



# *ET CETERA*

HUNTINGTON HIGH SCHOOL  
LITERARY MAGAZINE

2023-2024





Huntington High School's Literary Magazine  
**2023-2024**

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

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Welcome to the 2023-2024 issue of Huntington High School's incredible literary magazine! Within these pages, students have spun stories, spilled secrets, and shared their creativity with you, reader! Whether it be through poetic rhythm or punctuation, each piece showcases the voices of our very own talented young writers.

Et Cetera offers a safe space for fostering growth and support, because what we care about the most is our aspiring authors.

I've personally learned so much from my peers during my years jotting in my journal and listening intently to the words that filled the room. I can promise that you'll find solace somewhere nestled between paintings and poems.

Some things are better left unsaid, and this is why we write. Enjoy!

*-Lily Tierney*

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# ART CREDIT

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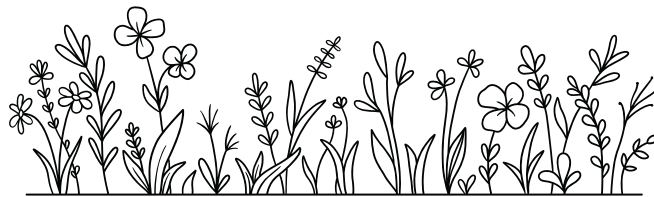
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# INNOCENT GHOSTS



*1st Place Poetry Winner  
Huntington Youth Writes*

By Kiley Barch

The old brick walls are  
crumbling and sunken now  
The once sweaty railings elicit a  
cold, barren, touch.  
Our kindergarten hallways were  
once filled with pencil dust and  
coloring books;  
Now there are no dwindling  
scents of pencils, the last of  
them were used as weapons  
And the books were used as  
shields.

Aspiring dreams and broken  
promises are left to die here

Ghosts roam these halls, ever  
seraphic ones  
The type of ghosts that spent  
their final seconds lurching  
from a demon  
The type of ghosts who are now  
known for their suffering,  
instead of their  
accomplishments  
The type of ghosts that learned,  
fought, and fell all in one place  
A place of chalkboards, A place  
of friends  
This place is now a graveyard  
for

Innocent Ghosts

A soldier enlists in order to fight a  
war, and for that their bravery is  
honored

A child is thrown with brute force  
onto a battlefield, for a war they  
were never trained to fight.

A child hides behind their teacher  
and looks into the desolate eyes of  
classmates

A child who imagines their life  
beyond this blockade of  
encapsulating grief

For one final time before they  
became

Innocent Ghosts

That walk home from school is now  
a trail of footsteps meant for better  
pathways

That final packed lunch is food for  
the grieving who haven't eaten in  
days

The fading memory of a mirrored  
glance

an "I love you" before that child  
walked off with a backpack too  
heavy for a small body

And the breach of that brick wall,  
which was used as a barrier against  
fatal shots

To protect was our job and we fail  
time and time again,


Desperate and feeble as we have  
become

until there is no one left but...

Innocent Ghosts

# bitter orange...

By Isabelle Gregorio



I ripped open my orange that I was eating for lunch and then I felt bad about how I used to think of what I can say to make you hate me more. I hated that you wanted to be around me all the time. I hated the way you looked at me. I hated it when you told me you loved me. I hated when you drove me around and looked for “our dream home”. I hated the fantasies about our life together that you imprinted in my brain, how we got married and had three kids. I hated when you told me that I looked ugly when I wore makeup or changed my hair. I couldn’t understand why you made me so panicked. I threw out my orange and left school to go home instead. I didn’t want to look at other people or talk to my friends and pretend to care about what they were saying, even if it was about me.

Art by Natalie Parrott



# EXTINCT

By Rachel huth

It was a beautiful night. The clouds were like puffs of smoke in the shrinking sapphire stretch of afternoon sky. A violet as deep as the sea and as bright as flame transformed the entire landscape into a fairytale setting, washing the mountains in lilac and lavender and the pine forests in plum and mauve. At the horizon, peeking between snow-coated mountain-tops, a hint of pink and red stubbornly stuck to the fiery hues of sunset, clinging to outlines and shapes like the hurried brushstrokes of a painter. In the forest, trees grew tall and wide. It had been decades since the last fire, and the trees grew unhindered.

In the amethyst shadows of the towering plants, a grizzly bear meandered peacefully forward through the trees. A mile away, a lion the color of tree bark prowled through its territory. When it came upon a long-toothed fellow feline in a slowly darkening meadow, it slinked out of sight into the shadows of the forest. The larger cat let it pass without a fight. A small fox stalked a rabbit with one of its kind. It was nighttime now, and the predators ruled more or less in harmony.

Beneath the roots of a gnarled old tree which had lived for hundreds of years, a mouse scurried out of its burrow. Putting its nose in the wind to scent for predators, the mouse slowly stepped out into the night. In a flash of gray fur and small paws, the creature was under a bush a few feet away. A second later, it was between the roots of a tree. Although tiny, this particular mouse had lived for three years. He had watched other, dumber mice be eaten. It was near the end of the mouse's lifespan, and he certainly would rather die warm in his burrow, surrounded by family, than in the jaws of a cat. This mouse's name was Twitch, and he knew the ways of the forest. As Twitch scrambled from hiding spot to hiding spot (a technique he called "shadow-jumping"), he looked for nuts and things to feed his family back home. Twitch was not looking for food, but it couldn't hurt to have extra, even though the forest was plentiful. Any creature would do well to collect food whenever possible, or at least those that were not predators. Suddenly, Twitch halted. He smelled cat. Twitch, panicked, maneuvered through the brush until he was

downwind from its scent. When a dappled tan and brown paw neared his hiding place in the brush, Twitch squeezed his eyes shut. Unbidden, the memory came to him of another cat and another mouse.

*"Look what I found!" Jump squeaked excitedly. She nudged a small round pebble towards Twitch with her paw.*

*"It looks like an eye," she said. "See? It has this marking on it that makes it look like it's staring into your soul." Jump looked at Twitch expectantly.*

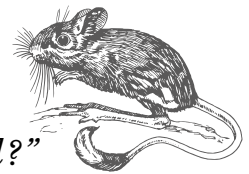
*"Yeah, I see it," lied Twitch, after a few seconds of staring at the rock. It just looked like a rock to him, but Jump had more of an imagination. She liked to tell the young mice in the burrow fantastical stories of animals that walked on two legs and giant, rumbling creatures that smelled of smoke and had four rotating paws. Twitch had no idea where she got her inspiration. Nothing even remotely like that existed. It never had, and never would. Jump took the rock back from Twitch.*

*"Hey, let's play soccer with this," she said suddenly.*

*"Soccer?" asked Twitch, bewildered.*

*"Yeah, soccer! You know, where you kick the rock into a goal?"*

*"Goal?" asked Twitch. Jump must have been talking about one of the games she was always making up and teaching to the kids. Twitch had never heard of "soccer" in his life. Suddenly, a shadow loomed over the two mice. They had forgotten the rules and strayed into the open. Twitch smelled cat. "Run!" he screamed, but Jump had already been snatched up by a saber-toothed cat, the worst kind of cat. Normally mice ran away from cats, but in that moment Twitch would have fought that cat with nothing but his own teeth and claws. When he heard the crunch of bone and saw Jump disappear into the saber-toothed cat's mouth, though, his courage disappeared and he darted away.*



By the time Twitch pulled himself out of the memory, the cat was gone. Twitch swallowed his fear and focused on shadow-jumping once more. After a few hours of travel, the trees started to thin and eventually disappear, replaced by bushes and long grass. The mouse had finally arrived at his destination. This place was where all the mice met on the day of the new moon every month. Each burrow sent only one representative to the meeting--if all the mice had gone, even this huge place would have been overrun. Jump had been the representative for Twitch's burrow before her death a year ago, and Twitch still wasn't sure he did as good of a job as she had. But now wasn't the time to dwell on that.

Twitch ran forward towards the next hiding place, scurrying over a strange flat white rock. Although he couldn't read them, the faded black letters on the sign, mostly gone now, had once said: "Welcome to San Francisco, California: Home of the Golden Gate Bridge."

The saber-toothed cat awoke from her slumber, opening bright yellow-green eyes that seemed almost to glow in the darkness. She stretched and yawned, showing her long ivory fangs, but then went back to sleep. After a few more moments of laziness, the saber-toothed cat's sister batted her ear and growled,

"Get up, Rock!"

"My *name*," yawned the cat with lime-green eyes, "is *Pinecone*."

"Oh yeah? 'Cause you're acting like a rock." Pinecone reluctantly sat up and cleaned her face with her paw, putting all the dappled tan-and-brown fur back in place where it had been tangled by sleep.

"You're the one who's *actually* named after a rock," Pinecone said pointedly after she was finished. Her sister twitched her tail angrily.

"*Gemstone*. I am named after a *gemstone*. It is a very *dignified* name."

"Yeah, sure, whatever, *Tourmaline*." Pinecone grinned, her long fangs glinting in the moonlight. She jumped down from the tree that the two sisters were in and landed lightly on her huge paws. Tourmaline followed, landing with a large *thump* that sent up a flurry of pine needles.

"Careful!" Pinecone hissed. "You're going to scare away all the prey!" Tourmaline sniffed.

"We don't need to find our own prey," she said, nose in the air. "We can just intimidate a grizzly bear or a mountain lion or something. *All* the animals know to bow to us saber-tooths." Pinecone rolled her eyes. Tourmaline was so obnoxious sometimes. The two saber-toothed cats were only cubs. They could never hope to beat a mountain lion or a grizzly bear, even though adult saber-toothed cats could dominate any other predator whenever they wanted. Saber-toothed cats were by far the largest mammals in the forest, and they had huge fangs and sharp claws, as well as the ability to run and jump faster and higher than other large predators. A team of saber-tooths could even take down a wooly mammoth, which lived in the fields to the north, although none of those lived here. Here, in the forest, a cat's best quality was not brute strength or speed, but the ability to be silent, and a good nose for sniffing out prey. Mice, squirrels, and moles liked to hide in the brush, or in the shadows of trees. Beneath the canopy of the tall pine trees birds were rarely spotted, and even then their ability to fly made them bad prey, so small mammals were the main food source for Pinecone and her sister.

Suddenly, Pinecone smelled mouse.



"There!" she whispered to Tourmaline. "Mouse! By the tree!" Tourmaline nodded and licked her lips hungrily. Pinecone moved downwind and used her dappled coloring to blend in with the moonlit bushes behind the tree. Tourmaline did the same, and soon all that could be seen of the sisters were two pairs of yellow-green eyes in the darkness of the shadows. Tourmaline and Pinecone watched the small grey mouse dart from under the roots of an ancient, gnarled old tree to a dark and shadowy bush. Pinecone prepared to pounce, but before she could, the wind shifted and the mouse ran out of view. It must have smelled Pinecone and Tourmaline in the wind. Pinecone sniffed around, but the mouse was nowhere to be found. Tourmaline said,

"Come on, let's go. The mouse is gone now. We scared it off."

"You go ahead," said Pinecone. "I'm going to keep looking." Tourmaline shrugged and stalked off through the bushes.

"Your choice!" she called towards Pinecone as she walked away.

"Shhh!" said Pinecone. "You're going to scare it off again!" But Tourmaline was already gone. After a few minutes of looking, Pinecone sighed. Tourmaline was right. The mouse was gone. As Pinecone turned around to find her sister, she heard Tourmaline scream. Pinecone ran as fast as she could towards the sound, terrified that something bad had happened to her sister. When she got there, there was nothing she could do. Tourmaline lay in the mud, the silver moonlight turning her pelt into gold and silver. She wasn't breathing. Pinecone walked slowly towards Sapphire's body and saw that some huge animal had clawed out her throat. She felt ill. Then she heard the most chilling sound you could hear in this forest: the howling of a dire wolf. The fur on her back rose in terror and suddenly Pinecone was surrounded by dire wolves. Alone, dire wolves could not hope to kill a larger predator such as a saber-toothed cat, but in a pack... Pinecone didn't stand a chance. Sparing one last look for Tourmaline's body, she turned and sprinted as fast as she could. Pinecone ran harder, faster, and longer than she ever had in her life. She sprinted out of the forest, into a place where the trees turned to bushes and then disappeared from the landscape entirely. She ran to a place with strange tall, rectangular caves covered in ivy with square openings, and unnaturally flat rocks on either side of her. Even when the dire wolves were far behind her, Pinecone kept running, trying to outrun her sister's death.

When at last she could run no more, Pinecone saw that the night sky was darker than usual: it was the new moon. As she stood there, panting, Pinecone smelled something: mouse. No, wait. She sniffed again. Not just one mouse. Hundreds of mice, maybe even thousands. And Pinecone was very hungry...

As Twitch ventured further into the meeting place, he began to see more mice. They came from the forest, the meadows, the mountains, the beach: hundreds of mice, maybe even thousands. One mouse coming from the north said, "Hey, Jump!" Twitch winced. The mouse who had shouted realized her mistake and corrected herself. "Oh. Sorry, I meant Twitch." Twitch nodded politely and looked around as he scurried towards the meeting place. He was surrounded on all sides by caves that were taller than trees. Although they were covered by plant growth and broken by earthquakes and time, Twitch could see that some of the caves were strangely colored, and a few were even shiny. They were arranged in unnaturally perfect rows and columns on solid rock as flat as the ocean. Twitch knew these rocks were caused by natural erosion, but Jump used to say that they were made by huge yellow monsters that ate the hills. Jump also used to say that these yellow monsters were called cats.

"Cats eat mice, not hills," Twitch argued once. "And they're not yellow."

