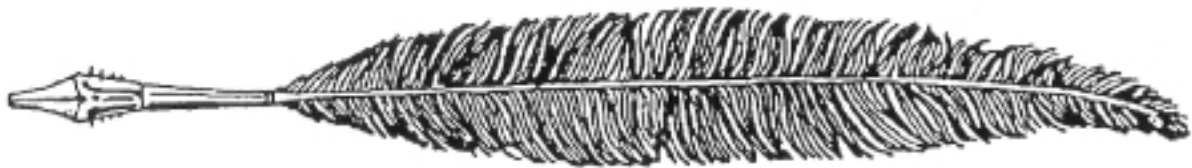


Susquehanna  
UNIVERSITY

# THE APPRENTICE WRITER



Volume 35

\$3

# Introduction

Welcome. *The Apprentice Writer* annually features the best writing and photography from entries we receive each year from secondary schools throughout the United States.

Every September, we send printed copies as a public service by The Daily Item in Sunbury, PA to nearly 3,000 schools.

For full submission guidelines for the 2018 edition of *The Apprentice Writer*, please visit [www.apprenticewriter.com](http://www.apprenticewriter.com)

The submission period runs from January 1st to March 15th, 2018.

Susquehanna's Creative Writing major now enrolls over 170 undergraduate students. The Writers Institute also hosts Creative Writing Day once a year, a day of readings and workshops, giving high school students the opportunity to experience creative writing in college.

If you are interested in learning more about the Creative Writing major and programs related to writing sponsored by the Writers Institute, see the back page or go to [www.susqu.edu/writers](http://www.susqu.edu/writers).

**EDITOR:**  
GLEN RETIEF  
**SELECTION EDITORS:**  
Amy Anderson, Alyssa Coleman,  
Morgan Green  
**FINAL SELECTION EDITOR:**  
Emily Gilman  
**Print & Design Editor:**  
Sydney Curran  
**Web Content Manager:**  
Matthew Dooley  
**Special thanks to:**  
Codie Nevil Sauers

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WRITERS INSTITUTE  
AT SUSQUEHANNA UNIVERSITY

## Penitentiary

Jeremy Hsiao  
WALNUT, CA

People stare at each cell  
for minutes  
and all they saw were things  
to marvel.  
I saw painting prisoners  
trapped behind clear bars  
to preserve the aura of a  
portrait.  
Within a frame, I could watch  
flashes of a life  
through torn, paused VHS  
tapes  
fragmented and placed layer  
upon layer  
to form a jumbled,  
mismatched, puzzle  
forced together incorrectly.  
Every day, people would look  
at the prisoners and say  
"What does he mean to you?"  
Life is too short  
to wonder about the things  
that matter to others  
yet they still ask.  
If stumped, visitors read their  
labels and titles  
as a guide, a broken GPS.  
One such painting stood  
gleaming through white  
strokes  
drawn in door frames,  
and the prisoner meant  
nothing at all,  
disappearing back into  
synchronous lines  
that still beckoned to me with  
its oddly shaped, dark gray  
fingers  
yet pushed away with a palm  
of glass.  
I moved on.

I saw yet another captive  
dipped in marbles of black,  
white  
and everything in between  
shooting stars through the  
sky.  
There were those who  
stood in tangibility  
as sculptures.  
deformed yet perfect  
frenzied radio transmissions  
3D printed with no interior  
except light.  
Those were the ones I admired  
most,  
the 'escapees' still rooted to  
the spot  
with a glistening streak in their  
many eyes  
down through their esophagus  
into the lungs and the heart  
that beats  
in the self portrait from the

garage, titled *RHYTHMS*.  
Those who left would one day  
return  
to admire the minds of  
prisoners in drug-induced  
comas  
death hidden in tar pits  
lounging outside.



## Atlas

Jade Cruz  
TYRONE, PA

With constellations on his  
skin  
and bruises on his hands,  
he takes heavy footsteps  
moving forward despite all  
he carries in his arms.  
He looks sort of frail, but  
mostly tired. No one is  
ignorant enough to call him  
weak. Nor is anyone naive  
enough to ask what he is  
carrying. If people could  
see with more than their  
eyes,

no one would have to ask.  
Everyone would just know.  
It's not hard to suspect,  
really, what all he carries.  
Some say it's the stress of  
so many classes. Others  
believe  
parents are the problem.  
There are even rumors that  
he once went head on into  
a lost battle and hasn't  
been the same since.  
Perhaps all  
of it is true. Or it could  
all be completely wrong.  
But personally I believe I  
know what keeps his arms  
full. It is clear to me that  
he holds nothing less than  
the sky itself, and we  
ought to be in awe of  
the heavy, enduring  
footsteps  
of Atlas.

## Paper Cranes

Meagan R. Thomas  
Coventry, CT

The grey city is masked by an  
aging day of mottled umber  
smog.  
The sky looms,  
threatening thunder.

Asphalt arteries clog with lazy  
traffic.  
Eyeless strangers rush the ash  
sidewalks.  
Steel wires cross the sky  
on rusted bolts and creaking poles.  
The smell of electricity is blind now.

As the day goes darker,  
a cold breeze whistles through the  
hollow city,  
carrying tantalizing insinuations  
of rain  
to wash away the grime.  
Someone brave glances up to see  
thousands of paper cranes  
perching on the telephone lines,  
silently watching,  
waiting.

The breeze stirs their pale wings;  
they incline their wedged heads  
with yours.  
The first drops break on their  
pointed tails  
and your unmasked face.  
The sky fills with rain  
and soggy paper,  
washing the earth through  
the night.

The damp dawn bathes the city  
in rose gold and amber.  
More lift their heads with you,  
looking past bare wires  
to newborn sky.

The cranes are gone.  
You do not ask after them;  
you know no one will understand.  
Perhaps they were finally able  
to fly away.

## I am the Lord, Your Shepherd

Kelechi Nwankwoala  
NEW ROCHELLE, NY

*After four days of deliberation, the jury found former Oklahoma City Police Department Officer Daniel Holtzclaw guilty of multiple counts of rape and sexual assault. On Dec. 10, Holtzclaw, who has been on trial since November 2, was accused of targeting black women in the community he patrolled. All 13 women testified against Holtzclaw in the trial.*

i am just a woman  
and the gospel of today  
is that i am something to be conquered

i  
am high and hospitalized, careening and  
crashing off PCP  
HE  
is Policeman, Hero of the streets, and  
Respected in OKC  
HE  
just wanted to talk but body language betrays  
bodily functions  
HE  
said "you know you got these warrants" and  
somehow my body just knows something  
i  
know that this is much more than a search  
HE  
took me to Dead Man's curve  
HE  
is here to Protect and Serve

peering up  
i think  
i was wrong to have thought my body a temple  
my eyes were watching god  
but he forced me still  
saying "you know this is better than county, right?"  
i just gasped  
the whole time i am staring straight into the night  
i am still losing my voice in that alleyway  
forever i am still that girl with  
her arms outstretched  
and her mind  
reaching far back to the big safety of before  
*This*

I have seen the devil.  
I have walked the valley.  
I am not broken.  
I must speak.



## New York Winters

Chloe Burns  
HAWTHORNE, NY



i've lived seventeen new  
york winters.  
the sky always splits and  
freezes the air around me -  
i lace boots up to my  
knees and pull  
cardigans tigher  
around myself  
i feel the first pangs  
of frost the sharpest,  
like daggers in my side

i was born on the very  
crest of springtime, the  
pinnacle of fast beauty;  
i was always fading, a  
changeling child, a  
maladjusted mortal;  
i was all pale eyes and hair,  
all stolen light and flushed  
cheeks;  
i was the cherry blossom  
tree blooming in the yard,  
just past its prime;  
the only snow i knew was  
the soft caress of petals in  
the soft wind

i've lived seventeen new  
york winters.  
they were all savagely  
beautiful -  
icicles snapping the  
limbs of the cherry  
blossom tree  
icicles curdling in the  
gutters and gushing  
out as crystal shards

icicles falling as godly  
daggers from the roof,  
all savage and  
beautiful

i'm crowned with icicles  
and all my diamonds melt  
in sunlight.  
i'm pale like the frost and  
my blood is lazy in the  
winter,  
circulating thickly under  
wool and leather gloves,  
barely reaching the tips of  
my fingers

i'm a lonely corpse in a  
mausoleum, bones are  
rattling the arctic wind,  
iced over in the night

every winter i hear  
frost on my window,  
always begging to be  
let in, to coil around  
my mirror  
frost on my lips, in my  
hair, always whispering  
darkly to itself

springtime sometimes  
visits me  
she kisses my eyelids, curls  
her well-heeled fingers  
through my nerves,  
leaves defeated, a winged  
Nike fleeing Greece,  
the very picture of defeat;

i curl up under the old  
pine in my backyard and  
sleep in the snow,  
burrowing as if to  
hibernate away my hours  
until the thaw.  
i wake with blue lips and  
white fingertips,  
bleached as a skeleton in  
the winter sun and still  
as a corpse;

i've lived seventeen new  
york winters and always -  
the harbor curls  
against itself,  
retreating from the  
docks  
all the barnacles curl  
up and sleep,  
dreaming of the sun  
all the flowers shiver  
in their beds  
the bulbs sometimes  
forget to wake, too  
entombed to  
remember what they  
were waiting for  
clouds huddle across  
the sky, hurried by  
the whistler's song

the sun burns cold fire, as  
close as it will ever be,  
but the angle is off -  
i cannot catch it in my eyes



## Bridge of Stone

Erin Mahoney  
WEXFORD, PA



### Grandma's House

Mariam Trichas  
BASKING RIDGE, NJ

It seems odd.

Odd that memories could be stored in a stained glass box with an ornately beaded green cover, the side of the box containing a hairline crack, enduring years of being handed down from one generation to the next.

Odd that as if by holding one slightly crumpled piece of paper with the words 'Grandma's House' scrawled across it in black sharpie, I could be transported to that time and place. Holding the wooden beads of her necklace while we talked

in her kitchen.

It's funny because memories are so much more than that. More than a scrap of paper ripped out of a journal. Yet, I continue to collect them in a box. As if, by doing this, they will never be erased from my memory. The details, the emotions, that make them so special. So worthy of being added to this box.

Over time, will I forget the way the sunlight hit her face, making her shine as if she were an angel? Will I remember the unbalanced smile that caused her left cheek to crease more than her right?

