Mrs.

-Mrs. Cazzalino