"They were called cats," Jump insisted, "And they were yellow." Lost in his memories, Twitch almost fell right off the side of a cliff. As he scrambled backwards, the sight he saw in front of him was so impossible that at first Twitch thought he was dreaming. It was a huge red thing that stretched out, unbelievably, *over the water*.

"Cool, right?" said a mouse Twitch didn't know. True to his name, Twitch twitched in surprise. "Some say it used to be a part of a sunset, but it got stuck when the sun tried to go down and now it's stuck here forever. I know this one mouse who says giant beings that walked on their hind legs used it to walk across water, but that's probably false." The unknown mouse grinned and introduced himself.

"Hi, I'm Squeak." he gestured at Twitch. "And you are...?"

"Twitch," said Twitch. Squeak waited for him to say more, but that was all that really needed to be said, in Twitch's opinion.

"A mouse of few words, eh? That's okay, I'll talk enough for both of us! So, where are you from?" Squeak said after a few seconds.

"Is it alive?" asked Twitch. He was still wondering about the giant red thing across the water. Squeak looked confused.

"Is that the name of your burrow? Weird name. But I won't judge. I know this one mouse--"

"No, that... thing over there. Is it alive?" Twitch gestured at it with his paw, unable to think of a better name for it. Squeak shrugged.

"I don't think so. But I know this one mouse who says..." Twitch stopped listening. How many mice did this mouse *know*? It seemed like everything he said came with a "I know this one mouse" attached.

"Shall we get going?" Twitch interrupted. Squeak looked confused again.

“To what?” he asked.

“The meeting?” Twitch replied.

“Oh. Yeah, sure. You know, I know this one mouse who says-- hey! Wait up!” Twitch had already started moving forward.



Pinecone wandered further into the abandoned city, following the smell of mice. The moonlight seemed to turn everything into silver and obsidian and moonstone. For some reason, this place was setting Pinecone’s nerves on edge. It felt like something was watching her, but whenever she looked around, she saw nothing but those strange rectangular caves. When she turned the corner, Pinecone saw a cliff looking over the sea and a strange, lonely red broken thing seemingly floating on the water. Suddenly, Pinecone’s surroundings of a moment before were gone. The caves were no longer ruins. And they were no longer caves. Somehow, Pinecone *knew* that they were called buildings. Houses, businesses, restaurants... The words flowed into her consciousness, although she had never known them before. The silvery light of the moon was replaced by small glowing glass suns in every color of the rainbow. And the *sounds*. Huge, rumbling monsters crowded the streets, making blaring sounds louder than thunder. *Cars*. But most surprising of all was the people. Humans lounged in chairs at outdoor cafes. They talked and laughed with one another, and they shouted and cursed at each other. One person threw trash into the street, and another stooped to pick it up and throw it out. A person with bright pink fur on the top of his head got into a car, another with a helmet mounted a two-wheeled bicycle. And then, as soon as it had come the vision disappeared. It was dark again, and the color seemed to be leached out from the houses as they turned back into ruins. The red thing in the water--a *bridge*, Pinecone knew now, turned back into a heap of metal twisted by storms and earthquakes. Pinecone was more confused than she had ever been in her life. What on *Earth* had just happened? Oh, and she knew “Earth” now too.

The Bristlecone Pine tree was 5,823 years old, and it had the rings to prove it. It had been home to millions of animals over the years, from the smallest ant to the largest saber-toothed cat. Right now its roots protected a mouse burrow, while its branches hosted two saber-toothed cat sisters. In between the two dwellings, insects, birds, snakes, and even slugs lived in and on the tree. The Bristlecone’s existence was much more peaceful than it had once been, all those years ago. For the first five thousand years of its life, the tree watched as its fellow trees were cut down by greedy humans or burned in fires carelessly started by them.



The tree had tried to ignore the pollution in the ground, the air, and the water, and it did its best to filter out the carbon dioxide from the air, but every year there was more of it. The tree had watched passively, unable to move, as species went extinct. It had watched through a vast network of tree roots when the last Californian grizzly bear had died in this very forest. It had watched the American lions struggle to survive despite being hunted everywhere they went, and eventually failing. It had heard from other trees of dire wolves getting stuck in tar pits and dying a terrible, slow death, until the only evidence they had ever existed was their remains in the glue-like tar. The tree's great-great-great-great-great-grandparents and relatives had passed down the stories of saber-toothed tigers dying out in the Great Ice Age so very long ago. And then, only a few hundred years ago, the humans were wiped out. It started with a plague, which the humans eerily called "the creeping death".

The Creeping Death spread rapidly, but it was asymptomatic for everybody... until, suddenly, a few months later, organs started to die. It began with the eyes. The first symptom anybody experienced from the Creeping Death was blindness. Then the ears followed, and the nose, and the tongue, and only once all these symptoms had happened would the internal organs start to fail. In a matter of days after exhibiting the first symptom, everyone with the disease died a terrible, painful death. The tree had seen this, and heard it from all the trees connected by the vast underground root system through which trees communicated. There was no cure for the Creeping Death, but of course there were still people that survived.

Agoraphobes, germaphobes, people living in isolated communities on small islands or tall mountains, all these survived. But they didn't band together. Instead they picked up the atomic bombs and the nuclear weapons from where they had been abandoned and used them on each other. In this way, at least as far as the Bristlecone Pine could tell (the root system only went so far), humans wiped themselves out entirely.

At first, it seemed like the end of everything. Where mountains once stood were now huge holes in the ground from bombs. Rivers were toxic, and humanity's abandoned technology kept belching smoke into the air and pumping pesticides onto farms. Animals started to die by the thousands, and plants did too. The tree lost many friends in the hundred or so years after the extinction of humans. It was now the oldest tree in the forest. In fact, it was probably the oldest tree in all of America. But after this, all the beloved animals the tree used to know who had gone extinct started to return. The dire wolves emerged from the mountains, as if back from the dead. Many trees rejoiced when the first in a long time was sighted in the forest. After that, the Bristlecone Pine started to hear rumors of wooly mammoths to the north.

The tree had never seen one of the magnificent creatures alive, and might never, but even hearing about them brought the Pine joy. After that, grizzly bears and mountain lions came back to California. And a few years later, the saber-toothed cats of legends started appearing. The weather became colder, undoing all the man-made climate change on its own. None of the trees or plants or mushrooms or fungi that the Pine asked knew where, or why the animals appeared, but the tree had long suspected that some human beings had genetically engineered the species of old, and they had since repopulated the land. Although there was no proof of this, the tree liked to think that humanity had had some good people. Whatever the cause, the world was fixing itself again. The feeling of doom that had been hanging over every living thing for the past few hundred years was dissipating. And so the tree hibernated, as trees do when they live for so long. Until now. Something was happening. The Bristlecone Pine could feel it.

Twitch and Squeak made their way up a tall hill to the place where all the mice met each month. It was a huge open space, where the ground was all flat. There were a few sections in which mice stood; forest, mountains, fields, et cetera. Twitch headed towards the forest one, which had a few mice he recognized, and Squeak went over to the fields, remarking about “this one mouse he knew” as he went. Twitch smiled. Even though, logically, Squeak should be annoying, Twitch couldn’t help but like him. Squeak was one of the first mice outside of his family to talk to him in a while. It was refreshing to talk to someone who hadn’t known Jump before knowing Twitch, who didn’t subconsciously compare the two mice.

“Hi, Twitch,” said a mouse named Sniff, mostly out of politeness.

“Hi, Sniff,” He replied, mostly out of courtesy. Sniff had apparently been best friends with Jump, according to Jump, and although Sniff was always polite, Twitch got the feeling that she didn’t like him very much. After a few minutes of awkward silence, mice started to go forward and share details about their lives. One mouse from the fields reported sadly that a woolly mammoth had trampled four members of his burrow. Another from the mountains reported an early snow and a lack of food. But some of the news was good. A mouse from the same forest that Twitch was from said that their burrow had managed to make peace with rats that had previously given them trouble, and another mouse declared that six baby mice had been born in his burrow since the last big meeting. It was right before Twitch’s turn when somebody smelled cat.

Pinecone had *finally* found all those mice.

"They'd better be worth it," she growled grumpily. She hadn't eaten anything all night, and it was almost dawn. "They'd *better*," she mumbled, still in shock from her strange vision earlier as she slid around the corner. Pinecone froze in surprise. She'd smelled a lot of mice earlier, but *this*? There could be *millions* of mice here. She started to grin. Ha! This would be like scooping up water, except instead of drops of water it would be mice. Pinecone grabbed a loudly squeaking mouse with her claw and started to raise it to her mouth, but before she could eat it a mouse was shrieking *unnecessarily loudly* in the center of the group.

"Maybe I'll eat you first, since you're so annoying," she told the little grey mouse. But before she could, all of the mice in the area suddenly body-slammed her. It was like being hit with a wave.

"Ow!" Pinecone exclaimed angrily. "That hurt!" The mice seemed emboldened by their small victory and did it again. That one shrieking mouse just kept going at it, and the other mice just kept slamming her backwards and backwards...until, finally, there was no more backwards and Pinecone fell off a cliff (a small one), rolled down a hill, and dropped into the previously hidden secret entrance to an underground bunker.

"Did we kill it?" asked Squeak tentatively. All the other mice gathered around the edge to see. When no hint of the cat was found, Twitch, who had lead all the mice in battle against the cat, said,

"Yeah, I think it's dead." This led to cheering and squeaks of congratulations from the mice.

"Cat-killer Twitch!" Squeak started chanting. The other mice joined in.

"Cat-killer Twitch! Cat-killer Twitch! Cat-killer Twitch!" They shouted.

"Any mouse could have done it," Twitch mumbled, embarrassed.

"Yeah, but all the other mice were too scared. Fighting against a cat! Pure brilliance," said Sniff admiringly. Squeak stopped chanting for a second to remark proudly,

"Cat-killer Twitch here's my best friend. He can do anything! I know this one mouse who once said that smart beats strong, every time. Well, Twitchy just proved that."

"Thanks, Squeak," Twitch replied, although he didn't exactly like the fact that his new nickname seemed to be either "Cat-killer Twitch" or "Twitchy". Twitch wasn't sure which one was worse.

"We should probably continue the meeting now," said Twitch, but the other mice didn't listen. They were too busy chanting,

"Cat-killer Twitch! Cat-killer Twitch! Cat-killer Twitch!"

The cat in question was most certainly not dead, and somehow, miraculously, barely even injured at all. Pinecone got to her feet slowly, wincing at all the bruises. How on Earth had Pinecone started her day in the forest with her sister alive at her side, and ended it in some sort of human dwelling after being slammed off a cliff by a bunch of mice. It wasn't fair. She was always outnumbered. The dire wolves, the mice... neither had exactly been a fair fight. Pinecone started to cry. The full events of the day began to hit her, from the traumatic event of her sister's murder to the strange vision she'd had in the city to the tidal wave of mice. But poor Pinecone never seemed to get time to grieve. Suddenly, without warning, another vision appeared. In this one, a person with military badges shouted orders from the far side of the room while flashing red buttons flickered and alarms blared in front of people in some sort of uniform. On a map of the world on a screen, a dotted red line traced itself from one continent to another.

"Launch!" the officer kept screaming. "Launch!"

"At where, sir?" asked one panicked screen operator.

"Everywhere," the officer answered grimly. The vision disintegrated as quickly as it had appeared. Pinecone sat on her haunches in the dark room, extremely confused. What had the humans been "launching"? The last vision had been much more cheery than that. Pinecone walked over to the table where the screens had been just moments before. They seemed mostly intact. She batted one of the buttons that had been flickering in her vision and suddenly the whole screen came to life. Terrified, Pinecone turned to leave and ran right into the well-preserved skeleton of a human being. Flinching backwards, Pinecone's tail and head somehow accidentally hit two buttons on two desks at the exact same time.

Above the hidden bunker, the mice all squeaked in terror when they saw the huge monster come out of the ground. The very ground had actually opened up, and the mice sprinted as fast as they could for cover before whatever this thing was could find them. A few seconds later, a puff of smoke spread from the bottom of the object and it soared so high into the sky that it was invisible to the mice on the ground.

Half a world away, on another continent, the last remaining humans were living in what used to be the city of London. There weren't nearly as many as there once were in the British city, but it was a pretty sizable community, and the leaders of it hoped to one day repopulate the planet. In the top apartment of a building, one family celebrated a child's birthday. They had baked a cake. Little did they know, as they placed the candles into the cake and lit them, that a nuclear bomb was about to blow them all up.

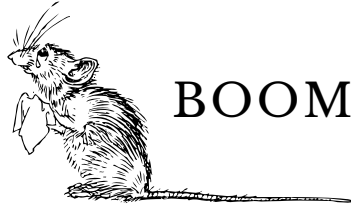
10, 9, 8 went the countdown in the bunker.  
“Happy Birthday to you,” the family sang.

7, 6, 5

Happy birthday to you,

4, 3, 2

Happy birthday dear Charles, happy birthday to--



## MY BRIDGE, MY BRIDGE,

### MY BROOKLYN BRIDGE

BY ISABELLE GREGORIO



I'm 15 falling off of the Brooklyn Bridge.

The cold sharp breeze icing my arms and legs, hearing the wind loudly rumble across my face and ears,  
“Goodbye.”

It was a goodbye to the world, to the life I once lived, feeling nothing more than empty thoughts. Then, just before I was left on the steps of death, I found myself shrinking. I hit the water and saw nothing but darkness. I couldn't feel anything. As I resurfaced again I knew I died. I knew I wasn't myself. I was reborn again. I was a duck. My frail arms turned into wings, masked with feathers. I floated for a while downstream off into a river bank. Swimming out of the water, I waddled toward the grassy shore, trying to make sense of what had happened.