When I open the piece of paper that says 'Grandma's House' in ten years, will I recall the scent of pine needles that I smelled as I approached the entryway to her home? The smell of freshly baked apple pie which gently enveloped me in its warmth and comfort as I stepped into her kitchen? The hot chocolate, which provided much needed soothing relief from a stressful day, sweeping away my worries as it washed down my throat, its warmth overtaking me?

Or will I just remember Grandma's House.

# Memento Mori

Jimin Han

SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

*Death, be not proud, though some  
have called thee*

*Mighty and dreadful, for thou  
art not so*

- *Holy Sonnet 10* by John Donne

1. 2016.4.18.

The weather was red. The weather was red and the air tasted of wine. I inhaled a good dose of the sunset's musty breath, losing myself in a soft hike along the trails of memory. Nostalgia shifted like leaves, its movement divine yet somber. One scene in particular has replayed a hundred times over now, but with every play back, it seemed to be losing its light. The scene has been so bright at first, gleaming with brilliance of the stars. Now, it was withered and weathered like a worn-out cassette. Its end was nearing.

Waking from the spell dusk had cast on me I put out my cigarette. The doctor would be outraged if she figured out I was smuggling smokes into the hospital again. She always berated me, like a steely schoolteacher scolding her child, that smoking was prohibited in the building. I would merely respond with a good-natured laugh and put the fire out. But the last time I got caught smoking, after my daughter's Death, she did not say anything. She just took out her own cigarette and kneeled down next to me. Just like that, our sighs clouded the grim hallway of the hospital staircase. But today, it's just me and my half-burnt cigarette, side-by-side, gazing at the sunset, except that there hasn't been a sun in the sky to go down and up again. I don't think the sun has ever risen since that day.

"The suspect is already wanted for several cases of homicide, and authorities have recently charged the suspected serial killer with three further counts of murder. He is currently at large, and the NYPD has identified the suspect as..." the TV raged on and on, apparently about an infamous serial killer who had been on the run for quite some time now. Damn me, how idle had I been, musing so delightedly in the veranda through such shocking news? I smiled, for I knew another, perhaps a more powerful serial killer.

His name is Mori. No one knew his name, save for me. How did I know so well? I caught a glance of the psychopath when he took my daughter, his face concealed in the shadows yet undoubtedly etched with a maniacal calm, on that day in that grimy hospital. Mori preyed on the fear of people, engraving his claws into the consciousness of anyone who dared expose the tiniest sliver of vulnerability. "I could be next", he would make people ponder frantically, and indeed it could just as easily be them who ends up winding up on Mori's mental cutting table as his next victim. He was more than just a murderer. He was a symbol; a symbol of Death. Ironically, he was far from the stereotypical, grotesque butcher-executioner. No beheadings; no autopsies; no messages on walls painted in blood; no traces of violence whatsoever, not even a single scar on the victims. He killed so...naturally. Fear served as his sly accomplice - Fear was the one that got his hands dirty, not Mori. Fear would paralyze the victims, setting the stage; all Mori would have to do is calmly walk up and gaze upon his incapacitated target, subjugating his prize into a cold, limp statue.

My train of thought was interrupted by a phone call.

"Mr. Leto, you've got a mailman

waiting in the lobby. Is it okay if I let him up to your room?" recited the voice.

A clump of uncertainty clogged my throat. I took the receiver from my ears for a moment and hesitated. I looked out to the darkness outside my veranda window.

"Bring him in," I muttered.

A visitor, at this time of day, in this incredibly banal setting - coming to see me. Strange, I thought, as I turned on the faucet to splash my face with some cold water. Then it struck me - Mori - it had to be him. It all made sense now: the weather, the news report, the eerie heaviness that had seemed to be suffocating the life out of both artificial setting of my apartment as well as the natural scenery that surrounded it. Everything had come together to stand at attention in anticipation of Death. I couldn't resist surrendering a dry chuckle, both at the thought that these events had purposefully coincided and that I had only now realized it. It's finally time, I declared. But you see, as much as I knew about Mori, I had never seen him clearly before - no one has. All I have is that shattered glimpse of him when he killed my daughter, cool and composed as can be. But sometimes the quickest of flashes can have lasting effects, for I cannot forget the domineering physical eminence of the man; draped in a charcoal cape, tall, powerful in his stride.

A knock.

"I don't quite see the need for a knock, Mori. The door never is locked." My voice reeked of artificial placidity, my hands busily reaching for the white silk robe dangling in the dresser. The door creaked. And after what felt had been two lifetimes, there he was. Mori, my hell, my heaven, my damna-

tion, my messiah. My Mori. What an odd, fickle thing fate was, for there I was, face-to-face with the killer of my daughter. I indeed was paralyzed, not awed but rather dumbfounded at the sight of a petty youth in his twenties whose obsidian suit was clearly unfit for his shoulders, with no sign whatsoever of any physical dominance to be found. I froze. Where was the fear? To my surprise, Mori just stood there, locking his hollow eyes onto mine. Silence started groping me from my thighs, eerily climbing up to my neck and making her way down again to molest my chins with her fingers. I was starting to gag when Mori strangled the silence with his flagrant whisper.

“Stella - she has your eyes.”

And with Mori’s words, I was blown into a familiar, but unpleasant hospital room. It was the room where Stella’s life had begun - but mine had ended.

2. 2007.8.22.

“She has your eyes,” the doctor trembled through her words as she searched for the correct words to gently articulate her diagnosis Mr. Leto’s daughter, Stella, with autism.

“She’s such an angel, Mr. Leto. She’s such a sweet little girl.” The doctor stroked Stella’s blonde hair. Mr. Leto didn’t look back, instead remaining stiffly fixed in his stance with his head turned, gazing out onto the lawn. The smoke from his cigarette hazed the cloudless sky.

“Smoking is prohibited in this building, sir,” said the doctor crossly. “And on your daughter, as you have noticed, she is clearly different from other children. She doesn’t talk; she won’t cry like other two-year-olds would; she seems aloof. That’s because autism basically isolates her from the rest of the world,” she added.

Yes, he had taken notice of Stella’s peculiar habits. Ever since she was born, she had not spoken to him but in short grunts. That’s why he had taken his daughter, Stella, to the hospital. He was not totally unprepared, but the word “autism” sent a clear blow to his head and erased all thinking.

Mr. Leto put down his cigarette. “So now what? Is there a cure? Or is she going to be like that for her whole life?” Mr. Leto asked as he took off his plastic, thick-rimmed glasses and gingerly rubbed his temples, as he always did whenever he was anxious. Next to the doctor, Stella was showing a profound interest in the ballpoint pen clipped to the upper left pocket of her gown. The little angel finally gathered up the courage to take it out and fiddle with it.

“That’s not how I like to put it, but yes, there is no cure yet, only different therapies and programs to help her blend in. Plus, I have to warn you that she is naturally more prone, due to her condition, to disorders or ailments that affect the brain, such as tumors or brain cancer. You see, patients who have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have a higher portion of cancer-promoting mutations in their brain,” the doctor said as she prodded the pen from Stella’s tiny hand, instead replacing it with a lollipop. “She’s just fragile, Mr. Leto. That’s why she needs extra care,” Mr. Leto turned away, freeing him from the shackles of the truth. “By the way, did you come here alone? Does your work or stay at home?” She pulled out her small handbook. “If she stays at home, it’d serve you guys well for me to give her some instructions.

“Well, I’m a single parent.” The doctor looked up, her glasses perched on her nose. “We’re divorced. I mean...she ran away.” Mr. Leto couldn’t seem to look her in the eyes.

The doctor shifted her gaze to Stella, meeting her with a distressed look. “But you work, don’t you, Mr. Leto?” she asked him.

“Yes, I do work.” This was only partially true. He would work here and there, from time to time. He was only able to work when work gave him permission. Currently he was employed at a construction site, earning fifteen dollars an hour. If the construction were to be completed, he would have to look for another temporary job. That would mean another two to three weeks of nervous calls and curt replies. Until a new position was secured, he and Stella would have to survive on two minimal, ungratifying meals a day. Breakfast would consist of the French fries from the most inexpensive, \$3.49 value meal from the McDonald’s down the street, saving the burgers for slow, piece-by-piece consumption throughout the remainder of the day. “Was it the microwaved dinners that made my wife run away?” Yes, it was indeed his lack of a stable job and perpetual financial shortcomings that finally pushed his wife to abandon them.

Mr. Leto, or Friedrich Wilhelm Leto to be exact, was born on October 15th, 1980. He hadn’t always been poor, for his father had been a priest at a small church in the Bronx and brought home a steady, if not unspectacular, income for the family. However, following his father’s death at age five, his family was thrust into poverty. Friedrich had to work ever since, being allocated into the gloomier quarters of the city. He met his wife at the restaurant at which he used to work, and the two weaved out a delicate love story that could just as well belong in the theaters. She likewise came from a humble background, a poverty-stricken, single-parent family. The couple completed each other; they provided each other with the



love that had been devoid in their childhoods. So they wed, though they could only afford the paperwork, not the ceremony.

But alas, it wasn't long before Friedrich soon learned the harsh realities of marriage, even in ones that began with the most modest hopes of happiness. Marriages without a proper wedding usually end early. And Stella was his wife's parting gift. She was all that Friedrich had left of his family.

"In that case, you might want to hire somebody to take care of Stella. You see, she needs that care," said the doctor. "No, just give me the instructions. I'll be the one taking care of her," Friedrich said.

3. 2014. 4. 17.

Friedrich was met with an outburst of noise and a soft thump as if something had made a plush crash landing on his hips. Looking around, he was met with that cherubic, innocent face of his daughter, painted with that precious expression that only he got to witness every day. At the doorway, stood the nanny who looked after Stella, also laughing at the pleasant surprise. His plan to surprise his daughter with an unexpected party was unsuccessful, but nevertheless, he was granted a rare chance to be with his girl while she was awake. He swiftly took out of the fridge strawberry shortcake, an aberration from the cheap white cakes they had every year.

"Happy Birthday, Stella." Friedrich kissed Stella's forehead as she blew out the candles. Stella beamed silently, being occupied with the adornments on her cheap birthday hat. "So you're home early today, Mr. Leto," commented the daytime nanny as she took his coat and hung it on the dry, cracked wall next to the door.

"Told my boss about Stella's birthday. My boss let me go this time, but not without some prodding and pleading," Friedrich proclaimed over a spoonful of cake. He made his way to the kitchen, grabbing a glass full of cold water, and sat next to Stella. "Would you mind staying until 6 tomorrow?" He took a sip. "I'll need to put in some more time tomorrow."

"Sure, but I have to leave exactly at 6. I have to get to another babysitting job," replied the nanny.

"That will be fine," said Friedrich. "Thanks."

"What about Stella?" She asked.

"I'll just have to rush my way home," he shrugged.

Stella's 9th birthday party was lavish and extraordinary. Stella, Friedrich, and the daytime nanny had been gathered around the dining table. Friedrich brought in the small cake around noon, after barely securing an afternoon off from the church where he worked as a janitor. How good it was to see his daughter under the warm glaze of the sun! It had been only a few months now, that he was able to hire a nanny. Finally, he could work without having to leave Stella alone at home. Although his financial situation had improved slightly, Stella's health issues still presented a long-term, unexpected source of expenditure. The doctor was insisting that Stella's increasingly frequent bouts of shaky hands and dizziness were a sign of an imminent brain disease. As a result, Stella had been forced to undergo arduous check-ups at the hospital. The payments were a problem, but what hurt Friedrich the most was seeing his daughter get eaten up and spit out again and again by cold machines, the life drained out of her time after time. That's why he had tried so dearly to be on time for her

birthday party - to raise her spirits.

That night, Friedrich sunk into a sleepless pool of thought, lying in bed with one hand under his head, the other around Stella's shoulders, accompanied by Stella's gentle snoring. A good day, another day that was now slowly nearing its end only to bring on a new set of struggles comes the next morning. Again he had managed to survive, scratch and claw his way to cling on. He wasn't sure if he was grateful for the fact that he still had life, or rueful for everything with which life had burdened him. "Just give me a reason," he pleaded in his mind. "If you don't love me, just give me a reason." He sighed, for he knew it was going to be just another desperate appeal in a long list of unanswered prayers. Snapping himself out of hypnosis with a yawn, Friedrich turned to face Stella, stroking her hair. It was soothing to see her sleep. Her shell-pink lips were delicately pursed together, and a soft, furry track in the groove of her upper lip led way to her reticent nose. It was a pity that he could not see her eyes while she was sleeping. Stella's eyes held the depths of the stars, so deep and full that he would always find shelter there, even during the darkest of nights. Maybe Stella was God's way of saying sorry. Too drowsy to think any longer, Friedrich closed his eyes and slipped into a deep slumber...

Then it was morning. Friedrich showered, grabbed some toast and water, and carefully left the apartment, trying hard not to wake Stella up. Then he set out to the church, where he worked as a janitor. He changed into his ash-gray uniform and set forth to another tedious routine of sweeping and mopping the floor.

4. 2014. 4. 18.

The clock nervously chirped 5 o'clock, imploring Friedrich to hasten

his pace. He looked up. Even when he was mopping the floors of the church, his mind was fixed on the modest, messy floors of his apartment. In an hour's time, the nanny would set off to her next workplace. "Would Stella be okay?" He thought. He desperately hoped that the nanny would be sensible enough to put Stella to sleep before she left the house. Regardless, he would bolt down to the apartment as soon as the clock hit 6. Somewhat relieved, he went back to soaking the soggy sponge in the half-spilled water, not being able to do much else saves for waiting for the clock to do its work.

But then a shrill ring pierced his right thigh, and jolted upward to clutch his heart. It was a phone call.

"Hello?" answered Friedrich. It was the nanny. His face got grimmer and grimmer as she informed him, over discontinued sobs, that a severe stroke had hit Stella, and that she had been rushed to the hospital.

So many thoughts flooded into his head that his head became blank. Ironically, as his head went blank, his body started to clear. He darted out of the church, without giving it a second glance, and sprang to where his daughter was. He shouldn't have left Stella alone in this world, though he knew it was nobody's fault. Her time had come.

The Stella that was lying in front of Friedrich now was nothing like his little girl, his angel, and his world. Her face was pale; her lips twitched; her eyes flipped, and a barren glare had replaced her starry gaze. Her hands were tightly clenched into rock-firm fists. She gave an occasional fit, shuddering the little life she had left into thin air. Friedrich turned away from her bed and raised his chin to wipe his tears.

The pins that supported Friedrich's legs seemed to have slid away, for he collapsed, knee-first on to the ground. His head dangled from his neck, and two hands rolled into a rocky fist. No nurses, doctors, and patients approached him. But instead, they devoted a tad more focus to what they were originally doing. Nurses tended to their patients, with a more shrill voice and bigger actions, while doctors furiously scribbled through their clipboards. And patients and their families started to share aggressive hugs.

And the day after her ninth birthday, Stella died on a cold, desolate hospital bed. Yes, Stella was murdered - murdered by a lad called Death.

5. 2016. 4. 18.

"I don't care if she has my eyes. I don't want to know how beautiful she is, Mori," the paralysis loosened as the intense beating in my heart freed my limbs. "You dare speak her name, after what you did to her?" I couldn't resist blurting out loud.

"You know that wasn't me, Friedrich." Mori's voice carried an exceptional softness, and I loathed how it soothed me. It was indirect contrast to his outward appearance, which was quite abominable.

"Look, I know what you had to go through. I know what it feels like to be abandoned, to be cornered into a position where you can't do even the slightest thing to fight back. You suffer not for some greater good or reason, but you suffer just for the sake of suffering." Mori slowly approached, his glance firmly fixed upon me. I collapsed on to my bed. He was right; he was absolutely right. I tried to process his words in my head, but my attention was diverted as a teardrop

trickled down my nose. The teardrop marred into a sob, halting our conversation.

"You're different from others. Imposters think they know so much about life and Death and give illustrious speeches. But that is ridiculous, foolish - it's like a blind man trying to describe a landscape. They've never lived in the ghettos, scratching away for minimum wage, all with an autistic girl attached to him. They're aloof, arrogant, and abstract - a pity. What disgusts me the most is when they say that people should not give up on their lives, for after a storm comes a rainbow, as light always follows the darkness," Mori scowled.

"Nonsense! Who says life should be virtuous and Death blasphemous? Life is servitude. People claim themselves to be superior, but they are chained to money, to health, to church, to time, and ultimately, to Death. Then why worship servitude and desecrate emancipation?" Mori was bellowing at the top of his lungs now. "But you see, Death is liberation. Death is escape. Death is a choice." He calmed himself down and kneeled to stroke my hair. "And you, I respect you because you know it. And because you have the guts and wisdom to make that choice."

Abruptly, he sprang to his feet, rushed to the veranda door, and thrust it open. Then he waved at me, as if he wanted me to come join him in the already-murky night sky. I stood up reluctantly, cautiously taking step after step towards Mori. Above our heads, a brilliant yellow dotted the vast palate of navy-blue. Mori and I draped us over the handrails and stared at the spectacle in silence. Another trail of tears trickled out from my closed eyes. Finally, someone spoke to me. Mori spoke to me. Mori was doing something that no one, not even my father, my mother, my wife, nor my Stella could do.

"Friedrich," he murmured.

"Friedrich," I turned to look at him.

"I see Stella over there," he pointed at a particularly bright star in the sky. Indeed, their Stella was, her twinkle waving down at me.

"Sprout, my damned wings, sprout!"

"Fly. Fly. Fly. Let me soar once more."  
"Let me soar once more."

My last words echoed in silence, as I spread my wings and soared up into the star-lit sky. One short sleep past, I woke eternally.

6. 2016. 4. 18.

The door creaked open as the mailman tiptoed into the hospital room of Mr. Leto. He had been standing there, waiting for Mr. Leto's reply, when the door wasn't even locked!

"I'm sorry to trespass, Mr. Leto, but

I've brought you mail," the mailman murmured, both irritation and fatigue noticeable in his voice. "You weren't answering, so I wondered if..." He stopped in mid-speech to locate the source of the eerie silence.

"Mr. Leto?" there was curiosity in his voice.

"Mr. Leto...?" now there was a tinge of fear.

Of course, he had delivered mail to a mental hospital before and therefore was not alien to such atmosphere, but he preferred not to revisit any place like that. Something was wrong. The mailman could sense it in the hodgepodge of tattered clothes that were scattered over the bed and the stained, tangled blankets strewn across the floor. His footsteps echoed in the air with hollow resonance. There was an absence of life in the room that clogged his breath, a creeping feeling of suffocation that he himself could also fall victim to it. And the smell. That smell. You see, the sense of smell

is what hits a person first, and is usually never wrong. What the mailman smelled in this room was Death. Yes, the room reeked of the stale traces of a fresh Death.

The wide-open veranda door seemed to testify his bold speculation. Indeed, when the mailman staggered out the door and managed the courage to glance down, he found himself staring into the red, lifeless body of Friedrich Leto.



## Little Lullabies

Isabella Gonzalez

LIVINGSTON, NJ

## Antiquity

Eva Erickson

EAST AMHERST, NY

something about this old town  
thorns in housewife smiles  
tumble through cornfield down

no one talks about the dark side  
of the light  
shadows enveloping ground to  
sky  
crowding out the night

breath fogged up windowpane  
i can't tell moon what i'm  
whispering  
ink splotch on cotton stain

there's cracks in your smile  
shut, bolt door tight  
come now, dear, stay a while.

A sunset concert transitions to starry night  
because who would dare to break a holy  
matrimony between the ears and the voice?  
The man sings of blurriness and isolation as  
he bashed the black and white keys. He spreads  
his soul like thick amethyst jam on whole wheat  
toast. The rhythm drumming their hearts tells them  
that in some cases, words can speak louder than  
actions.

As unsteady, patched couch acting as a nest.  
We promise to part once the Calibri credits  
roll down, yet someone refuses to press pause.  
I can't promise it's not me. What can I say?  
Dozing off on a beating heart is too big an  
opportunity to pass up.

The moon watching over me as I glide on the  
saltwater like a stage diva. If I squint my eyes  
tight enough, I can make out a rocky reflection.  
The painting lionizes me, contrary to the mirror's  
insults. The crest of the sea tickles my neck and  
whispers, "You're here. That's all I want."