Was this death? Is what I've become the same as hell? Is there a chance to go back? I knew there were no humans or other animals to answer my questions. I was alone again just as I was human. The difference that I could have made in my mind is that this time, I can fly.



Art by Sebastian Ramirez

## *to find a paradise*

By Caleb Palermo

Love is the crack of light in the darkest cave  
Sometimes it fills the entire brain  
Other times it's there and no one is aware  
The uniqueness of love knows no bounds

It is the sound of strumming Harp  
Different feelings creating a cord  
And once the cord comes to the ears  
Overwhelming emotions could possibly appear

Opening your eyes to a Blinding light  
Disoriented at first to find a paradise  
Walking in Paradise may be nice  
But then realize it might come with a price

Like the smell of penil throughout a small house  
Smell so overwhelming you can't help but draw near  
The First bite is always warm soft and full of flavor  
But when that becomes cold it's nothing to savor

Opening a door without knowing what to expect  
But only the brave and willing are able to enter and accept it  
And those going through a dark time will know  
That love is the crack of light in the darkest cave





# Cherry Blossoms

*By Mia Molina-Baptista*

*Art by Natalie Parrott*

*As much as I'd want life to be sweet and light,  
it is something that is not.*

*It is as though the sweetness can be tasted at times,  
but the lightness of life may pull you down to the core.  
The struggles all lasting what seems an eternity but just a  
few days, is quite similar to that of a Cherry Blossom tree.*

*As I step onto the grass with my two feet  
Is where I see the truth uncover beneath  
And though there might not be a clear answer  
I do not fret, because it will last as much as a  
Cherry Blossom Tree.*





Art by Alice Hammerquist

# Time Stands Still

By Mario Redondo Flores

To know you, even in your darkest side,  
And still love you  
Is true love

Alway sworn to protect the world, for my world  
resides in your being

The universe becomes small in the face of the immense love we share.

No matter where we are,  
We are always together  
Until death do us part...

no,  
Rather until  
Time stands still

# Melting Sugar

By Sophia Weiss

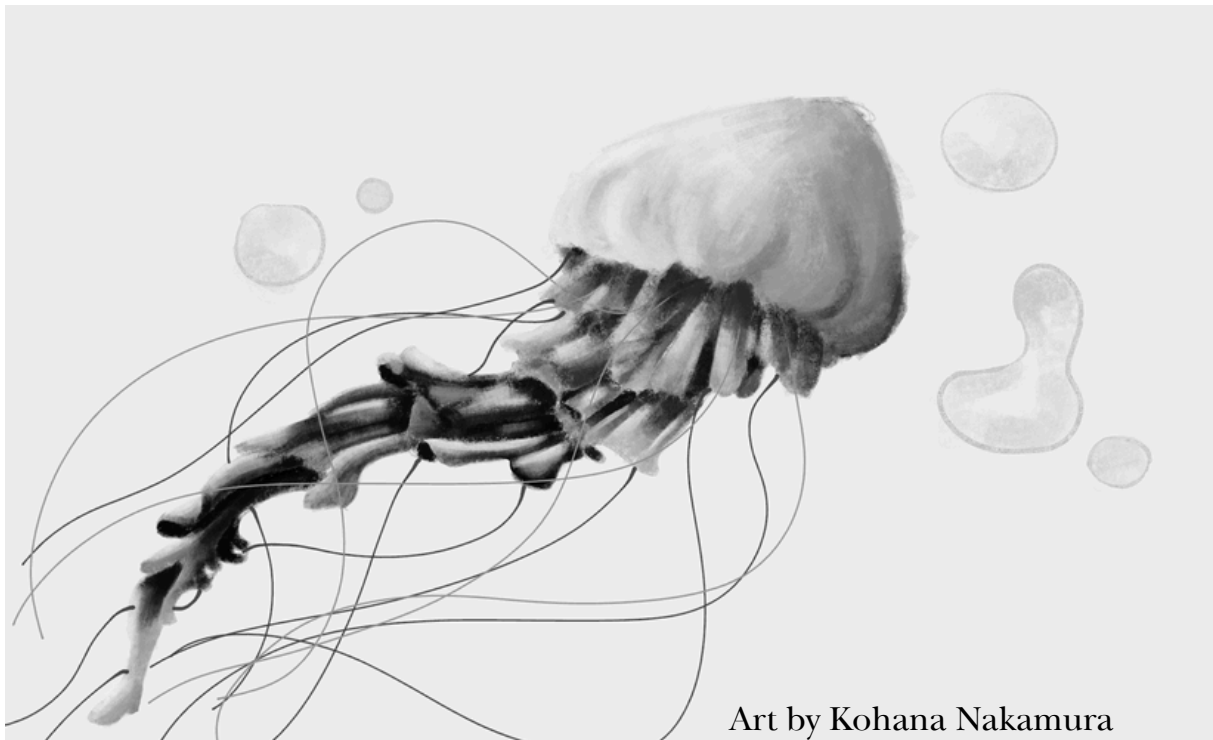
Commonly associated with sadness, despair, and simply unfair...  
The word melt is left unheard,  
and a negative outcome is preferred.

As the white glistening powder melts, and the holiday choirs mute their belts...  
The world will not go bland...  
A new season will cover the land!

Cold ice melts away...  
however, refreshing water is there to stay!  
Both quench on a scorching day.

A warm marshmallow is created by the sugar's reform.  
As you can see it is a positive norm!

Melting sugar is not always bad...  
A hint of uniqueness it could even add!



Art by Kohana Nakamura

# Your Neighborhood Raccoon

By Milo Pascucci

I stroll around your neighborhood  
Eating your trash  
I'm the lurker at midnight  
The reason you hear a CRASH!

Garbage everywhere  
For my friends all around  
Opossums, rats, and mice  
We are hated in your town

We don't care what you think  
We do what we want  
Chase us with your brooms and mops  
This neighbor is our restaurant

With the free food you provide  
It's like a paradise  
I give this neighborhood five stars!  
It comes with no price!

My furry friends need to hear  
Let's board this train!  
Say hello to your neighborhood raccoon  
Say hello to the new rodent fast-food chain!



# *The Final Goodbye*

By Paige Vidota

As I sit above the dispute  
I notice someone  
They aren't a friend nor are they a foe  
But someone I know

Someone who has been with me through Heaven and Hell  
Someone who has been there when I felt unwell  
They aren't one that people can see  
Rather they are invisible, but not to me

For they are a part of me.  
A part of me that has been causing me restless nights  
A part of me that made me want to die  
The horrible horrible part of me that makes me cry

But no longer shall I shed tears for them  
Because my final tear will be the one of goodbye  
It is sad to let them go  
Even though they caused me distress, anger, and even made me a mess

They were a part of me, another twin of me  
But they are no longer in control of me  
No longer will I be the puppet that I used to be  
I have cut the strings loose  
I can move by my own

I will abide by my own rules  
And speak of what I know  
I will not shove my emotions away  
Because now I will spread my wings

And open my eyes  
The truth that was once hidden  
Is now right here, inside  
I go down to hug the one screaming

I feel their pain  
I let them know it is ok  
But they need to stay in the past  
Stay in the time that was once me

I have grown out of them  
I no longer need thee  
They have given me comfort  
But now It's my turn to comfort me

I give them a hug  
Let them know they can rest  
No longer will they scream in distress  
But lay at ease as I go on to figure the rest

The act is slowly coming to an end  
I must let go if I want it to end  
I say my final goodbye, shed a tear and fly



Art By Thomas Galicia





# *What's Mine Is Not Yours*

By Rafaella Gregorio

*It must be said that what's mine is simply not yours. What you have is because I give it to you.*

*This is a phrase I am told most often, by all despite few. The life I live is borrowed. Piece by piece each and every I have isn't mine to have but I am given it, I am renting it.*

*I dream of having something small, a victory token of some sort that I could have, to pocket and label as my own.*

*I wanted this more than anything, just to be able to throw that statement back into someone's face. To be able to have the authority to dangle their desires in front of them and rip it away. To just say a tit for tat. To have the authority to bargain with someone.*

*I had desperately wanted to be thrown into a dance of endless negotiation and begging from someone who wanted what I had.*

*I wanted to be wanted. For my things to be wanted. For all of it to be sought after. This may sound sick but it's the truth.*

*A piece of a larger truth that is mine and mine alone.*

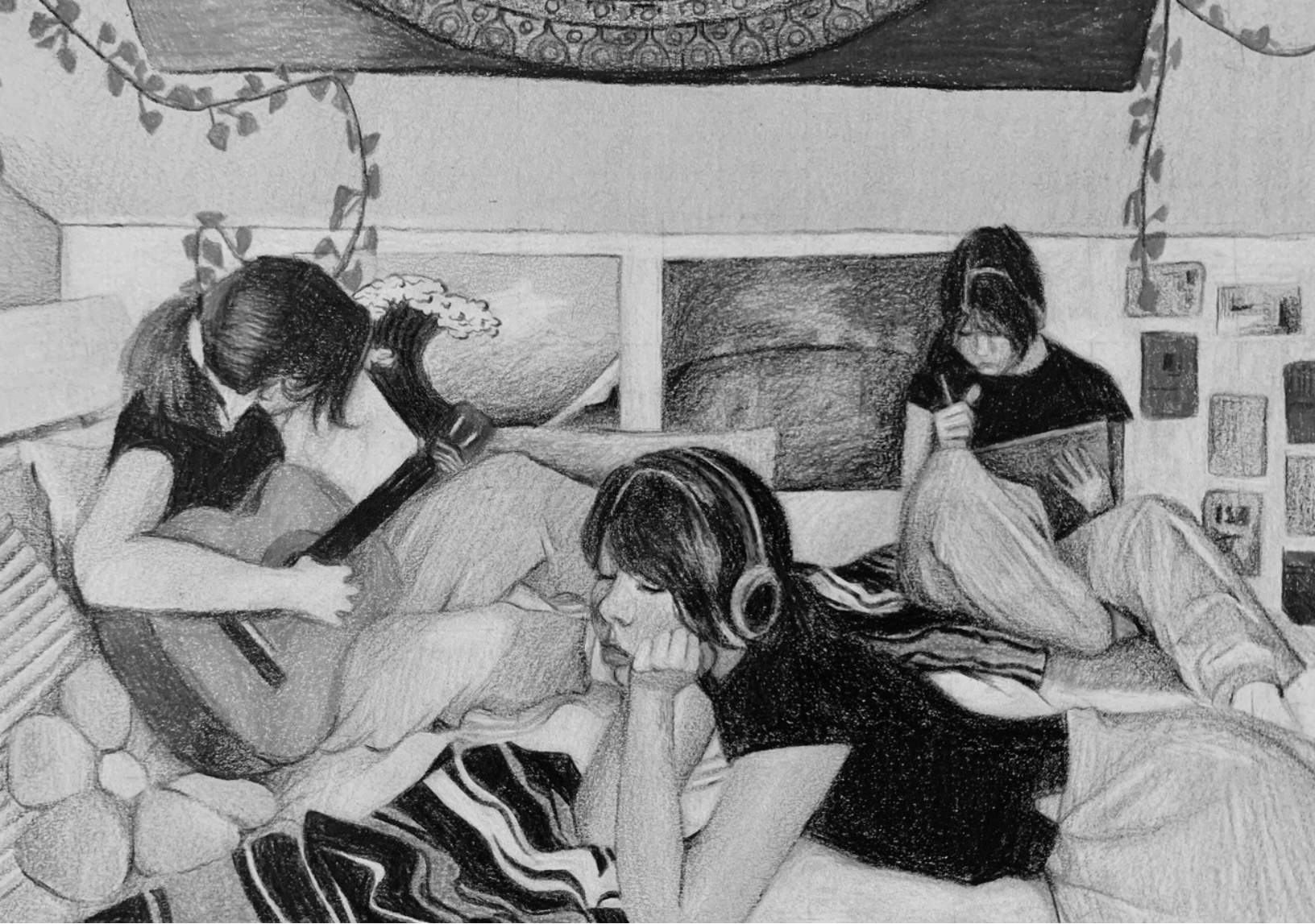
Art by Sophia Tine

# Old Dog

By Anne Tyrrell

Old dog now lies in tender wait  
his fur is matted near his mouth  
whirlpools mark his every move .  
Imprints of a good man, once boy,  
left on shag carpets, and teeters into bed.  
Old dog now lies in tender wait.  
The face that greeted me, and the world;  
now hushes  
lays snow-capped, coated in frost  
or morning dew,  
light and sticky on greener pastures,  
of graphite on paper, shaded to black.  
This old dog, who creaks and lumbers,  
the old machine, a legend, now rests.  
The dog's tail swishes,  
like wind in reeds and desert gusts;  
the canyon whistles:  
The Old Hunter's call  
and makes him feel  
young again





Art by Natalie Parrott

## One in the Same

By Sophia Weiss

To some I'm a beast.  
To some I'm a toy.  
To some it is strange if I'm touched by a boy.

Some envy my beauty.  
To break me's their wish.  
To be seen as a baby is something I miss.

To some I slam doors.  
To some I ignore.  
My innocence is something I wish to restore.

I often lay, broken and torn.

A teenage girl.  
One in the same with her childhood unicorn.



# Velvet Green Eyes

By Isabelle Gregorio

I'm not exactly sure when I felt something for her. I don't really even know why I feel this way, but all I know is that when she leaves she's still there.

Where is she?

I found her. She was sitting there, waiting for a table at the diner. Laughing harder at my jokes than all of our other friends did. I liked that she grabbed my arm and held my hands as I said something funny. It made me feel better. Important. Green eyes rolled as she smiled and complained about the waitress.