## Driving from Ashkelon to Tel Aviv

Dan Rudiak  
TENAFLY, NJ

The sky had never seen such surprise and splendor as it held  
Two dancers meeting at mid-point, mindful of their measurements.  
Their flames of fume and vile plume pushed and pushed as  
They executed the can can, cha cha, and conga with ease.  
Arcing forward as a foreword, one furiously dropped  
Into a spiral and fought to spare the people from the flaming,  
Concave con posing as a great phenomenon.  
I watched its twirls and whirls of gust as a must.  
Of course the con's course would be the innocent, and Lord knows  
How to assess the devastation and the downpour of war.  
Lore tore through both of them.  
A story of sacrifice seized a nation.  
A story of resistance seized a world.  
Wrongs do not equate to rights but here the dancers  
Had flown past their wrongs, kited their rights, collided.  
I watched and caught my escaping breath to the aftereffect of this show.  
Dust loomed, daunting me.  
To one storyteller, a terror was an object close in a rear view mirror, yet  
Other storytellers spoke differently.  
Indifferent, their cause paused.  
They poised up, looking destroyed.  
They blamed. They sang. It rang in my head.

## Charlie

William Jasey Roberts  
CHRISTIANSBURG, VA

Rubbing his temples, a young man of around nineteen stumbled unto a brick curb. He pushed his way into a convenience store, nodding at the store clerk before trudging to the back of the aisles.

The young man grabbed a bottle of Tylenol, breaking the plastic around the cap with his fingernails and quickly unscrewing the bottle. He emptied a few pills into his hand, and then grabbed an energy drink from the cooler to down the tablets with.

The clerk at the front of the store craned his neck so he could see over the aisles. The young man swished the drink back and forth in his mouth before he finally swallowed it, waving hello at the clerk as he walked back.

"Is there anything else I can get for you?" The clerk asked, carefully scanning the already-open energy drink.

"No, thank you." The young man said, scratching the top of his forehead.

"You got a headache?"

The young man looked up at the clerk. "Yeah, I just studied for, like, eight hours."

The clerk nodded, proceeding to scan the pill bottle.

"Also, I've gotten migraines since I was a kid." The young man added on at the end, uncomfortably drumming the front desk with his fingertips.

The clerk printed out a receipt, handing it to the young man.

"Sorry man, school's tough. If you could sign that little slip at the bottom for me, that'd be great." The clerk said, digging around in the register for the young man's change.

The young man scrambled around in his pockets, finally finding a click pen. He signed Charlie W. on the receipt with a tired flourish, handing it back to the store clerk.

"Ok," the clerk said, "you have a nice night, alright?"

"Yeah, thanks." Charlie said, taking another swig of the energy drink and grabbing the pill bottle as he opened the front door.

In his peripherals, Charlie noticed a large red truck skidding down the street. It swung too far onto the left side of the road, and then quickly tried to correct itself, sending the front end into a spiral, screeching until its left side slammed into a light post. Smoke began to plume out of the front hood.

"Oh. Oh shit." Charlie said, looking back at the store clerk, who was leaning over the front desk on his palms to see what was going on. Charlie looked back at the wreck, seeing that the airbag had deployed, inflating to an almost cartoonish extent. Parts of the bag were pushing out of the car window.

Charlie put his energy drink on the sidewalk, breaking out into a run to the truck, feeling the bottle of pills shaking in his pocket as he ran. He looked both ways as he ran across the street, seeing no other cars in sight. The airbag was appearing to increase in size, pushing itself into the back of the car.

As he approached the truck, Charlie realized that it was no airbag.

A hulking mass of fat was growing, growing, growing. Expanding, putting spider-web cracks in the windshield until it finally shattered. He watched as the truck's suspension began to sag, and as the side doors finally gave way to the layers and layers of cellulite and skin.

Charlie took a step backward, finally switching direction and sprinting back to the convenience store. He pushed the front door open, looking at the store clerk.

"You need to call an ambulance. There's something really wrong with that guy out there."

"What do you me-" The clerk started, but then trailed off.

Charlie felt himself begin to unbuckle, his legs turning to cottage cheese. He fell onto the ground, his skin wriggling upon impact with the linoleum. He felt his body quickly begin to lose shape, expanding down and out. The sides of his fat began to cut into the doorframe, eventually squeezing so parts of him were sticking out both sides of the door.

Charlie still had his vision, though it was blurred and unfocused, he could still see in a general direction. He could still hear.

And so Charlie the blob witnessed the clerk's transformation, too.

The clerk formed a more droopy, bulbous shape. The clerk's face bulged, losing all recognizable facial features in the enlarging mass. His clothes ripped apart and he continued growing until layers of fat were flowing over the front register.

Charlie's initial thoughts were panicked and afraid:

What do I do?

What is this?

Will I be stuck like this forever?

Will I ever see my family again?

I have a midterm I have to take tomorrow and if this makes me miss it I'm going to be really pissed off.

Charlie ended up missing his midterm.

Charlie missed a few midterms, actually.

The power in the store eventually went out, flickered back on for a few days, and then went out again, making the nights unbearably dark. Charlie could sometimes hear the howling of coyotes in the distance, making his creamy flesh quiver.

A few weeks after that, the gallon jugs of milk they kept in the back went sour, wafting its way over to Charlie. He thought about moving out of the way of the stench, trying to roll somewhere else, somewhere where he could look at something else. But an overwhelming sense of futility had placed itself in the back of Charlie's mind, constantly reminding him that there would be no point to moving, even if he could move.

Charlie's panicked thoughts were gradually replaced with cynicism and apathy, often having conversations with himself about pop culture or really anything that he found interesting. He accepted the fact that this was his life now, the frame of a convenience store door cutting into his body, getting more and more sore as they days went on.

And one day, months after the night Charlie turned into blob Charlie, a brick slammed through the convenience store window.

A young woman, maybe only a few years older than Charlie, carefully slipped her way through the hole in the window, stepping over the broken glass in her tennis shoes. Her shirt still had the tag on it, and the shoes were plasticky and relatively scuff-free.

She ran into the view of Charlie, who

looked at her tiredly. This was the first normal human being Charlie had seen in months.

She looks like Diane from Cheers, Charlie thought vaguely.

"Listen to me." The woman said, glancing back and forth at Charlie and the clerk. "The both of you. I've figured it out. You need to think about being a human again. And it's the only thing that you need to think about."

I wonder if she has a boyfriend. Charlie thought.

"It might take a while. Like, a few days. But you need to focus. Keep all of your energy on that one thought, and you'll go back to normal."

Charlie tried to remember if he had a girlfriend, but quickly got a headache.

The young woman stayed for a few more minutes, talking to the both of them, Charlie couldn't lock onto anything she was saying. Her voice was distorted and distant, like she was trying to talk to him through a toilet paper roll.

She left after that, and Charlie went back to trying to say his alphabet backwards. The farthest he ever got was Q before he had to start over again.

The young woman came back the day after that.

Charlie hadn't noticed until she pointed it out, but the swelling mass that was once the store clerk had gone down a bit. The clerk's fat had receded back behind the register again.

The young woman focused on Charlie, a sense of urgency in her voice.

"I know it's hard, thinking only about one thing. But it's something you need to train yourself to do. You'll get into this mindset, this rhythm of thinking, and from then on, it's the only way you'll be able to think. You need to think about the people you're doing this for, and most importantly, you need to think about yourself."

The young woman's words struck a chord in the mounds of flesh that had once been Charlie. He was filled with a sudden warmth, his heart grew three sizes, that sort of thing.

It was a slow process that was continuously halted by dread and self-hatred. The clerk had turned completely back to normal within a few days. By that point, Char-

lie was still pushing into the sides of the doorframe, although he was noticeably smaller.

The clerk looked around for a second, and people quickly arrived through the hole in the convenience store window, wrapping the clerk in a towel and giving Charlie earnest glances. Charlie never saw the store clerk again.

After that, Charlie was fuelled by his loneliness.

What kept Charlie from losing track of his thoughts was the young woman. She'd reappear day after day, giving him words of encouragement.

One day, when Charlie's mass was forming the vague, lumpy shape of a human, she brought a fresh set of clothes, laying them in front of him. She set a pair of sneakers on top of them.

"These are for you when you become a human again. Not if, when. You're going to do it tomorrow, and I'm going to be there with you the entire time."

Her words were cloudier than ever, but Charlie didn't need to understand them. He now had only one thing on his mind, one pure unadulterated purpose.

Turning into a monster was easy. Turning out of one was jolting and uncomfortable.

He felt his eyes slide out of his skull and into their normal position, he felt his mouth open, skin that had grown between his lips tearing away. He used his lungs for the first time in months, the oxygen burning his throat. His muscles and bones locked back into place, and the shroud that had covered his brain for so long was finally lifted.

He looked up, the young woman standing there with a crowd of other people.

And Charlie was lying on his stomach, naked.

"Could you, uh, hand me those clothes over there?"

She handed him the pair of sweatpants from the pile,

"Could you turn away, please?"

The crowd of people looked at each other, and then slowly turned around. The woman smiled and turned with them.

Charlie quickly stood up and slid the sweatpants on.

"Are we good?" She asked.

"Maybe let me get the shirt on too."

Charlie said, grabbing it off the floor.

When the woman turned around, Charlie was leaning against the door, trying to put his sneakers on.

"Do they fit alright?" She asked.

"Yeah, yeah. They're good." Charlie said, wincing.

"Are you sure?"

"Yup. Snug as a rug."

The young woman hugged him. "I knew you could do it."

"What was that?" Charlie asked, looking at the crowd in front of him.

"We don't know, but it happened to everyone." She said. "We've all reformed, we've gotten better. We helped each other."

"What- What's your name?"

"Oh- uh, Alyssa."

Charlie smiled at her, starting to feel a sudden trembling in his arm.

He looked down at it. It was starting to bubble and expand, and he was losing focus of where he could move it.

Charlie's heart rate began to raise, and he cover his arm with his other hand

"What's going on?" He asked.

"Well, that's the other thing." Alyssa said. "You have to keep thinking about it. Or else you'll turn into one of those things again."

Charlie looked down at the shoes that made his toes bend backwards, wondering where they could possibly take him from here.

Charlie and Alyssa did their research when they moved into a new neighborhood. It was at that time that Alyssa was pregnant with the baby, and the doctor had warned her and Charlie to avoid any mental fatigue, on the chance that she'd lose her focus.

Thinking about staying a human was a second nature to Alyssa; she never showed any sign of struggling with it. She could watch movies, listen to music, exercise, and even read books with that thought constantly humming in the back of her head: stay human, stay human.

She'd even admitted to Charlie about going for hours without thinking about it and not seeing so much as a ripple in her skin.

Their neighborhood was nice, very low people-to-blob ratios, and it received little rainfall, to the point that there hadn't

been a storm in years. The realtor offered them a sizable suburban three-bedroom, two-bathroom residence.

They made their life there. Alyssa had the baby, Charlie finished school and went to work at a local construction firm as the bookkeeper.

Alyssa wanted a girl more than anything, already planning on the name Cecilia. She was going to call her "Sissy" for short.

Things never really worked out the way she wanted them to. After a few more months, Christopher was born.

The name was Charlie's idea.

"We can still call him Sissy." Charlie said as the doctor handed the baby to Alyssa.

"The kids at school are going to kick the shit out of him."

"He can always change it back to Chris."



Charlie pulled one of the blind shades down, looking across the street at the Selick residence. Matty Selick, someone Charlie had gone to school with, was being removed from his front yard. The removal crew slid his flippery body on top of a forklift, attempting to load Matty into the back of a garbage truck. The job ended up taking three people, one to operate the forklift, and two more to hold the edges of fat that were attempting to flop off of it.

Charlie felt his hand begin to lose its shape, so he quickly closed the blind and thought about how much he loved being able to see with his own eyes and breathe with his own lungs.

"Charlie, dinner's ready," his wife called from the dining room.

Charlie turned and walked away from the door, tentatively glancing back at the blind shades and thinking about the time back in school when Matty got caught giving out free cigarettes to students who pledged to vote him student council.

His wife had made Asian chicken in the oven and put some rice in the cooker they had gotten as an anniversary gift. Heaping some onto his plate, he noticed that it looked dry, almost wishing she'd fried it in a pan.

"Can you get Sissy?"

Charlie was just setting his plate down as she said it. "Oh, um, yeah."

He turned and walked down the hall to Sissy's room, turning the door knob.

Sissy was sitting in a chair, staring at a white wall in silence.

"Hey, bud, it's time for dinner."

Sissy turned and looked at him, smiling after a quick moment of confusion. "Ok."

They both went back into the dining room, where Alyssa had already sat down and begun to eat. Charlie thought about how right he was about the rice. He needed something to give it a little bit more flavor.

"Honey, do we have any soy sauce?"

Alyssa looked up, taking a minute to finish chewing her food. "No, I threw it away. We need to cut down on sodium."

Charlie clicked his tongue and then nodded, clanking his fork against his plate when he tried to get another bite.

Sissy was holding his fork like a shovel, attempting to scoop a piece of chicken over and over again, but continuously having it roll off, his father watching him do this.

"Let me get that for you." Charlie said, plucking the piece of chicken with his fork and holding it out for Sissy to eat. The boy ate it whole.

Alyssa glared at Charlie. "You can't do that with him. He needs to learn how to do things on his own without losing focus."

After a beat, Charlie said "Is that why we make him stare at a wall all day?"

"The school recommends we do it. They need a clean slate to work with so they can work on his attention skills."

"I like the wall." Sissy said, still chewing his chicken.

Alyssa looked at Charlie. Charlie looked at his rice.

"Matty Selick's getting removed from his home with a forklift."

"Who's that?"

"A guy from high school. A friend."

"I mean, hopefully they can get him the help he needs."

Charlie nodded. "Well, it's just that- I don't know- I think it was wrong- what they were doing to him."

"What do you mean?"

"They just looked like they were disturbing him, you know? It's not like he lost control at work or in the bathroom or anything, he just did it in his front yard when

he was taking out the trash. He seemed fine there. Selick was never a happy guy; he had all kinds of loss in his life, and I always thought the only way he could be happy was if he lived simply. But when they removed him, it didn't look natural."

Alyssa did a half-smile. "We still have procedures for that kind of thing, honey. This is what we pay taxes for, this is what we teach our kids."

Sissy picked up another piece of chicken and popped it in his mouth. "Where do they take the people who turn into monsters?"

Alyssa and Charlie looked at him.

"It doesn't matter as long as you don't turn into one," Alyssa said, leaning in close to her son, "so make sure you never, ever give up, okay? Never."

"Ok." Sissy said, his face like a statue.

Charlie stayed at home for his job. He found himself not leaving the house nearly as much as he used to, and when he did leave the house, it was primarily to pick Sissy up from school.

His job consisted of long hours sitting at home and going over paperwork, memorizing people's names without losing his focus, and quickly stopping the bubbling when he did.

Alyssa was pressuring him for another kid. He understood why she wanted it, but making the first one was hard enough for him. He almost lost control and crushed her a few times.

He expected something different from getting Sissy, like having a kid would make his life easier somehow. He knew having a kid was demanding, but when Alyssa was pregnant with Sissy, Charlie always thought the stress would be helpful. Cathartic, in a way. Having a kid would take his mind off things.

He got a call from the school one day.

"Mr. Walker?"

"Yes, that's me."

"I'm Madison Connolly, the principal at Simmerson Elementary."

"Is everything okay?"

"Yes, everything's fine. We just need you to come pick up your son."

Sissy's blob was a bit more flaky, and a lot smaller than Charlie's, but it was still heavy. When Charlie arrived at the school, they were forklifting his son out into the parking lot, tiny flecks of his pale skin

peeling away in the sunlight. He looked like a giant raisin.

"Can you just put him in the trunk?" Charlie asked the removal crew, putting a hand to his forehead.

The supervising crew member handed Charlie a clipboard. "You need to sign this form stating that you took possession of your daughter after this incident."

"It's a boy," Charlie said.

The crew member looked at him. "Pardon?"

"It's my son. He's not a girl."

"The- uh, school told me the kid's name was Sissy."

"Nevermind." Charlie said, signing the document.

The crew member took the clipboard back from him, taking a quick look at the other workers loading Sissy into Charlie's car. "One more thing." He said, grabbing a small pamphlet from his back pocket. "This is always an option if, you know, you have trouble turning him back."

It was for one of the rehabilitation facilities.

The worker handed it to him. "You aren't obligated to take the kid to it because he's a minor, but it's still an option for you. And personally, as a parent myself, I think it would be the best thing for him."

Charlie looked at the pamphlet. "Thank you."

It took Charlie half an hour to get Sissy out of the trunk and roll him through the driveway. Pieces of gravel and dirt clung to the bloated mass. Charlie was reminded of when he built snowmen as a kid.

The front door was just wide enough to squeeze Sissy through. Charlie wanted to roll him into his room, but was completely out of breath before he left the kitchen. Charlie felt his own arm start to expand, so he quickly staggered into the living room and laid down on the couch. He looked over at the side of Sissy's blob, only a little bit visible from the edge of the kitchen.

"I'm so sorry, buddy." He said.

"We have to take him." Alyssa said, pacing around the room and taking frantic glances at the blob sitting in their kitchen. "It's the only way we can help."

Charlie sat at the kitchen table, glaring at her. "I keep hearing that word; help. We have to help him, Charlie." "It's the only way

to help him, Charlie. Why can't we help him? Like when you helped me when we met?"

"Charlie, that was before we had systems in place. Systems designed to rehabilitate the debilitated. He needs professional care."

Charlie raised his voice. "Do you know what they do to people in those facilities?"

"Oh god!" Alyssa shouted, running her hands through her hair, tugging at the roots.

"They leave you there. They lock you in a cell- as if you could move at all- and they leave you there. There's a queue of thousands of people they have to treat, they do it one at a time, and you're always signed as last on the list. It could be years- decades, even- before we see our son again."

"But it works, Charlie! It works! People come back completely fixed and never have another incident again. We could live our lives with our son, and never have to worry about becoming one of those things again."

"Why is that so bad? What are you so afraid of?"

Alyssa looked at him, incredulous. "What aren't you afraid of?"

Charlie peered at Sissy, whose swelling hadn't gone down at all. Sissy didn't know (or maybe didn't even care) to try.

"I'm not afraid of living. I'm not afraid of turning into a monster again or of losing you or of my sodium intake or of any shit like that. I'm just not afraid anymore."

Alyssa said nothing.

Charlie continued. "I was thinking the other day, when they took Matty and loaded him into a garbage truck. I was thinking: What's even the point of living in fear of becoming this thing, when being the thing itself isn't nearly as bad as thinking about it all the time?"

At that moment, Charlie felt his one chin sag and turn into several. He clutched desperately at his gullet, but his arms started to turn to paste and drop down to his hips. The seams of his shirt were beginning to rip. Charlie fell to his knees, quickly losing the capacity of his lungs.

He thought about all of those long nights he spent in the convenience store, quickly getting a hold of himself.

He regained control of his arms, push-

ing himself back up onto his feet; his face and chest swelling back down to normal size.

Alyssa gaped at him. "Does this happen often?"

"No." Charlie said, looking at his arm.

After a pause, Alyssa said "Maybe you should both go there."

"Oh my god."

"No, seriously. This could help the both of you."

Charlie turned away from her, beginning to push Sissy out of the kitchen and down the hall. There seemed to be a slight imperfection in the hallway; it had a small incline that caused Sissy to roll backwards whenever Charlie stopped to catch his breath.

Alyssa followed behind him. "Stop, Charlie! Stop it!"

Charlie ignored her, his muscles aching and his brain pumping against his skull.

"You need help. You need serious help. You and your son." Alyssa yelled, gesturing at Charlie and the blob.

Charlie finally got Sissy to the end of the hall, putting him in a position where he couldn't possibly roll away. He turned to look at his wife, who was hunched over with a look of desperation on her face.

"Why did you keep coming to see me? At the convenience store?"

Alyssa squinted at him. "What?"

"Why did you come every day to talk to me?"

"You were tired, and after the clerk guy left, you were alone. I knew you couldn't stay there forever."

"So then why did we get married?"

"What?"

"Why did we get married, buy a house, and have a kid together if our relationship began and ended in that store?"

"Because we loved each other."

Charlie lost control at that point.

It was instantaneous, like someone had hooked him up to a helium tank. He was bigger than he had ever been in the convenience store, the sides of his body pushing into the walls. He expanded outward, a tidal wave of flabby, watery fat that almost crushed Alyssa, who was running back down the hallway.

For the first time in 25 years, Charlie turned into a blob again.

The last thought Charlie had before

a shroud of apathy was thrown over his brain was:

Wow, look how big I'm getting.

It took the removal crew seven days to get Charlie out of the hallway. They discussed with Alyssa the idea of bulldozing the house to try to get an easier way to Charlie and the kid. She kindly declined.

The best solution they had was bringing in a tub of grease and lathering up shovels with it, trying to dig him out. The process was long and grueling, but they eventually got him out of the hall and through the kitchen. They then quickly rolled the kid's blob out the same way. The hallway walls were stained black with grease and skid marks from the shovels.

Alyssa watched as they loaded Sissy into a garbage truck, already most of the way full with the blobs of other people.

One of the workers gestured at Charlie. "This is the biggest one I've ever seen. There's no way we can fit him into this truck."