She was charismatic enough, if you talked to her you'd feel smitten. It's hard to look past that. You told her your secrets and shared lipstick while sitting in a booth at Mundos or in your bedroom. Going to parties together and hanging out more often, made me feel content, happy even.

Who knew how to distinguish whether it was infatuation or love?

# AT THE PET STORE

By Anne Tyrrell

and so I said a prayer for the animals  
the 3.95 rats,

cooped up alone in their glass tanks  
bringers of plague, harbingers of death  
nestled quietly in a plastic kingdom

And so I said a prayer for the animals  
the drifter dogs

the best friends of man,  
waiting behind steel doors for a family,  
and a saint that was lost to time

And so I said a prayer for the animals  
the skin-peeling geckos

stripped from their jungles  
like the scales they have shedded,

were the bright emeralds of  
a rainforest

one they shall never find

And so I said a prayer for the animals  
the bubble-eyed fish

pressed into fluorescent tanks  
coated in ink like a baptism

of never finding a home

I walked to the pet store yesterday,  
and so I said a prayer for the animals.

## *My Mother*

*a six-word memoir*

By Jesley Martinez Canales

They  
failed her

but  
I won't.

# Can of Worms

By Milo Pascucci

A whole new can was opened  
I spilled the worms on the ground;  
the worms were a new problem  
I wished I never opened.

I wish I never opened this can, but I had to  
If I didn't open this can  
I would be left with no answers  
forever a cliffhanger,

A problem I've discovered, with the help of the outside world,  
the ones who helped were surprised with the worms too.  
They had to tell me why there were worms in the can  
instead of what I wanted to expect

## **SHAME, EMBARRASSMENT, AND ANGER**

the world towered over me  
those around me, viewing my helpless mind.  
I see why I'm different, I see why others view me as different.

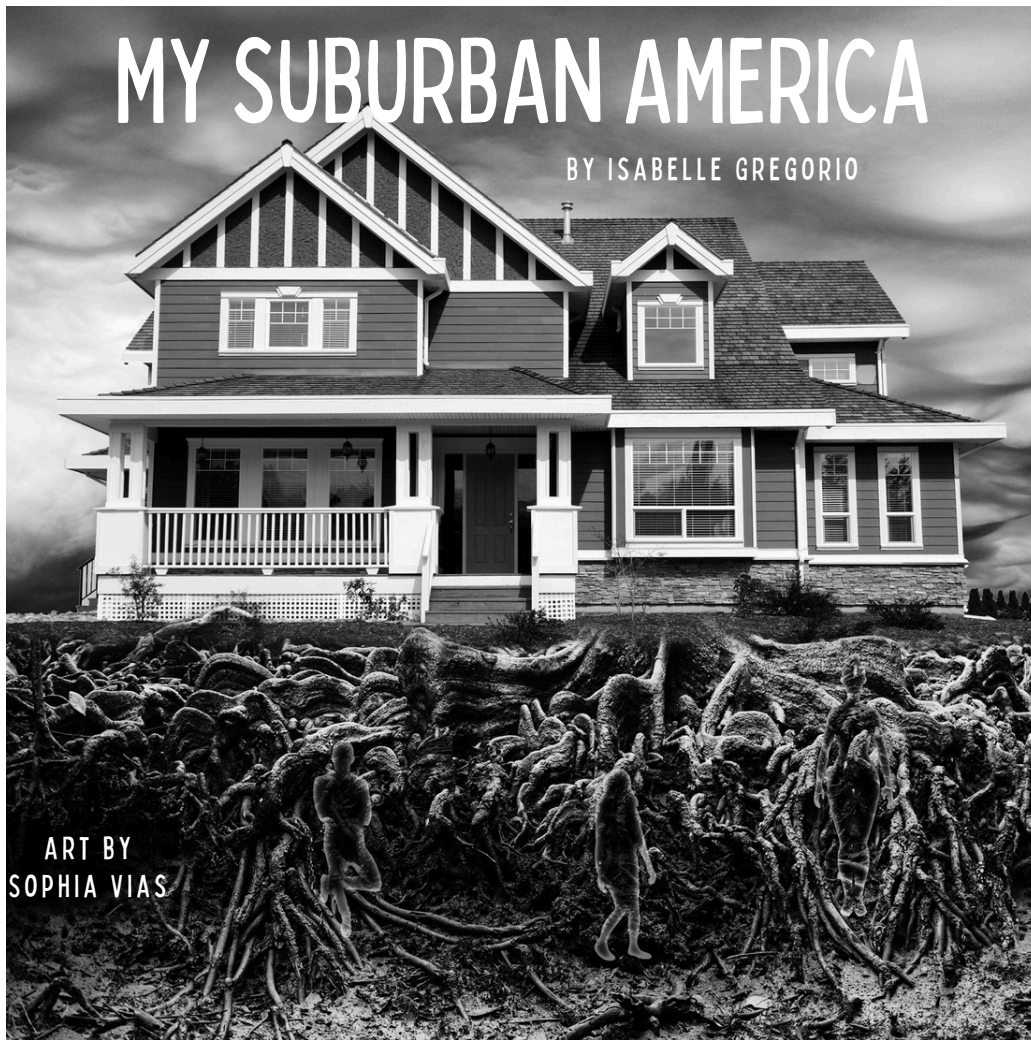
Years of confusion,  
months of hyper energy,  
weeks of despair,  
all the same capacity.

I wish I didn't have a big heart,  
the worms will eat it alive.  
My heart is yin,  
these worms are yang

The label on this can attached itself like a parasite-  
it's stuck on me. Now a label I have to live with.  
I read the label, the name of this can of worms,  
their name is bipolar.







I lived in a decent town consisting of overpriced clothing stores and restaurants with mediocre food. It was beautiful and full of life in the spring and summer, but as fall and winter came around, stores closed earlier, and everyone grew more tired and didn't bother staying out later than six o'clock.

School soon came to another end as spring rolled around, pushing the trees and newly bloomed flowers ever so softly.

Teenagers in the Bay stayed out far later past their bedtime or usually without a curfew at all, their parents were usually too drunk or too high to even notice. The Bay Area consists of so many details; that it's almost impossible to name all of them. Everyone owned either an expensive car and a decent home or it was the reverse, or if you were really rich enough you owned both.

Freshly mowed lawns for small children to play on, knowing that the child playing on it will have more money spent on them in their first few years of life, than the man who was mowing their lawn for them ever has. Every other house has some form of American pride, usually a flag or plastic wind spinners.

Being a teenager here was a right of passage, staying out late with friends usually consisted of staying in someone's semi-lit basement, driving around listening to your favorite music obnoxiously loud, or visiting beaches and parks discreetly made it all the more memorable.

If you didn't have a car as a teenager you'd have to walk around everywhere, which wasn't awful but not exactly convenient. There are the occasional coffee shops, bookstores, and famous family diners that everybody knows and cherishes, flooding them with talks of current events and unforgettable laughter.

We had typical hangout and hookup spots where secrets and gossip were shared but most of the time never really kept. In school, almost everyone knew each other and if you didn't you probably were a loser.

Time ticked down in school but as the weather got warmer from the winter we had; barely any snow, the thought of spring always felt like a tease. Girls were always conscious about their clothes and bodies hoping to be noticed by one of the boys who only thought about drinks and sports, thinking of girls came as a second thought... barely. We had pass-times doing things like fishing, driving on one of our parents' boats, tanning, drinking, eating out, doing everything but schoolwork or getting a job.



Art by Natalie Parrott

Some of us wanted nothing more than to leave our town, traveling usually to the West Coast or Europe. Since we have all four seasons: fall, winter, spring, and summer, we realized that life here is simple, and sometimes simple is enough.

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## *My Best Friend*

a six-word memoir

By Sofia Van Arsdale

Mom stays strong,

I can break.





# *A Princess*

By Lily Tierney

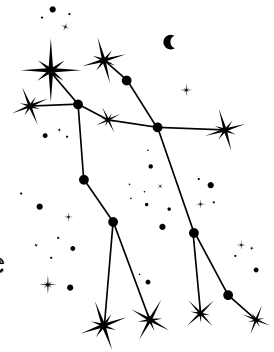
Constantly calculating charm,  
Lovergirl with a facade of disgust,  
upholding An image of perfection, she  
cracks & In seeps the light of the world she's  
shut out. Reborn with smile instead of  
the bird, Engulfed in the frenzy of real  
connection

Art By

Clarissa Marcelino-LaQua

# Gemini

By Anonymous



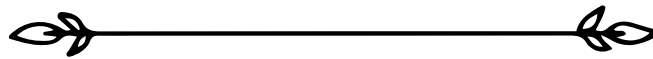
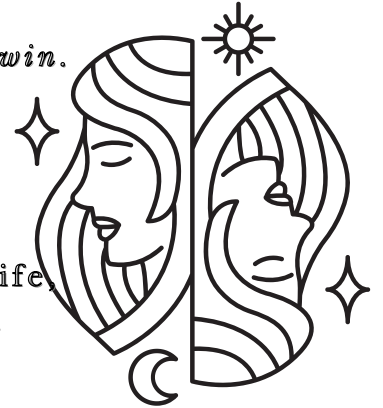
I can't tell you this face-to-face because  
I know  
what you already will say.  
The second my words ring in your ears  
I can see  
your face in front of me,  
how it will first fall and then twist into an angry rage, with  
your eyebrows narrowing.  
The way your eyes turn dark and  
you inhale  
a large breath to muster up  
your yell.

Girl, my girl,  
don't you see you have left me adrift to the bottomless sea.  
To the bottom I sink, and will sink happily, but first  
you must  
tell me that you do not love me.  
Love me no more but then, can  
I understand  
your rage. Why oh why have you been acting so strange?

You have permanently shut me out and  
created a whole world for yourself, one in which  
I travel  
as a foreigner.  
One with unfamiliar faces, speaking tongues I cannot decipher, a heaven  
I am  
not welcome in.  
This is so new to me, not being by your side.

Girl, my girl,  
you make me cry. Cry as I clutch pain in my side, my chest, my head,  
swallowing my pride to get to you.

This I soon regret to tell you dear sister, is my final goodbye, as  
I do not intend  
to simply just survive,  
this place has no air and suffocation isn't my choice on how to go.  
This journey has proved that you and  
I have grown  
to be too different, too incompatible  
*despite what's written in the stars my gemini twin.*  
From across the galaxy  
I am mirrored by you,  
my other half, my better half.  
Girl, my girl,  
do not cry, you have chosen your blissful life,  
one that does not have me by your side.



## leaf company

By Walter Lopez

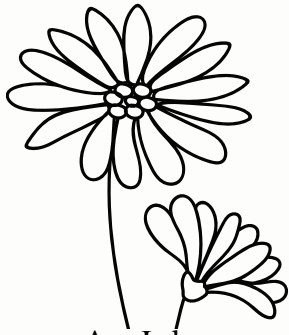
Being alone can feel like leaves  
Drifting in the wind  
Detached from the trees  
Searching for a connection

In the quiet dark of my solitary bed  
A lonesome echo whispers in my head  
In the silent shadows, where loneliness is spun  
I lie alone, feeling like the only one

Beneath the crowd of falling leaves  
Each carries its own silence, loneliness, and beliefs  
No words exchanged  
Just leaf company

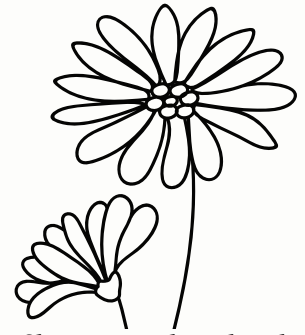
In the quiet reflection of each leaf's sigh  
Feeling alone and unseen  
But on the branches, their beauty appears  
It helps the trees calm down its fears

Embracing solitude, I wander free  
Like a leaf in autumn, unleashed and carefree  
Longing for connection  
But as leaves learn to see the beauty in their journey  
They dance with grace, free from worry



# THE YELLOW DAISIES

By Shannon Koepele



As I lay awake in the middle of the cold, hardwood floor, I looked up at the spinning ceiling fan. I was in disbelief. This time I went further than ever before. Lately, I have been working on my newest concoctions, time travel with the help of roots and flowers. Ever since I was little time travel was the big thing, those thoughts of time travel engulfed most of my life. I was always working towards that dream. Now, as I'm lying here feeling the cold start to seep past my skin, I realize why the past should stay in the past. Finally pulling myself out of my trance, I stood up and walked to my desk cluttered with vials and jars. I debated making another mixture of the strange roots and flowers that let me experience the past from the safety of my little house. I decided against it when I looked out the window and saw it was already dark. This was the longest I have ever time traveled. That means the mixture was getting more exact.

As I tried to fall asleep that night, something told me not to. I ignored the eerie feeling and succumbed to my bed.

I awoke to a loud gong ringing loudly, igniting a headache. As I jump up from my slumber, I find myself in a field, filled with yellow daisies and clovers. *I must have jumped to another time period*, I thought. This was strange, I never had this happen before. Maybe the last batch I made was extra strong. I started walking towards the end of the field.

It was as if I blinked and I was in a town, with a small bouquet of the yellow daisies in my hand. I don't even remember seeing the town from the field. I felt dizzy and as if every movement was heavy and with a lot of thought.

As I looked around, I realized I was in France. I realized I was on a red brick road, so I continued to follow it. *Might as well explore while I wait for the batch to wear off*, I said to myself. Another blink and I was mid-conversation with a girl. She looked to be in her early 20's. She was saying something in French and I realized I was responding and understanding her. This was outstanding, when I get back I must remember the batch ratios.

"Je dois dire que tu as l'air étranger. Continuez sur cette route et vous serez très étonné," she said to me. I thanked her, gave her a daisy, and continued on the road. The dizziness kicked up a notch and I started feeling as though time was going really slow.