"Just push him into that ditch over there. We'll send a truck for him over the weekend." The supervising worker said.

The workers forced the behemoth into an irrigation ditch, their chests heaving after their work was done. They walked back over to the truck, shutting the back and grabbing onto the railing on the side as it started to pull away.

Charlie watched them take his son.

Alyssa put her head in her hands, rubbing her eyes over and over again.

When she finally looked up, everything was significantly darker. For a moment, she thought a cloud was passing above her head.

The blob pushed itself out of the ditch, blocking out the sun and towering over the power lines. A flock of birds broke its path in order to avoid it.

The blob rolled down the street where the truck had gone with a certain determination, its flesh sticking and unsticking itself from the pavement.

Alyssa watched, her mouth open, feeling uncomfortable, terrified, and for the first time in a while, just a little bit happy.



## Laughable

Badriah Moussa

POTTSTOWN, PA

It's almost laughable,  
how a single action can set forth a whirl  
A whirl that spins and  
rolls and  
tumbles and  
shakes you up  
within it.

It's almost laughable,  
how it takes your breath away.  
How it leaves you shaking and  
gasping and  
crying.

It's almost laughable.  
But not quite.





# Morning Sahara

Michelle Mulé  
GREENWICH, CT



## His Stories of the Seas

Taylor Burgin  
MIAMI, FL

How he loved his secluded waters  
at day break,  
he'd long for blue bays.

And I know father's hands will  
return sunned and salted.

He lowers to wade through

black jade  
of freshwater mussel-shells  
to bring home to me,  
alongside stories of sails against  
the chill of dawn.

And he knows I'll ask  
of the shell white foam  
that surfaces buoyantly on the  
world withdrawn  
calling him home,  
*he will have novels.*

He will return with dusk on his  
shoulders  
and the new lines the sun drew  
across his skin.

My father will set out to his reverie  
on a motor boat strung with the  
water and sun  
together.

# My Fourteen Days of Color

Allison Jung

SAN DIEGO, CA

I.

I awoke to the laughter of children outside as they capered down the street with a new liveliness that I couldn't see before. A flower petal tinted with baby pink tumbled through my window. The cherry blossoms are coming.

II.

The following morning, I perfected a delicate swirl on top of my latte. I glanced out my window and was greeted with the rapid transformation of buds into puffy flowers. A taxi stopped in front of the apartment next door. A woman tiptoed out, her lush jet-black hair cascading down her back. Naomi, is that you?

III.

I awkwardly approached your door, hoping that the glimpse I captured of you was real and not just another illusion in my mind. I knocked on your door gently, but my heart pounded an incessant rhythm as the door slowly opened.

You grew out your hair, yet your eyes still harbored the same bliss that I noticed back in ninth grade.

"Hi, can I help you?" you said.

I tried to find a sign of familiarity or surprise on your face but nothing special. I'm a stranger to you.

"Uh—welcome! I'm Yuri." I tried to conceal the upsetting desolation growing in my heart. "I live right next door, and I was wondering if you want me to show you around sometime?"

Why would I say that?

"Naomi," you said shaking my hand. "I haven't been in Tokyo since high school, so that'd be great!"

Maybe I just couldn't help it.

IV.

I met you back in the first week of ninth grade. Chance brought us together, setting us up as biology partners. You asked me for a piece of paper, so my first impression of you was an unprepared annoyance, but time changed everything. We bonded over our confu-

sion about the cardiovascular system and the wonders of good seafood.

Reminiscing our obsession with tuna and sushi, I chose a notable fish market as our first stop.

"Where are you from?" I asked.

"Down by Osaka."

Of course. I knew you attended college there, so why did I bother to ask? It likely wasn't out of amiability; I guess I needed to feel like we weren't strangers who just met.

I heard someone behind me mention that tomorrow is full bloom.

V.

In honor of full bloom, I brought you to the famed Imperial Palace—even though we had to face the horrific crowds. We rented a boat and paddled across a moat to admire the flowers from the comfort of a river. I helplessly glimpsed at my reflection in the pristine water. Do I really look that different? It's only been five years.

VI.

We ventured into the bustling street market, where the mixed aroma of takoyaki and dango wafted around every corner. I needed to know more about you.

"When did you leave Tokyo?" I asked.

"After graduating high school."

"What brings you back?"

"I'm just visiting my cousin."

Your shoulders immediately tensed, and your voice displayed a strained shallowness that only I would notice. You're lying to me.

VII.

I'm going to tell you the truth of why I so readily knocked on your door that one day. If you really don't remember me, I'll sound like a crazy woman, but I need an answer.

VIII.

There were slight hints that full bloom has reached its end: color was fading. Petals vanished—slowly at first but faster each day that elapsed.

I was unsure of how to approach you. I decided to just go for it, but I couldn't help brainstorming every possible way the conversation could end—would it be tears or delight?

"Naomi, the truth is I went to the same high school as you."

"You mean—wait, what high school did I go to?"

"You don't know? We were good friends back in high school." I tried to obscure the sudden loneliness that seized control of my body.

"I don't remember. I just can't. I'm sorry Yuri." Your long legs strode into the horizon, and once again I was left alone.

IX.

After graduation, you left for college in Osaka while I continued my studies in Tokyo. We kept in touch for a couple years, but time acted as an insuperable barrier. We learned that no text message or reunion could return our friendship to what it once was.

X.

I apologized for not telling you from the start and building the foundation of our new friendship off of some white lies. You shook your head and handed me a piece of paper. Written in frantic scribbles, it said I have retrograde amnesia.

The room had photo albums scattered everywhere; one of them was open and displayed a column filled with pictures of us. The picture mocked us, reminding us that we can never go back in time—that what we had is gone, and it may never come back.

I sat beside you and held your hand, but your fingers ceaselessly trembled.

"I forgot a lot of stuff that happened before the accident," you mumbled staring at the photos, "we really were best friends."

XI.

The children outside no longer exhibited a vivacious exterior, and the petal that dropped through my window was as dull as the side of an overused eraser.

Early the next morning, my doorbell rang. Your sister stood there with an indescribable hollowness inside her. Upon seeing me, she gasped and forced a slight smile to her lips.

"Violet," I stuttered. "It's been a while."

I invited her in, but a tense silence fell upon us as we played with our fingers,

struggling to find the right thing to say.

"What happened?" I blurted out.

"I'm just going to be straightforward."

Violet hesitated as a look of sorrow panned across her face. "Two months ago, Naomi was in a car accident. She suffered from brain damage, which resulted in retrograde amnesia. I brought her to Tokyo to live with our cousin next door. There's a doctor here that might be able to help."

Beads of water formed around her lonesome brown eyes. What started as a serene bay evolved into a roaring storm. All we wanted was for the storm to cease—for the bay to be found again.

"We're seeing the doctor tomorrow," Violet said, "I really hope that everything will be okay."

XII.

You and Violet stopped by the following night. I peered at your face, attempting to obtain even the slightest hint; however, there was nothing for me to see because your face was completely drained of emotion.

"The doctor said it's too hard to predict. Maybe she won't remember," Violet said.

"For how long? Isn't amnesia temporary?"

"It's difficult to say. Maybe she'll recall certain events over the next several hours or the next few days, but what if the hours become days, and the days become weeks? What if months and years pass, and she still can't remember?" She lowered your voice to where it was barely audible. "What if it's forever?"

Forever. That's such a strong word—so firm, so immutable.

XIII.

You decided to fly back to Osaka with Violet tomorrow. Not a trace of me remained with you. All you have left is less than two weeks of memories, half of them unpleasant. Every tear we cried—whether it was joy or sorrow—and every laugh we shared is gone. Perhaps memories weren't as memorable as I thought.

XIV.

Out of the millions of places to re-

## It's Just Rain

Eloisa Sablan  
Livingston, NJ

Tales my father heard from his grandmother embed themselves within his melody as innocence comes with cries in the dead of night from an infant who fears the clap of thunder.

Skin of his bottom lip tastes like salt and blood as he realizes the inevitability of mistakes that the fates seal with carelessness and jinxed broken dreams.

My father sang this melody along with the thud of the rain *killing me softly with his song strumming my pain with his fingers telling my whole life with his words.*

Settle back now, it's just rain.  
The day will come when you can't cover up what you've done.

side in Japan, you happened to stay in the apartment right next door to me. I'm thankful that chance gave me an opportunity to see you again, though I still despise chance for waiting five years to hand me back the vibrant colors I desperately needed and stealing them back after fourteen days. Why can't time be on my side for once?

Right before you left, I gave you my new phone number, and you handed me yours, but we never contacted each other again. Maybe it was for all the right reasons.



## Deteriorate

Gizela Maksym  
West Islip, NY

I need a drug  
To break me down  
So I can sleep and not worry about  
the weight of my bones in the  
morning.  
And not the cough of a life running out.  
Not the love in a box,  
and not the pain in another.  
To walk on feet that are not sad  
of not being elsewhere,  
and to blink through eyes  
which see only black and white.  
I need a drug that lets the mind  
dull away,  
and makes the rain fall.  
When my hair will get wer  
and I can finally cry.  
To help release the burdens  
of what my hands have done;  
what my pulse has allowed.  
I need a drug  
to release each breath  
and watch me age  
forever.

# A Cry for Help

Naomi Jeanpierre

MIAMI, FL

The sky blushed an ashen gray as raindrops landed on blades of grass, staining Aileen's track suit. She heard the faint sound of thunder rumbling over her haggard breath, a certain sign of the bad weather soon to come. Brown wisps of hair tickled her cheek and she tucked the rogue strands behind her ear to glare at the rain clouds. The steady droplets of rain slapping her skin mingled with beads of sweat from her interrupted run. The soft thuds of cleats against the ground trickled to a halt as the other runners were drawn inside the resting area to escape the rain. Some breathed sighs of relief, thanking the gods for the bad weather halting their running practice. Aileen was left standing in the field, a lonely speck of brown against the jade terrain.

Aileen cursed under breath as she heard the short, shrill sound of the whistle ring over the slight rumbling of the sky, announcing the end of practice. She couldn't stop now. Her muscles screamed with exhaustion. Her heartbeat was faster than a moth fluttering wildly against a flame. She felt her stomach gave a painful twinge, the type of pang that came after running non-stop with an empty stomach. Her bottle of diet Pepsi was in her bag, she reminded herself, so her stomach wouldn't murmur her secret. Through the rain, she could see the faint silhouette of someone beckoning her over.