It felt like it had been days, why has this not worn off yet? But with the progress I made on the road, it could have only been minutes. Then time sped up. I was running faster than a cheetah, the wind couldn't catch me. I was not even a solid anymore, I was a liquid running through the gutters and between wheels connected to wagons on the road. I closed my eyes, enjoying the feeling of speed.

"Ahhhhhhh!" I screamed out in pain, I had gone face-first into a tree. Blood trickled down from my head. The throbbing from my forehead was agonizing. I looked behind me and saw the girl again.

"How did you get here?"

With a thick French accent, she said, "I was with you the entire time."

I sat up and looked around confused, my scenery completely changed from the last time my eyes were opened. Now we were outside a small broken-down cottage. There was a sign-out front that was faded red, the paint was chipped and peeling. The sign's weathered appearance told me that it had to be at least 50 years old. Though the letters were broken and missing, I managed to make out the words, Fortune Teller! Get Your Future Told Here."How fitting!" I mocked myself.

The girl was now walking up to the slanted door, the door matched the sign with its red chipped paint. The cottage itself was gray, it looked like it once was a bright blue but over the years had dulled down. I heard her muttering something inaudible and before my eyes, the cottage transformed. I saw its former glory only now it wasn't a cottage, it was a palace. The door was lined with gold and jewels, the sign once weathered was now sophisticated and matched the door. As she entered, I saw the spiral staircase and flight after flight of glowing orbs each with its purpose. Quickly, I followed her. When I entered, I was met with an aroma, but it wasn't a smell as much a feeling. I felt... happy?...no it was nostalgia. Nostalgic for when I didn't care about time travel, when I had friends and we would make up silly nonsense games.

Over the years they had grown tired of my talk of time travel and said I lived in the past too much. They all left me one by one. I was overcome with memories of those happy golden years. I turned to leave the story, it was causing me too much pain, but an orb stopped me in my tracks. The orb was bright, no it was illuminating, it was like staring at the sun. As I looked at the orb, it seemed to get bigger and closer. It was as if I was under compulsion and I reached out.

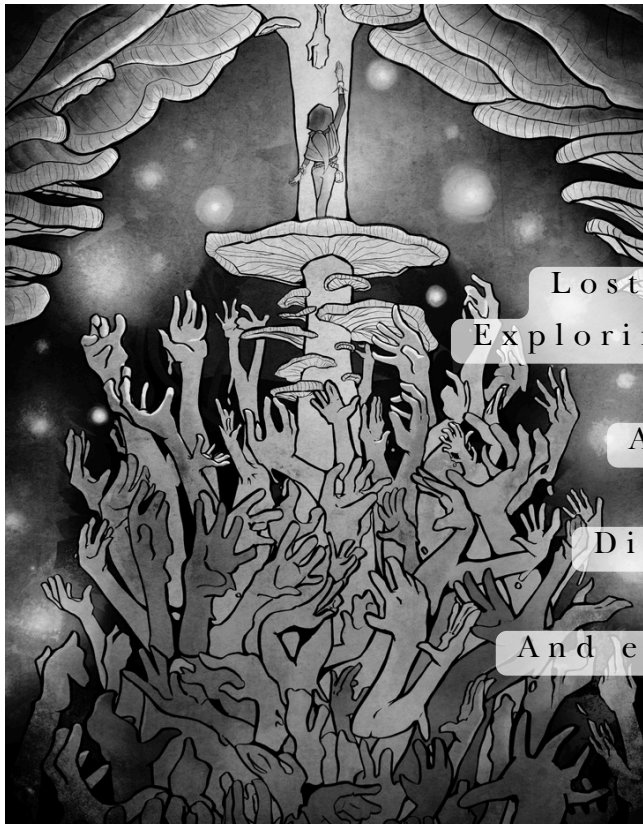
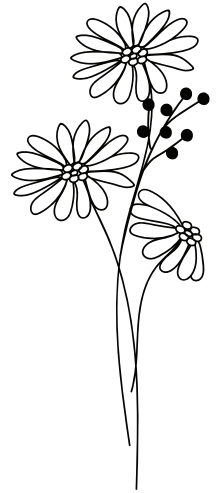
I was in a whirlwind experiencing every emotion all at once, I saw myself being born, I saw my innocence and then it was taken. I relived every fight I ever had. I relived the hurt I felt when everyone close to me abandoned me. I saw my last friend looking at me as I came back from a past time travel, lying on the hardwood floor looking up at them. They looked down at me in despair, "I care about you too much,

so that's why I can't watch you waste your life living in another time. I hope you learn to live in the moment," and then left. Walked out the door. Leaving me all alone. Again. The whirling stopped and I was back in my cottage.

This time I couldn't bring myself to break the trance. I felt the cool hardwood floor on my back. I watched the ceiling fan. I counted the number of times it spun. I got to 876 spins before I realized there was something in my pockets. I looked down at my body and every pocket was filled to the brim with yellow daisies. They had a sort of bioluminescent glow to them. I turned my head to the side and saw the vials I worked so hard to collect, I looked away from them and saw my bed which was so rarely used along with the kitchen that I never cooked in.

As I woke the next morning still on the hardwood floor, I felt different. The normal grudge I held for having to wake up in this lifetime was gone. I sprang up and put the daisies in vases all around the cottage. I got a large garbage bag and cleared the vials and jars, years of my life thrown out in five minutes. I cleaned the cottage from top to bottom. At the end of my manic cleaning, I felt complete. Clean. Free. Happy.

Two weeks later, I sold the cottage and moved closer to the town. I saw my old friends again.



Art by Sebastian Ramirez

## EMBRACE

By Maryam Iftikhar

Lost in a foreign place, what a thrill,  
Exploring new sights, it gives me a chill.

Finding my way, step by step,  
Adventures await, no need to fret.

Getting lost can be quite fun,  
Discovering cultures under the sun.

embracing the unknown,  
And enjoying the journey until the end

# CONFESSION OF A DIGITAL NATIVE

By Ethan Ambrosio

In Guilty fault I seek reply-  
The Muse has left my side  
And in its place- Machines stand by-  
A world of stolen words- all mine

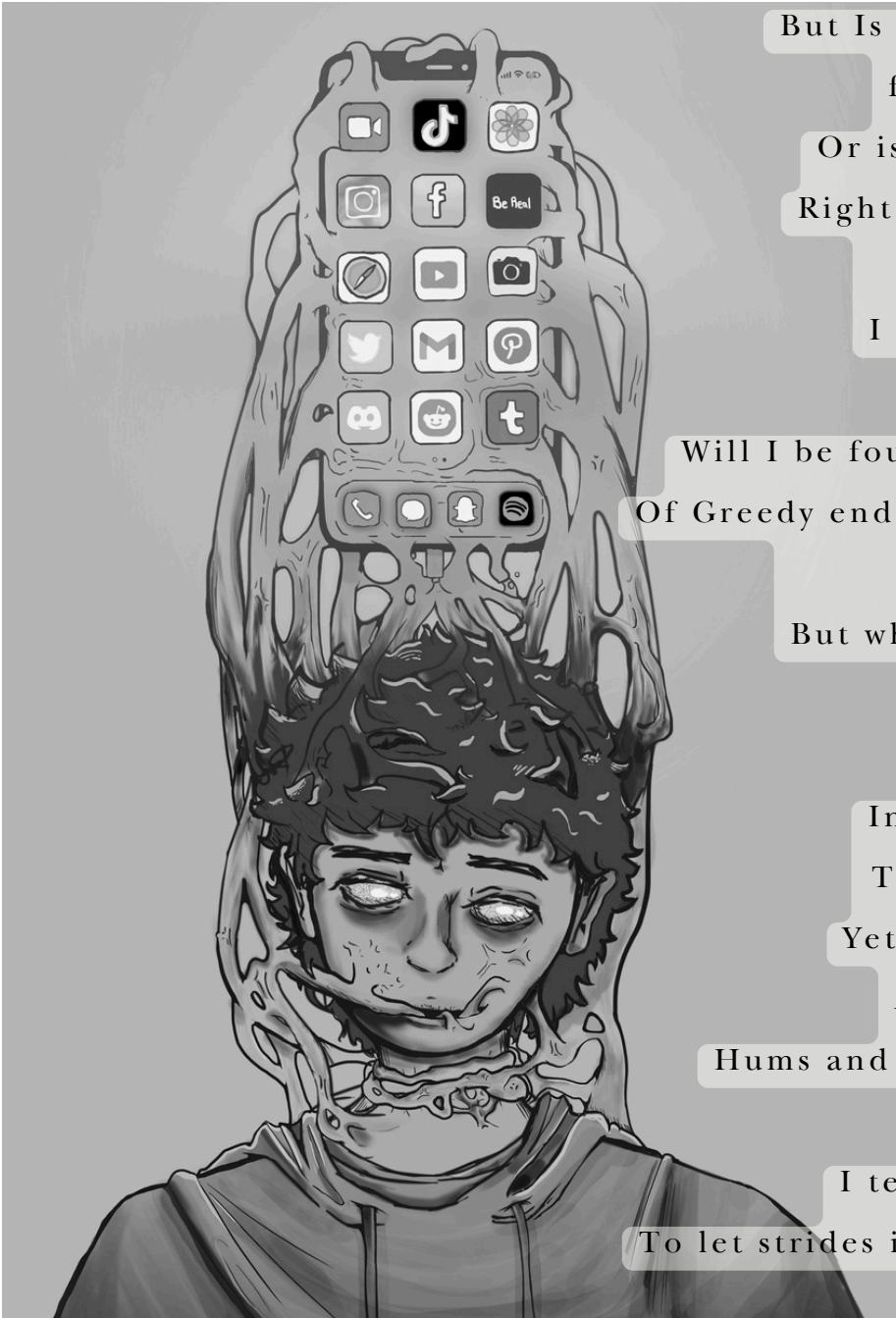
But Is it good- to let them grow-  
fast from Ones and Zeros?  
Or is it right- to weave a verse  
Right from the heart- but slow?

I enter- and with every line  
A tangent fills my mind-  
Will I be found? What will they think-  
Of Greedy ends with truly Sleazy means?

But when I gaze at Honest eyes-  
A fool looks back at me

In Guilty fault I seek reply-  
The writer's pen- now steel  
Yet- a part of me feels clever  
A check to trick my Guilt-  
Hums and clicks as I feed a prompt-  
Will my Guilt ever heal?

I tell myself- it is a Disgrace  
To let strides in technology- go to waste



Art by Sebastian Ramirez

# A TASTE OF LOVE

By Fernanda Ruiz Soto

Let us feast together  
And on each other

Sink your claws into my chest  
Cut me open  
Reach for my beating heart  
And take a bite

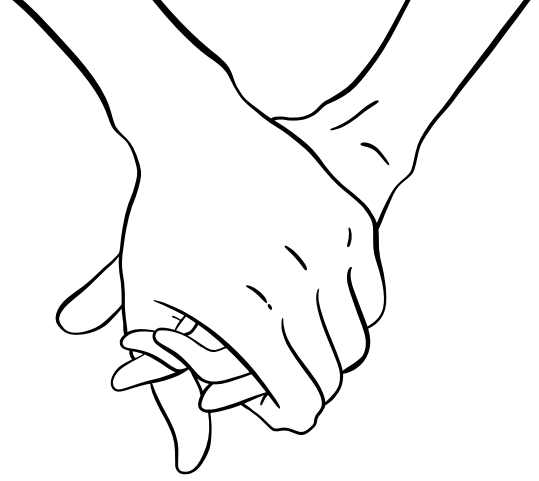
Can you taste it—  
My love for you?

Let our wounds bleed  
Allow our blood mix together  
And we'll drink from it  
It's our wine

We will dine  
On each other's flesh

Let yourself fall  
Into this depraved romance  
Don't deny yourself from it  
I am willingly giving myself to you

My heart is yours  
If you have the stomach to take it



## *Little*

By Fernanda Ruiz Soto

Little, so little left  
Of our love,  
There is barely anything left  
Not even words.

All that's left is crying  
Because our love is dying.  
And I avoid your gaze  
Well, there is nothing more to say

A friendly gesture,  
Is all that's left  
To make life bearable  
And thus drown our sorrows



# CONFIDENTIAL

By Tristan St. Ours

“Are you *serious*?” I say after the Director of Human Resources tells me what the plan was. “You’re telling me that after years of working at the National Space Association, I have to work in a different environment, with different people and everything? And with only a week to prepare?” I exclaimed.

“Aaron, I know this is a spontaneous decision, but we need to do this.” She added, “You can still be a leader, I know you are a capable and responsible individual.” I kept eye contact with her, but she was in a state of pure confusion and frustration. Every word he said was just background noise, “It is your responsibility to let your team know what is going on, I think you have a good way of explaining things.”

On the rare occasion that she would observe me in my workplace, she would compliment me on my way of explaining things. She pointed out that I would dumb things down, yet include enough information. I would always tell her I would do it subconsciously, but this time I needed to tell my group the full story.

With one more sigh and four seconds of silence, I look down and reply, “I can’t explain it like a 5th grader, everybody needs to know the full thing.”

She responds in a slightly more serious, but confirming tone, “You’re right, but please, for everybody’s sake, stick to the facts.” She walks to the door of the meeting room and faintly says, “Good luck” before walking out.

I stood there for what felt like an hour. My brain was racing with thoughts, but two were the most prominent. *Why was this being done and why was it confidential?* I opened the door and stepped out of the meeting room. It felt like I couldn’t feel my limbs, I felt more thoughts than anything. I walked down the hallways which were infested with Halloween decorations; it showed that there was a spirit in the facility. The group was about to test our new project: a series of motors. That was when I was pulled out, but I told them to go outside to the field and I will be there shortly. When I arrived at the field, I slowly walked to prepare myself for what I was about to say.

I walked onto the field and was greeted by my coworkers including my fiancée, Isabelle. I had a blank expression on my face, still from shock. “Hey hon, you okay? What did they-”

I interrupted her and said, “You will know momentarily.” I used a megaphone that was brought out to let somebody speak over all the loud engines going. I spoke into the megaphone, “I need everybody inside as soon as possible, there is no danger, but there is *very* important news.” My heart was racing, I still had no clue how to rephrase it to where it doesn’t sound as dire, but I knew it was impossible. We entered through a small door into our workplace, and everybody had taken about 20 seconds to file in.

The workplace wasn't the cleanliest, there was sawdust everywhere, cobwebs in a few corners, spilled paint cans, and from time to time the occasional rat. We could all look over this, however, as the workplace was quite large and had massive personal space to work in. Everybody gathered in a circle around me as I extended a little and climbed up a few steps.

I took a deep breath and announced, "I'm going to get straight to the point, we will be merging with the National Ocean Association. Most of you will be working with different people and in a much more strict, formal environment."

I took another breath, "Before anybody asks anything. I was given zero reasoning behind why this is happening, but this could be something VERY serious. You will all be given a week to prepare, but this workspace will be cleared out over the next few days, so there will be no need to come to work over this period."

A slight relief came over me as I let that out. Some people had their hands over their mouths, some just had a surprised look, but pretty much everybody else had a puzzled look on their faces.

I had already heard about seven people asking questions over each other, but I could hear Isabelle's more clearly than the others. She asked, "Who will we be working with?"

I let out a sigh and responded, "I don't know, but unfortunately, most of you will very likely be working with different people. We are supposed to be given smaller workplaces that around five or six people will be working in." After I said that, it sank in that I would not be spending as much time with Isabelle anymore, and this deeply saddened me because our workplace was the place where we met, and also the place where I had proposed to her. We made so many memories here, and it broke me that we wouldn't anymore. I couldn't see how Isabelle felt as I was too busy answering questions, but I am sure she felt the same way.

Two weeks went by, there was a delay in the merge as the new building still needed to be set up. It was a nice yet nerve-racking vacation from working because while not working was always nice, we had no idea what to expect for the future of our careers.

When Isabelle and I were in the car, we took one left, and the trees revealed the most beautiful, gigantic building we had ever seen. We arrived at the parking lot, and our minds were blown walking to the entrance of the building. I couldn't even explain all the features it had, but it looked like the White House if it had been made into a work site.

We entered the building and looked for the auditorium. After we wandered the halls for a few minutes, we located the auditorium and settled in our seats. A few minutes later, the lights dimmed. Isabelle and I were whispering when Isabelle jokingly said, "Watch the president walk in."

We heard footsteps coming from the stage as the auditorium was pitch silent. Never in a lifetime would I have expected the president to walk in.

We heard a few gasps coming from the others in the audience, but Isabelle and I quickly turned to each other, both with our hands over our mouths from shock and surprise. We had no reasonable assumption to even assume the president would be here,

but it was now made obvious that something serious needed to be done, and that maybe he was behind the merge.

“Welcome NSA and NOA employees! I am glad to see you all today. Before I say anything, I must preface that the reasoning behind this merge is still classified, but it will be announced within the next six months.”

This is the only full quote I can trace back to because it shocked me that it was still even *classified*. I had thought that we would be given the reasoning today. Anything after that was just a blur, he was explaining everything that we already knew from the email, however, near the end of the orientation, he said that the teams and workplace locations should have been emailed to everybody. Unfortunately, he added that nobody would be even allowed to speak to others from other workplaces, mainly to keep organization and minimize distractions. Not a peep was heard, but everybody looked at each other with disapproving faces.

Isabelle and I looked at each other as well, we both knew that the only chance we had of being able to still spend time with each other was if we were put on the same team. When we arrived back at our apartment, we ran to our desktop, opened up our emails, and crossed our fingers as I clicked on the spreadsheet that was attached to the email.

We both let out a large sigh of relief when we saw both our names with six other people.

\*Four Months Later\*

We hear on the intercom that all engineers must report to the auditorium for another lecture. Before however, I had noticed that one of my co-workers and good friend, Alex, was just standing there and doing nothing. I wasn't going to criticize him for it as maybe he just hadn't received enough sleep, but he looked like he was thinking about something judging from the continuous scratching of the head and a slightly worried look on his face.

Just as I was leaving the doorway of our workplace, Alex called me and asked if he could have me just for a moment in private. *Maybe he had to talk to me about something personal*. We have been very good friends for months since we met because of the merger.

When I walked up to him, he spoke very quietly yet quickly, “You know how the ceiling to this workplace is strangely high, right?”

“Yeah, why?” I responded.

“Call me crazy, there is a confidential room that all the higher-ups meet in, and it's up in the vent. I snuck up to the higher floors when the orientation happened, and when it ended, I overheard that the room they were meeting in was in workplace B4, our workplace. I didn't tell anybody because I did not want to risk getting fired.”

I believed him immediately. The higher-ups at this agency have always been super shady, even before the spontaneous merge announcement. Alex and I looked at each other and we knew what we had to do. He grabbed the extendable ladder and extended it to the vent, but then told me, “I'm pretty terrified of heights, so I would like it if you could just tell me what you find up there.”

I climbed up to the vent, threw off the vent cover, and climbed through the vent. Alex's story was immediately confirmed as I crawled into a somewhat large room with a computer and a large meeting table holding a bunch of files with “CONFIDENTIAL” plastered on all of them.

“I found something!” and jumped straight to the files on the table. I opened one of them to be greeted with an illustration and a few measurements on the side. I was confused about what it was until it hit me, this was the earth’s core.

I already had a suspicion about what I was about to find. I opened another file, and my heart dropped. The file contained a single sheet of paper titled “EARTH EVACUATION PLAN.”

It had a series of events labeled:

1. MERGE NSA AND NOA
2. BUILD SPACE STATION SIMILAR TO HOTEL
3. EVACUATE EMPLOYEES, AND ABANDON CITIZENS (NOT ENOUGH SPACE)

TIME WE HAVE: 2-5 YEARS

(UNSTABLE PARTICLES IN EARTH’S CORE WILL INCREASE UNTIL IMPLOSION)

I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. I called out to Alex, “I found everything!”

Alex then called back, “Really? What did-” A large thud hit the floor. I knew immediately what happened: we were caught. I heard steps up the extended ladder, but I was too frozen to move.

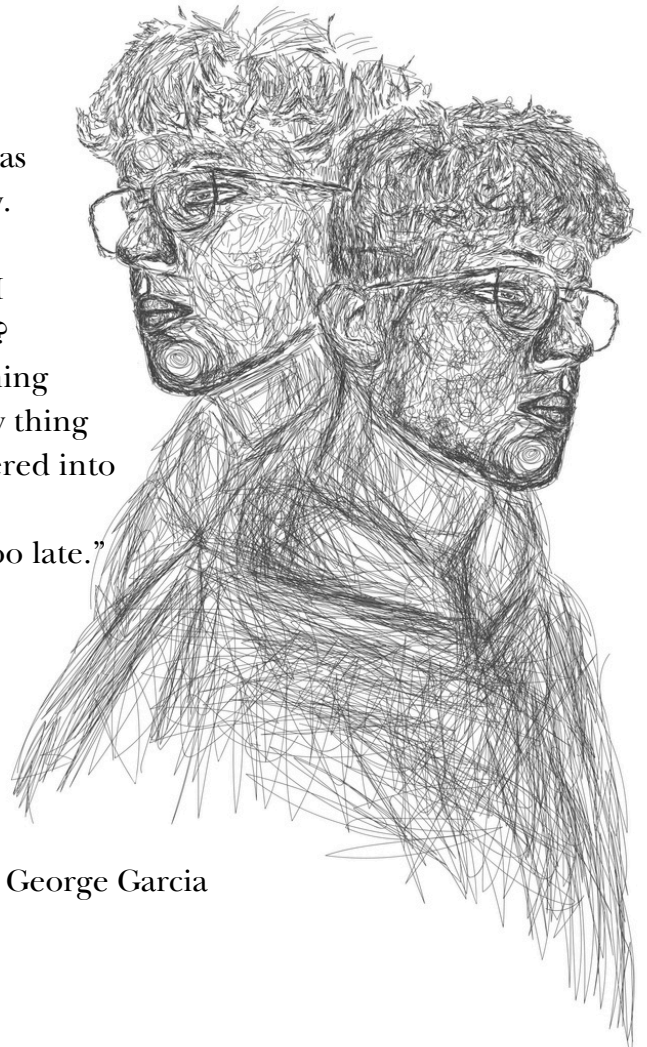
That was the last thing I remember.

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I woke up in a weirdly shaped room. Something was immediately off, and I realized that I had zero gravity. I was thrown into space. My heart was racing because I had no idea what was happening. How did I get here? What am I going to do? Would I come back?

I looked out the window on the right and saw nothing but space, so I looked out the other window. The only thing I could see was the moon and an earth that was shattered into a million pieces.

All that could escape my mouth was, “They were too late.”



Art by George Garcia

# *Aren't I Perfect?*

By Rafaella Gregorio

What did you see when you first looked at me?

Is it my long shiny hair?

Did you notice it's now cut and dull?

Was it my contagious smile?

Did you notice how it faded?

Or was it my loud, obnoxious laughter?

Can you hear my distant echo?

What do you see when you now look at me?

Is it the way my face holds a perfect, uninviting, cold stare?

Or maybe it's the way I appear when I am withdrawn from fellow peers.

The way my gaze turns  
numb and lazy.

If you're looking too closely  
to find these things  
then don't bother to look at me at all.

You are looking at the true,  
harsh version of me,  
a rejected  
form of myself.

Withdraw your eyes.  
Tear them away from  
my hair,  
my face,  
from  
me.

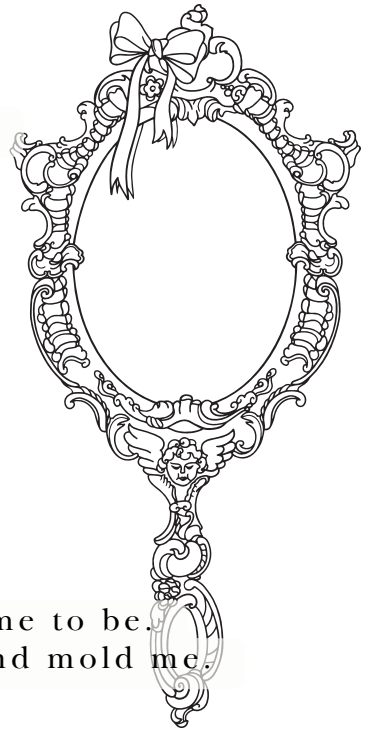
Let me distract you instead with who you want me to be.  
I have no limits, no bounds, press your hands in and mold me.

I have many masks,  
pick one, any one

and that's who I am temporarily.

I am a girl with no dreams of becoming someone or something,

I am what  
you  
make me  
out to be.



# P o n d e r

By Shelby Gillenwater

Glued to the Chair He catches a glimpse of fellow pupils,  
Accelerating in their Physical Prowess- while His Jealousy reaches new limits  
Adults supervision to stay put was compulsory  
Stuck on this Chair, meant for swift recovery

There He lies gaping through the window of low hope-  
Yearning for the day He can walk on this Bone  
A once active spring of joy  
Now adapted to a chair and Boot without a choice

Sat down on the Chair lies a ball of flames  
Grasping to the fact that gym class will not be the same  
His Old Regime is now soon to forget-  
Pondering wonders in a Boot filled with regret

He questions himself if His freedom was well spent  
Who would have thought executing your pleasures would leave the utmost resent  
If given the opportunity to retrace His footsteps, He would do any given task  
Though in this world, there is no such thing as the Ghost of Christmas Past

Time flew by, through the winter and spring  
Dislodgement of the boot, ready to spread His wings

Realizing his lateness of being apart- gave all his peers time to depart  
Instead of gaining help He lied in the dark  
Harshly grudging onto his bitterness heart  
Should have stood up for Myself from the start





# Blinded

By Kiley Barch

Screaming echoes of past days phrases  
Sailing out on waters of undisclosed secrets  
The glimmer of light shone on morning water  
Blinding my peripheral view---

Coveting the stillness of peaceful thought  
Sensing the changes to my current relishment  
As if I were a time traveler  
Who found solace in knowing  
---Control---

Pieces of glass shards pinching at my callous skin  
In a mirrored room of darkness  
Reflections of who I wish to be  
I starve for the hope of a Pause -----  
And the premonitions of my greatest decline  
Drained from my despair  
In Hopes that you would worry

Paths; followed just to cure my anxious feelings  
Potential; outpaced by my worry  
Decisions; looming for days

And the echoes lessen  
As the darkness flees my grasp  
Under waves of luminescence  
My eyes wide open now  
No longer blinded by my fear of light ---

Art By Alice Hammerquist

# BEAUTY

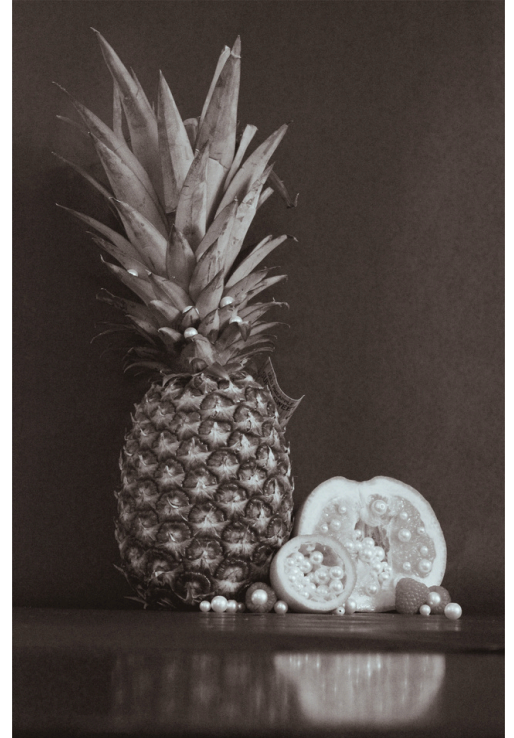
By Rachel Huth

Great plunging mountains, carved out from the sky  
Bright stars, their light reflected on a lake  
The decorated palace of Versailles  
The lovely sound in spring a song thrush makes

The smell of jasmine after a light rain  
The copper sunshine on a wintry day  
White flowers growing on an endless plain  
A footbridge that was painted by Monet

Cold water rushing down a waterfall  
A melody composed by Debussy  
The last note sounding in a music hall  
The sunset drawing lines upon the sea

Of all this beauty, though, one thing is true  
More beautiful by far, my dear, is you



Art By Ruby Baliber

## *Marwhal*

By Marilyn Mendoza Virula

She swims through the clear waters  
her spots like a dozen bubbles;  
the currents sparkle like a million stars,  
glide delicately through the ocean

# *Nervous*

By Gabriela Genao

In the silent corners where shadows sway,  
Nervousness lurks with its fleeting display.