Coach Jones was a portly man with stringy ginger hair that seemed to stick out in all directions and a tremendous beer gut. At first glance, one wouldn't assume he was once an Olympic athlete, much less a running coach, but he carried himself with an air of self-confidence that came with experience. Carrying a clipboard in one hand and a stop watch in the other, he regarded her critically as she made her way over to him.

Rain wasn't going to stop her from training. She spent too many hours running on the track field until her legs collapsed from exhaustion, as if she became immune to the burn of her muscles. Her stomach gave the familiar painful lurch and she pushed the thoughts of hunger into the soft fringes

of her mind. She was training for the Olympics. If she couldn't even go through practice on an empty stomach, she had no business being here.

Every snip, every trim she made in her diet was a careful dance that had strict rules to adhere. An apple for breakfast, 95 calories. She made sure to take a morning run she burned off the excess fat, so the bulge in her stomach didn't show, so she didn't have to bear through their judgmental stares and idle gossip. Nothing could distract her from the wind on her cheeks or the tug of ribbon against her chest as she ran towards the finish line.

"Look, Coach Jones," she began. "I'm fine with running with a little rain."

"It would be a safety hazard to run into the wet grass." He said matter-of-factly. "You wouldn't want an injury right before the tryouts, do you? By the way, that's exactly what I need to talk to you about." He adjusted the clipboard in his hands. "Your running times."

"What about them?"

"You're getting slower, that's what. At first I thought it was a fluke, but look at your times from the beginning of the year to now. You've gained two, almost three full minutes in your time."

Aileen flinched at his words.

"Your form is sloppy, your breathing is all over the place, and you're somehow slower than you were before." He made a *tsk, tsk, tsk*. "At this rate, you can't even beat a turtle in a race, much less try out for the Olympics."

She let his words churn in her head as he continued talking. "Look, this is the Olympics, the real deal. You know this field is competitive as hell. I know I promised to put a good word for you, but you need to shape up." He tucked his clipboard in his arms. "Come back tomorrow with a clear mind and get ready for the morning drill."

Aileen didn't feel her feet walk towards the locker rooms to get her things. Coach Jones shouted at her retreating figure "and take care of yourself! You're looking a bit worse for wear!"

She walked into the locker room to collect her things, and took out her umbrella.

Aileen stood at a street corner for her incoming bus. The wheels of the bus whined to a stop. The space was congested with people, so she picked a seat in the back. She allowed her coach's words to churn in her head.

He was right. When the last time she kept track of her breathing or felt the exhilaration of being the first to finish practice? Aileen couldn't remember. Perhaps it began last year, when she began this new "diet".

The first time she did it, her stomach was unfamiliar with the feeling of being empty and made little growls throughout the day. After bearing mocking stares from her other teammates, Aileen made sure to bring Pepsi, the diet kind of course, so her stomach wouldn't tell her secret. Her legs ran beneath her in a blur. Over the sound of her haggard breath she heard Coach Jones praise her for beating her past record. She felt so fast, so in control, running off the high of endorphins and the envious looks of the other runners. All this in exchange for snipping a little bit of her meals.

So she did it again. The list of safe foods seemed to grow smaller and compact every day. Aileen counted the calories as meticulously as she counted the days off her calendar to the Olympic tryouts. Any edge she could get in the competition, she invited with open arms.

Her first time collapsing on the running track, she assured the Coach that was just an ankle sprain. She couldn't understand why her body was suddenly deteriorating, where this constant ache in her logs came from, or why she felt so weak. Aileen thought she was sticking to her diet to a T, so obviously it meant she needed to restrict herself. A little snip here; no dinner after 7 P.M. A small trim there; eat energy bars in the morning to avoid losing weight. Any lulls on her running times only meant that she needed to try harder.

She tugged a yellow string to alert the driver to stop the bus here, and got off. Aileen checked her watch. 6:30 P.M. Her mom should be waiting for her to make dinner. As she walked in, she heard the familiar greeting from her mother in that casual tone of hers, so Aileen replied back, taking pains to keep the sadness from her voice. She began to make pasta, one of the few dishes she knew how to make. After some time

passed, Aileen was busy setting the plates when her mother came to the dining room.

"How did practice go?" Her mother asked.

Aileen gritted her teeth. "It went fine mom. So, uh, I made dinner. Pasta with meatballs."

She passed out the dishes as they sat down to eat. Aileen checked her time phone. 7:10. It'd too late to eat this, she realized. Maybe just one or two bites so Mom doesn't get suspicious. Her mother watched Aileen poke the food she made herself with the fork.

"Leen, that's not enough to keep a bird alive. You used to love pasta, what happened?"

Aileen remembered when her mom was first teaching her how to cook, how excited she was to start creating things in the kitchen. *Back when food and I were on speaking terms*, Aileen thinks.

"Well, maybe I already ate at the gym," she says.

She could feel her mother's eyes narrow at her face, and felt them linger at her gaunt cheeks.

"Leen, I'm your mother, I can tell that you're lying. Are you eating properly?"

Aileen's heartbeat stuttered. "Of course I do! I'm a vegetarian. What-are you trying to say something?"

Her brow crinkled in concern. "Don't pretend like you don't know what I'm talking about. Sometimes, you'd skip breakfast completely and train."

"Well, maybe I'm not hungry in the morning." Aileen crossed her arms. "I thought training for the Olympics was the exact reason why I'm here. Please enlighten me on how that's a bad thing. Look, thanks for the concern, but I'm fine."

"As your mother, it's my job to--"

"I said *I'm fine*." Aileen snapped.

Aileen dropped her fork at her plate and got up from the table. "I don't need to take this, I'm going to my room." Her voice

sounded cold even to her own ears.

Her footsteps fell silent against the carpet, but the slamming of her door reverberated against the walls. She just didn't understand, didn't get it. Aileen didn't expect her to.

Eventually, Aileen crept down the stairs to see if her mother was there. The lights were dimmed down and not a sound disturbed the silence, so it was safe to assume she was in bed. She went inside the dining room to find that her plate was still there, untouched and surprisingly warm. Her mother must have reheated it for her. On a closer look, she saw note was left underneath the bowl. *Honey, I'm so sorry for what I said, the note read. I just want you to know you can come to me for anything. You're still my little girl.*

Aileen didn't notice she was crying until she saw a tear stain the edges of the note. She crumbled the note and put it in her back pocket. It was too close to lose focus now. She couldn't let anyone stand in her way, not even her own mother. Remembering the reason why she came downstairs, she picked up the bowl of pasta her mother left for her. Giving one final sigh she threw the rest in the trash.

Morning came sooner than Aileen liked, but she reminded herself of practice. She needed to show Coach Jones that she was more than enough for the Olympics. Feeling light-headed and slightly woozy as she stumbled down stairs, and she hoped the feeling would go away. Aileen needed to

leave before her mother woke up, to avoid speaking to her, so she didn't have to see the sadness in her mother's eyes.

Her bus came on time as per usual and she arrived to the training facility for her morning run. She noticed that her skin felt was pale and clammy, and beads of sweat were breaking out like weeds. Her legs trembled like a leaf quivering in the wind. Aileen stumbled into the locker rooms to change into her track suit. As she opened her bag, the note slipped out. Slightly creased and adorned with wrinkles, she picked it up and glanced over the words again.

Aileen couldn't do this anymore. Her body was deteriorating right in front of her. She made her decision.

She dialed the number she should have called in the beginning. "Hey mom, I have something to tell you..."

Little by little, Aileen slowly started to get better. When they sit down to eat, Aileen doesn't hesitate to talk about her day as she makes an effort to place more on her plate and her mother gives a reassuring smile. She keeps tabs on her teammates and stifles the pang of jealousy when they get qualified for the Olympics. Aileen tells herself she's happy for them until she almost believes it, but not really. These days her smiles don't feel forced and when she laughs, it's the real kind. The type of laugh that comes from the center of stomach Aileen knows that she is far from okay, but right now this is enough.

## Dwelling

Elizabeth Anne Zupancic

LE CLAIRE, IOWA

and here we have lain for eternities;  
dimly lit christmas lights are  
strewn above us, and  
articles of unkempt clothing are  
strewn around us.  
you hum fairness into my neck  
just beneath my jaw.  
the moon looks down towards us  
and prays,  
i look up towards you  
and i pray.

you like me best  
when i am artless and  
i like you best when you are  
mine.  
time whirls between our body  
parts,  
interwoven, nimble, and acrobatic,  
but we don't try and catch it,  
we only watch,  
and we laugh as we pass it  
back and forth.

# Amelia

Alena Marcinkoski

LANCASTER, PA

She sat behind me in Ms. Wilbur's geometry class with a pair of clunky headphones pulled over her raven hair. I openly stared at this strange newcomer. Her dark hair was tied back into a bun at the nape of her neck, and polka dot tights peeked from beneath her long, yellow dress. Before I could turn around, her green eyes flickered upwards. The corners of her mouth tugged into a smile, revealing a dimple in her right cheek. I spun around self consciously, but felt a light tap on my shoulder.

"I like your hair," she said, pointing up at the fiery red that sprouted in every direction. "It's beautiful." I felt my face burning up to match my red locks. Her curious gaze looked me up and down as if I were the most interesting person she'd ever laid eyes on.

Breaking the awkward silence, Ms. Wilbur ambled through the doorway with her large rump, nearly knocking over Anna Milson's carefully stacked pile of books. The class roared, but we were soon quieted at the sight of our principal. His haggard face looked like he'd already been thrown through a wash cycle of a whole school year. He waved at us and directed his attention towards someone behind me. Her. She leapt up like a spring, slipped the headphones off, and skipped to the front of the room. The girls giggled, and the boys gestured at the bizarre girl, but she didn't seem to notice.

"We have a new student," he mumbled. "Please join me in welcoming Amelia Nelson."

Amelia, it suited her. Her cheeks were burnt pink with excitement, and her eyes gleamed in delight. Her child-like, thin frame contrasted against the other girls who sat gossiping with one

another and texting with lightning-fast fingers. She sauntered back to her desk, daring to throw a wink in my direction.

Our first assignment in Mr. Forbes's English class was to fill out a note card saying what we did over the summer and what our plans were for the future. With crinkled foreheads, everyone bent over their blank

cards. The bell chimed through the loud speaker, and I craned my neck to see what she had written. A bold sharpie smiley face covered her card.

In history class the next day, she proceeded in singing her own rendition of the "Star Spangled Banner," strumming a ukulele. She presented her pet tarantula in biology, sending even the boldest of jocks screeching into the hallway. To Carrie Finkle's dismay, she tried out for the cheer squad and made the cut.