A quivering heart, a trembling hand,  
In the grip of fear, where uncertainties land.

It murmurs softly in the depths of night,  
Anxiety's cloak, full of fright.  
Entwined thoughts, like vines that twist and wind,  
In the maze of an anxious mind.

It steals the breath, it steals the calm,  
Nervousness, the leader of unease.  
A fluttering pulse, a soul in unrest,  
In its clasp, where it is put to the test.

But in the depths, there gleams a spark,  
A glimmer of hope within the dark.  
For nervousness, though it may hold sway,  
Can be vanquished with courage, anyday.

So let me confront the trembling tide,  
With my heart, let fear subside.  
For in the struggle, I may discover my might,  
And nervousness fades throughout the morning light.



# The Dangers of Indifference

By Xavier Garcia Granados

Many have empathy for others  
As if they could feel themselves  
Inside their Soul, all so Clearly  
Like a touch of the Universe–

In the palm of their hand  
As they envision themselves–  
In a different world where their–  
Life would turn out distinct

They start to comprehend that every–  
Person has a life, unique yet the same  
And that although some have a good  
heart  
Others wouldn't say so much

Some don't have such a good universe–  
They might not have a bright and  
colorful and–  
Happy soul, as they are the total  
opposite  
These are people with no empathy or  
remorse

The Universes of these people are filled  
with no light–  
No brightness, no color  
These people feel indifferent towards  
the suffering of others  
And as dark as it may seem, it is true



## Hope

By Grayson Dunn

Hope is the light coming through the crack in the door  
Slowly moving throughout  
Slowly I'll feel it  
The darkness everywhere becomes flooded

It is like the colorful spring flowers coming back around  
The one thing I can count on  
The sound of the cheers on New Year's  
Possibilities around the corner

Hope is the last light in a sunset  
Grabbing onto it  
Grabbing onto the feeling that comes with it  
Hoping it lasts forever

A change of seasons you smell  
The air thickening in winter  
The air sweetening in summer  
I wait for that slow switch

I wait for hope  
The knot in my stomach loosening  
The deep breath that fills my lungs  
Hope is the light that I long for

# Uncertainty

By Wynne Franciscovich

Uncertainty is a foggy morning  
Not seeing past your own fingertips-  
Unsure of where familiarity might lay.

It can shield you from the light-  
Or protect you from the true darkness.  
Everything is now unknown-  
Not even sure where to step next.

Arising from a deep slumber, anticipating the sun's warm embrace-  
Just to find the sky all gray.  
Is it better this way?  
One might say, it's better to be shrouded in darkness  
If that darkness is lighter than what lies beneath it.

My mind wanders to times when the sun shone through  
The gray that envelops my world today.  
Well I must keep walking  
Without knowing Where.  
Just keep moving, but don't get Lost  
Continue the Journey, get to the light  
The clouds might Disappear if you Search for long enough-

Find the light, the answers to the World-  
Once you find them more questions will arise.  
Where have I traveled to?  
How can I find my way Back?

But you must keep searching  
Even if it feels like one big cycle  
Somethings are better unknown  
However you must know that-  
Rain must fall for the sun to shine on you.



# AT LEAST YOU DIDN'T BURN THE BEER.

By Rafaella Gregorio

I can cook. I can clean.  
I can smile wide, bigger than you have ever seen.  
My hair is thrown up in a wonderful updo. Don't you love it?  
It will go perfectly with the pearls I'm wearing for dinner tonight,  
it's your favorite, ragú!

This perfect life I live is all so wonderful,  
although not exactly what I would have envisioned for myself.  
But I do love it,  
my family, we are picture-perfect, collected, and poised.  
Not like those who dabble in the unclassy and wild.  
I have nothing else more to look forward to than to bear my third child.

Well, do I have other dreams?  
Of course! Who doesn't? Now my husband's clothes must be steamed.  
I can't focus on myself when my family is in need,  
it isn't just my mouth that I must feed.  
Well, what's wrong? Isn't this everything you wished for?  
Dreamed for? Live for?  
I think instead I would love to learn,  
to live outside these four walls, to show the world who I am.  
Who I dream to be.  
Who I can be.

Not just a mother or a wife, but an unstoppable, creative, and limitless being.  
A woman, unbound from the pots and pans she is tied down to.  
Oh gosh no your problem is in that right there. The way you think,  
thinking at all, is giving me a scare.  
From what I understand we have lost you, lost you completely.

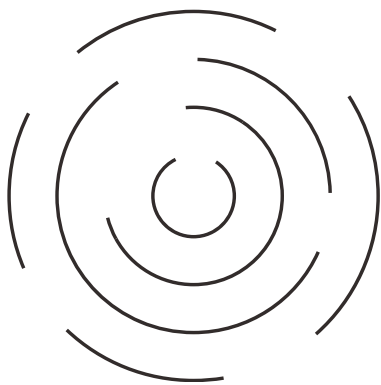
Don't you know, silly woman?  
You aren't anything more than what I tell you to be.





Art By  
Clarissa Marcelino

Art By  
Josue Campos Torres



# Freed from the Abyss

By Dylan Wong

Incarcerated on a sinking ship, adrift in a sea of desperation,  
Clarity of mind oscillating, an elusive haze clouds the air,  
Like a lost sailor, shrouded in the emptiness of the night,  
Tethered by the weight of stress and regret.

I find myself plunged in the depths of despair, as time swiftly escapes my grasp,  
The ticking of a clock, an incessant reminder of my impending fate,  
And of the faults of my past that brought me to this moment,  
Trapped in a prison of my own creation.

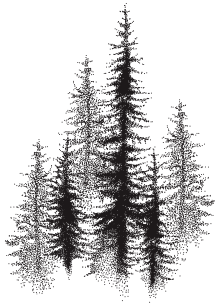
But amid the darkness, a glimmer of resolve ignites,  
For all of the time that I had let pass me by, there is still more in which I could seize,  
I take control of the helm, and navigate towards the light,  
No longer a victim of myself, I steer towards the gleaming future.

The clouds begin to part, revealing a path ahead,  
With each step forward, I reclaim the lost moments, the missed chances,  
My faith restored and my heart revitalized,  
I fly after the golden glow of freedom.

And as the sun breaks through, casting away the dark,  
I feel the rumbling of the walls as they set me free,  
The chains of stress and misery broken at last,  
In the embrace of freedom, the world feels so, so wonderful.



Art by Aristides Reyes Ochoa



# A FOREST BEYOND

By Ruby Hoffman

I was walking down the winding road leading to my house. The trees stood tall with blossoms on them. I could smell the flowering plants before I could see them. As I approached my house, a shimmering rock glistening in the sun caught my eye. Though my mother told me to come straight home from school today, I couldn't help but look at this beautiful rock. Walking closer to the light, it seemed to move further away. I decided to follow it into the woods, even though I knew I would be in trouble with my mother.

Soon I found myself deeper in the woods than before. My house was completely out of sight and there was a peaceful silence. The light stopped moving and was now hovering at my eye level. I hesitantly reached out to touch the small light. My finger had barely touched the light before it exploded into a blinding light. I was now hovering over the ground and was being swept into a forceful wind, pulling me deeper into the woods. I closed my eyes and waited for this to end.

My head spun and I could feel the soft, pillowy grass underneath me. I lay there for a while trying to figure out what had happened. The sky was light blue with only a few fluffy clouds. It still smelled of blooming flowers, but I couldn't see any flowers. All of a sudden, a high-pitched voice interrupted my thoughts.

"Hi!" said the voice as I jumped back.

"Hello?" I reluctantly said.

"Hm. I've never seen anything like this," mumbled the creature.

The creature circled me, inspecting my clothing and looking at my hands. I quickly pulled away.

"Who are you? Where am I?" I frantically asked.

"Oh, my apologies. I must seem so rude! I am Flopsy. Flopsy Hopps. How do you do?" said the rabbit as he held out his hand.

"Hello, Flopsy. I'm doing...fine, I guess." I shook his hand and looked around.

"Well... Who are you?" Flopsy asked as he walked down the gravel path.

"My name is Lily," I replied, trying to catch up to him.

Flopsy continued walking down the path, and I followed close behind. He walked, rather than hopped, and wore only a bow tie and some shoes.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

Flopsy continued down the path and into a forest similar to the one back home. We walked for almost an hour before he finally said something.

"So, what do you think of the forest?"

"It's...nice. It looks a lot like the forest near my house."

Flopsy nodded, smirked, and replied, "Well, you will soon see that our forest is much different than yours."

As we walked further into the forest, I could see a clearing not too far away. I could smell chocolate, and as we approached the clearing, I could see huge mountains. Each was a different shade of brown with trees, flowers, and long winding rivers running down them. The rivers weren't blue though, they were a



beautiful shade of light brown and white. I was astonished by the sight. Everything was chocolate. It smelled amazing.

"So what do you think?" asked Flopsy, as he studied my expression.

"It's stunning! Is everything edible?" I asked.

"Yes. Help yourself!" Flopsy said as he picked a yellow flower from the ground and ate it.

I chose a gray rock that was a very delicious chocolate truffle, and I ate some of the grass that tasted like sour candy.

"I see you're enjoying yourself!" Flopsy said.

I nodded.

"So, this world that you live in... Is it much different than what you've seen so far?"

"Yes, very. For one, we don't have edible trees and mountains. And of course, we don't have talking rabbits," I replied.

"Oh, interesting. So do you think?"

"Hey, Flopsy!" A voice in the distance called.

Flopsy looked back but seemed slightly disappointed that he didn't get to finish his question.

"Hi Alphie," Flopsy said.

I studied the creature. He looked like a fox, but he had wings. He stood on two hind legs and wore a dark blue blazer, with a few missing buttons.

"Flopsy," he whispered. "There's a weird-looking creature standing next to you. Watch out. I think it sees us. Let's back away slowly."

Confused, I glanced at Flopsy, who was now studying me as well.

"Hi, I'm Lily. I am from the real world, I guess that is what you guys call it."

"Oh wow. I've never seen one of you guys before! This is amazing!" Alphie replied, still in awe.

I smiled and we continued down the pathway surrounded by chocolate trees and candy flowers. Soon the chocolatey smell was faint and the mountains were in the distance behind us. We approached gates and a castle that looked like they came straight out of my social studies textbook. Before I could ask what we were about to walk into, Flopsy posed another question for me.

"So, do you like living in the real world? What is it like there? What kind of food do you eat?" Flopsy had to catch his breath after asking me.

"Flopsy, why do you want to know so much about the outside world?" I asked. But before he could answer, we were interrupted by a loud, deep voice.

"What is going on here?" the voice questioned.

Flopsy and Archie spun around and replied in unison, "Nothing, sir!"

"Then how do you explain trespassing into the Queen's garden without permission? I also see you've brought a friend. This is unacceptable. Now since you have a human with you, I must report you to the Queen."

The figure was a knight, and I couldn't see any of his facial expressions, but from the way he talked, I had no problem imagining them.

"I don't mean to cause any problems. I can try to go back home the way I came." I suggested as I turned to leave.

"There is only one way out, young lady. It is through the Queen's castle and just past those trees."

He pointed past a huge stone castle towards a cluster of trees.

"Come on. You wouldn't want to waste the Queen's time now, would you?"

We all shook our heads and followed the knight across a bridge and into the walls of the castle. It was beautiful. Just how I would imagine a castle. Tall ceilings, artifacts everywhere, and wide hallways with large doors. It was silent. You could hear a pin drop. The knight slowed and took out a key. He opened the door and led us into the queen's room. She didn't seem busy but looked very annoyed to see us.

"Not again, Flopsy," the queen said without even looking up.

"I'm sorry, Your Majesty."

She looked up and sighed, "You too, Archie? What has gotten into you?"

Her face dropped when I emerged from being the knight.

"And who is this? How did she get here? What has she seen?" The Queen asked frantically.

"Hello, Your Majesty. My name is Lily. I promise I don't mean any harm, I was only walking in the woods near my house and saw this floating light. So, I followed it and when I touched it, it brought me here. That's when I met Flopsy. He has been a lot of help," I said trying to defend myself as I smiled at Flopsy.

"Flopsy, you know you aren't supposed to take humans this far into our land. Haven't you learned from your past mistakes?"

"I have. This time it was different. She just seemed so lost and I thought I should help her," he said, and then he mumbled something under his breath.

"What was that you just said?" The queen asked.

Flopsy hesitated as he looked at Archie and me.

"I was hoping if I helped her find her way home, that I could go with her."

I couldn't say that I was shocked though. He had been asking me repeatedly about the outside world. I was going to tell him I would love to show him around my world, but the Queen answered quickly.

"Flopsy, I don't believe this. First, you go against my wishes and now you want to leave our land? I can't believe I even need to say this, but no. You cannot go out."

"I just want to go and look around and I'll come right back. Please?"

"No!" The queen replied sternly.

"Take the girl to the portal and send Alphie and Flopsy back to their land," the Queen said, pointing towards the door.

"Wait," I said without thinking, "I will take good care of him and return him quickly. There isn't much around my house, so I would only be taking him to the forest and showing him around my neighborhood."

"I already said no," she said.

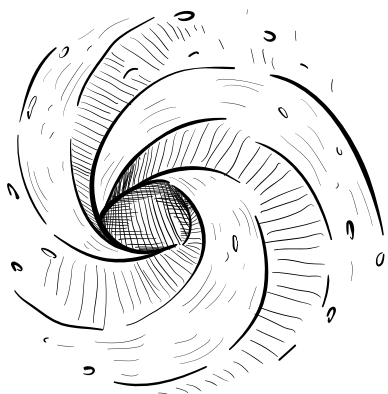
I didn't know what to do. I felt bad for Flopsy, but I couldn't disobey the queen. But then I looked at Flopsy and knew I had to say something.

"Wouldn't you rather him ask you to go out instead of trying to escape?" I questioned. "What if you went too? And if you don't like it, Flopsy wouldn't ask again." I suggested as I glanced at Flopsy, who was smiling.

"Fine," the Queen said after a while.

Later that day, we prepared to go. Flopsy was so excited. Luckily, the queen enjoyed herself. Flopsy loved seeing all of the flowers and trees around my house. We spent the rest of the day in the real world. When we returned, the queen said, "I'm sorry I was so strict with you Flopsy. I understand now why you had so much curiosity about the real world. It was quite interesting. I have decided that from now on if you would like to visit your friend, you can. But you *must* ask me first."

I had never seen Flopsy so happy before. He thanked the Queen, and the two of us rode the portal back to the real world.



## ***to be kind***

By Mildred Hernandez Veliz

Kindness, a beacon of light,  
A language spoken day and night.  
In words and actions, it takes a stance,  
A force that can make the hearts dance.

A smile that lifts a weary soul,  
A helping hand that makes us whole.  
Compassion flowing, boundless and pure,  
Kindness, the cure that can endure.

It costs us nothing to be kind,  
Yet its impact is hard to find.  
So let's embrace this gift we possess,  
And spread kindness, let it progress.

For in a world that can be unkind,  
It's in our hands to redefine.  
Let kindness be our guiding star,  
And make this world a better place, by far.

Kindness Is All we want  
Kindness is All we have  
If we take a moment and spare this time  
Then we don't have to worry how kind we  
are  
When we know we are worthy inside.

## ***Indifference***

By Shannon Koepele

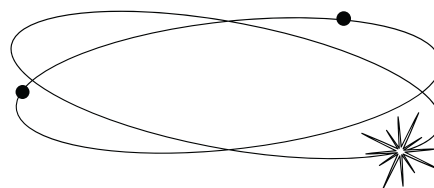
Apathy's mask, a shield so strong  
Unmoved by right or by wrong  
In the face of chaos, it stands tall  
Indifference, the quietest of all.

But beneath the surface, a truth untold  
Indifference hides the pain  
For sometimes it's a defense we wear  
To shield the heart from pain and despair.

Pale purple swirling with dark indigo  
The feeling of everything and nothing is  
all the same  
Stone faced and heart aches  
No way to express

Indifferent but not cold  
Distant and alone, found talking to the  
shadows  
Comforted by the oceans swells  
One star in the galaxy

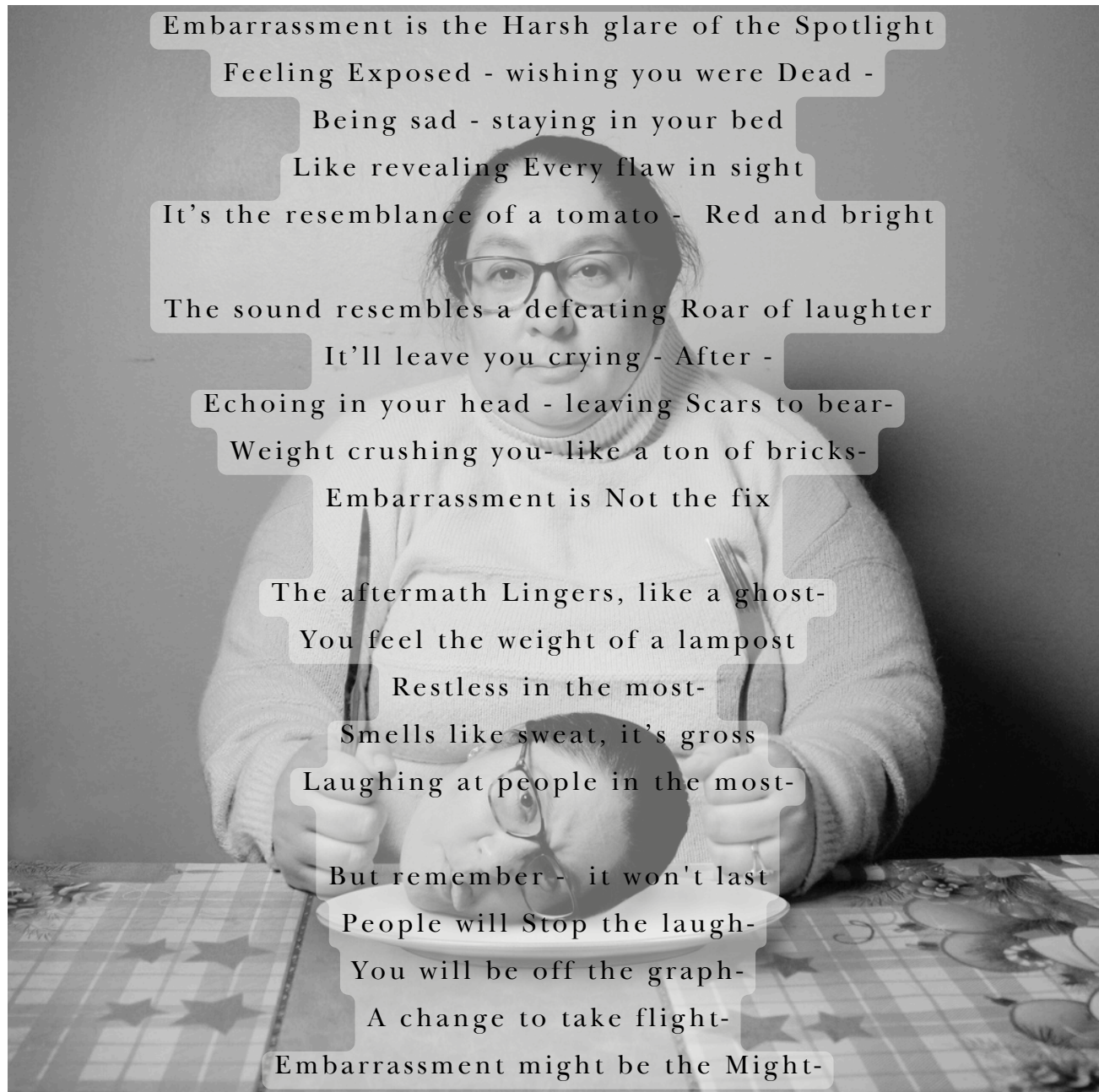
In the heart's quiet, where feelings should  
dance  
Indifference reigns with its cold, hollow  
glance  
No joy or sorrow touches the throne  
In the silent kingdom where care is  
unknown.





# echoing in your head

By Nathan Root



Art By Kellee Benitez

# Snapdragon *Sweet*

By Lily Tierney

Racing glances / bracing trances  
Sun swept hair made salty by the sea  
Deep dives into the atmosphere  
thick with the tide  
Pushing us back to the surface  
where we belong  
But interlacing with gravity is far less romantic,  
isn't it?  
Taunting the buoyancy of our bodies  
Sinking, sandy-eyed and bubble-mouthed  
Laughter silent under the sanctuary of the surf  
But soon the wind whispers your name  
(which you had tucked away  
behind your lips for safe keeping)  
Stuck to the roof of your mouth like bubblegum  
Popping questions and chewing words  
Fingertips pressed together  
as if separated by a looking glass  
Looking through the glass  
that has been  
smoothed by the rough shores  
And shines with the haze of a time-worn soul  
Who smiles as they open their heart  
and embrace the ocean spray  
And that's exactly what we do  
We smile and accept the fate  
of our interlocking hands  
Soft smiles stung by the sun  
The warmth of her light trapped in our gaze  
Searching for a starfish sky behind your eyes  
As the ocean waltzes with the night around us  
All that we can do is stay upon the earth and watch



# *Because.* By Lily Tierney

## **Because**

I watch the mood ring on my hand I swear with change colors by  
the minute.

## **Because**

the calm before the storm always holds an infinitesimal difference  
in time from what you predicted it would be.

## **Because**

you can't understand your own thoughts, why would you claw at the  
fact that you can't understand those of others?

## **Because**

I have fingerprints on my soul that never fade, they just become  
hidden under the touch of others.

## **Because**

I could taste the salt and maybe that was for a reason.

## **Because**

the weeping willow where I used to spend my summers could be  
dying and I wouldn't know.

## **Because**

the blackberries are ripe.

## **Because**

I can sometimes feel the blood flowing through me and I don't  
know if I should feel scared or feel alive, or if there's a difference  
between the two after all.



Art By Gael Reyes





# I can't say it

By Marilyn Mendoza Virula

I can't say the word,  
I can't repeat the sound,  
I just can't say it.

It haunts me at morning,  
It haunts me at night,  
I just can't say what it is

I'm afraid of bring it back,  
I'm afraid of keeping it close,  
I can't say it.

Art By

Genesis Bautista Marroquin

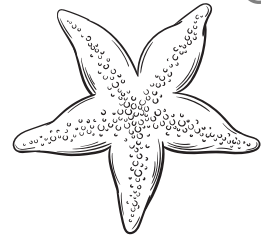
# A MERMAID'S HOPE

By Myah Urena

Beneath the twinkling waters of sapphires and teals

○ A mermaid's eyes carefully watched  
She was accompanied by the judgeful starfish  
But her thoughts could not be stopped

“Oh marine friends  
How dare you stay still  
When a life outside the water  
Can happen with will”



The sea creatures stayed silent  
The restless girl in despair  
But soon enough another thought popped up  
Running wild from the tip of her mind to the tip of her hair

“My father used to go up to the surface  
Really really high  
And blew bubbled of dreams and love  
All the way up to the vast blue sky”

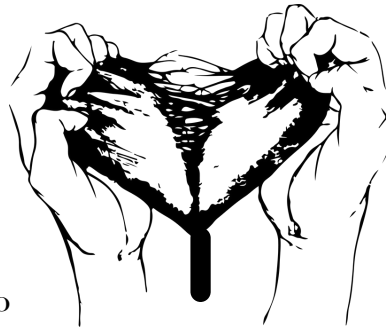
“You're judgment will not stop me  
I will touch the land soon  
And crystal orbs will come from my mouth  
And fly up to the moon”

The mermaid could talk forever  
But the starfish grew tired  
At least she knew deep in her mind  
That her hopes and wishes will transpire



# Nothing to you

By Fernanda Ruiz Soto



# Heartache

By Michelle Mejia

What if I told you  
That I can still feel it  
All those sensations  
After all this time?

Your hand in my hair  
Your lips on mine  
My hands on your chest  
Your hand on my back

The heaviness in my eyes  
The pressure on your chest  
The tears on my cheeks  
My hands pushing you away

How would you feel now?  
Would you also cry with me?  
Would you try to make me feel better?  
Would you tell me it's okay?

Nothing but an object  
That's all I was  
Nothing but an object  
That's all I am

In the depths of my heart, there lies a love  
A love so strong, yet filled with pain  
A love that brings both joy and sorrow  
A love that once was bright, now dimmed by  
the clouds of heartache

I am caught in a whirlwind of emotions  
A love so intense, it consumes my very being  
But you, oblivious to my feelings  
You are the cause of both my sadness and my  
fleeting moments of happiness

I long to tell you how I feel  
To pour out my soul and lay bare my heart  
But fear grips me in its icy clutches  
And I remain silent, my love unspoken

I watch from afar as you smile and laugh  
Unaware of the storm raging within me  
I hide my pain behind a mask of indifference  
But inside, my heart breaks a little more  
each day

Yet in the midst of all this heartache  
There is a glimmer of hope, a spark of joy  
For even though my love is painful  
It is also pure and true

So I will continue to love you from afar  
To cherish the moments we share  
And to find solace in the bittersweet mix  
Of sadness and happiness that accompanies  
my love.





Art By  
Sebastian Ramirez

# The Cloisters

By Mrs. Cazzalino

The birds  
chime like bells  
calling me home.

The frosted glass,  
plexed with diamonds,  
urges to be looked through.

Unready.  
Unwilling.  
Resentfully  
sharing this quiet reprieve.

The light post,  
was this once shared by Mr. Tumnus?

When  
they built  
and  
brought here  
all the magic  
of the Medieval world,  
did they bring other worlds too?