Talk of the new girl had spread like wildfire around the school. Our days consisted of guessing what move she'd make next. Several theories floated around saying her parents were undercover spies from Russia or maybe mad scientists or my personal favorite, aliens. She was mysterious, unbridled. No one quite knew what to make of her. Our grey worlds had never been sprinkled with so much color. She was odd, yes, but somehow this made her even more wonderful.

We formed a mutual bond by saying hello in the hallways. Our conversations never went beyond small talk, but I felt her eyes on my back, watching me.

Flyers began popping up on the school bulletin boards advertising auditions for the school play, *Romeo and Juliet*. At the first sight of one of these posters, Amelia gripped my hand and dragged me to the auditorium. With our fingers still intertwined, she led me onto the dark stage. She closed her eyes, and raised her arms to an invisible audience.

"You know we could get caught out here," I warned.

"Hit the lights," she said dramatically, ignoring my advice. I was sure we were breaking many rules, but I did as she commanded. Flicking on several switches, the stage burst into life. She inhaled deeply and cleared her throat before taking a step forward. "Well, do not swear. Although I joy in thee, I have no joy of this contract tonight: It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden..." She gazed at her pretend crowd before continuing. "Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be ere one can say 'It lightens.' Sweet good night..." Her words blended into a melody. The stage lights cast a halo around her hair. Holding the hem of her skirt in one hand, she crossed one leg behind the other and bowed in a deep curtsy.

I pretended to throw a bouquet of roses in her direction.

"Do you like me?" She remained standing with her back to me.

I laughed and made a face.

"I like you."

She was never one to hold back an opinion.

"You don't know anything about me."

"Sure I do."

"Oh really? I want specifics."

She spun herself around to face me. Her green eyes bore into me like a laser, peeling back my skin to reveal what lay inside. She held up three fingers and wiggled them in the air. "You always wipe the mayo off your sandwich before eating it. You use the trophy case as a mirror to brush your hair right before Elizabeth Crane passes you in the hallway."

"That's two." I crossed my arms self-consciously.

Grinning, she put her finger to her mouth and tapped her rosy lips, but her face grew serious. "You never say exactly what's on your mind because you don't want to disappoint anyone or make a fool of yourself."

I was caught off guard from her previous comical observations. "I didn't know anyone noticed that."

"I did."

A speedy click-clacking of high heels sounded backstage. The solemn mood broke. We screamed and ran for our lives, tearing down the carpeted aisle.

It was unannounced, unforeseen. We were suddenly a thing. No one knew what to make of us. What was a nobody like me doing with the girl who was rumored to be the illegitimate daughter of Matthew McConaughey? I couldn't even answer that question. She never dressed the same. Her getup ranged from long Amish dresses to hippie bell-bottom jeans. I, on the other hand, was nothing but a Joe ordinary. We held hands in the hallway, laughing like high school idiots in love. We were barely

accepted by our nonconformist classmates, but accepted nonetheless, at least for the time being.

Our classmates were constantly trying to find something wrong with Amelia, and they finally got their lucky break. One day, she came into school caked in makeup. The tables turned automatically. She had always been talked about, but now people started calling her things- the weirdo, the freak, the fake. She only smiled at the insults, but I was ashamed of her. I was quick to hide in the hallways, hastily ignoring her looks for support.

She slowly disappeared into the background, fading into the beige lockers and sea of students. Her crazy wardrobe transformed into jeans and sweaters. She was now one of us, a

clone. She stopped smiling, stopped singing. I tried to catch her eye, but to no avail. Her seemingly undying spirit had been defeated by animals.

As I walked home from my bus stop, I found myself staring into the dense forest. The trees beckoned with outstretched arms. I was overtaken by an impulse, and my feet carried me over a beaten path that curved deep into the woods. At the end of the trail, I came to a clearing where one enormous oak tree stood in the center. She was lying beneath its massive branches, eyes closed.

I approached, careful not to wake her, but she had already sensed my presence.

"I guess you found me." She sat up and motioned for me to sit down.

"Can we talk?"

"Shhh," she placed a finger to her lips. "Listen." Except for the occasional bird song, the area was quiet. The makeup had rubbed off. Underneath, dark, ugly purple tinged with yellow tattooed her arms. Her tears left trails revealing black and blue under her eyes. She saw I noticed.

"He likes his alcohol," she stated.

I said nothing.

"You know I've made these crazy plans in my head to kill him. He beats my mom and my little sister and me. He deserves to die, but I can never do it." She lay back down and stared up at the slowly darkening

sky. "Death must be a beautiful thing. No one telling you what to do. Every day you can lie beneath the grass and just... listen. Would you still remember me if I died?"

I found this to be an odd question but nodded anyway to answer her.

She sighed in relief. "I'm tired of people trying to change me."

Lying back down, she picked a lone dandelion and blew on it, sending the seeds drifting in every direction. She laughed. "See that's what I want to be. Free. With no one chasing after me."

We were positioned right beneath a part of the canopy where light peaked through. Wispy clouds drifted dreamily across the gap like a silent film. We lay there for hours while I said very little, and she rambled on about stories from her childhood. Whether they were true or not, I never knew.

The sky darkened, and we parted ways.

The clearing became our daily meeting place. Some days we never said a word, and other days we would share tales about the past and our wishes for the future. One time she explained each cut and bruise on her body in gruesome detail. The one on her forehead had come from the time her father came home stumbling drunk and thrown a bottle at her head. Laceration scars were from his leather belt. She kept some of them a secret, saying that no one should know where they had come from.

She showed up even less to school, but I always found her in the clearing. When teachers questioned her bruises, she made up excuses. "I fell off my bike," she said. "I tripped down the stairs."

Only I knew the truth, or at least part of it.

Several weeks later, it was prom. The student body was packed tight into the gymnasium with little room to move around. Tiny lights were strung about, sending a warm glow throughout the room. A net of rainbow balloons snaked across the high ceiling to be cut loose at the end of the night. I went with my friends, but for a moment I thought of her in a long dress, her head resting upon my shoulder.

I felt a tap on my back. Turning around, I found myself staring at an angel. Her

emerald eyes twinkled with that familiar mischief. Her raven hair was swept back behind petite ears revealing glittering diamond studs. The bruises seemed to have disappeared by magic. Almost by fate, the DJ announced a slow song and couples began pairing off.

She let me take the lead as we walked to the center of the dance floor. Placing my hands on her slender waist, we first began to sway in rhythm with the music. Then the real Amelia emerged: the girl who brought in her pet tarantula, the girl who perfectly quoted Shakespeare in front of an invisible audience. We threw in some touches of disco, some hints of tango, twirling and spinning until our dizzy heads began to scream. I laughed until I felt the rivers rushing through my eyes. All eyes were on her. The Bard of Avon himself would have said that the world was her stage for the night. With her face glowing with life, she had everyone in the palm of her hand once again.

As hip-hop music began to pulse from the speakers, she leaned up and whispered in my ear, "I hope you find someone that loves you as much as I did. I think I'll go be with the dandelion seeds now." She placed a kiss on my cheek and disappeared into the massive crowd. It was impossible to run after her. Finally escaping the hoards of students, I broke free into the lobby. A deafening rain pounded outside, and she was gone.

Amelia never reappeared in our little town. A search party was sent out to look for her, but I knew they wouldn't turn up with anything. Rumors still floated around our gray halls. Some said she had run off to be an actress or perhaps a singer. Others said she had joined the circus to become an acrobat. I knew one thing was for certain. Nothing and no one could hold her back.

Sometimes I go to her clearing underneath that giant oak tree, and I gaze up to the sky. I can hear her quoting Shakespeare perfectly in her delicate voice. I still see her on that lighted

stage as she curtsied to the invisible audience. The lights bounced off her hair, illuminating it so

# Stars

Jackson Eagan

SHIREMANSTOWN, PA

Dana wrapped her coat around her tightly, took a deep breath, and stepped into the alley. She knew for a fact that hundreds of people came through the alley every day, but it seemed unsettlingly lonely and bare. She could see one light, at the end of the alley, however. Nervous, she picked up the pace and rushed toward it.

"Hello?" she called. No reply. She stepped over to the source of the light, a little shop built into the side of the alley. Inside the shop, Dana could see lines of little bottles holding vividly colored, sparkling liquids. Each one is labelled with a single word; things like Sadness, Fear, Trust, Surprise, Anger.

"Hello?" she repeated, leaning over the counter to see if anyone was hiding inside. She noticed a small door hidden inside the shop. She stood there for a moment considering her options. She sighed and climbed over the counter into the shop. She knocked on the small door. After a few minutes of just standing there, she realized that there was probably no one there. She turned around and browsed the bottles.

"Trust, Anger, Sadness, another Sadness, Sadness, Sadness, Sadness, Anticipation..." she whispered to herself, "Where is it?" Suddenly, the door swung open violently, and a little old man stepped out, swinging a broom in her face.

"What the- who are you? What are you doing in my shop!" He screeched.

"I'm sorry sir! I just was looking for..."

"I see, well, if you want some of my goods, you'll need to pay for them. And..." He pushed her back outside the counter to the shop. "You need to stand out here. Now, what can I help you with, my dear?"

"I need Hope." She answered without hesitation. The man rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Hope? That's a rare one. Let's see." The man checked his wares in search for a rare bottle of Hope. "Hmm, I don't know if I have any Hope. How about Joy or Happiness? I think I have a couple bottles of Happiness in the back. Happiness is my most popular product. People just keep buying it, thinking it's the secret to true happiness. Here's a little hint miss; artificial Happiness is nothing like the real deal." The man laughed and pulled out a bottle of green liquid marked, "Happiness" Dana shook her head.

"You're sure you don't have Hope? That's all I really need." The man raised his eyebrow

in response, then stood there thoughtfully for a moment.

"Hope..." he whispered to himself. "I could conjure up some Peaceful if you want. It'll cost a little extra but..."

"Peaceful? You can't make Hope?"

"Sure, I could try to make Hope, it's as simple as mixing Determination with Luckiness, but Determination is extremely volatile, and I'm not sure it'd be safe to do without better equipment."

"What if I took Determination and Luckiness separately?" Dana asked, not sure if it was a stupid question. The man laughed.

"Afraid we can't do that, miss. Not allowed to sell pure Luckiness anymore after those gamblers collapsed the economy across the sea a while back. It's against the law." Dana thought for a moment.

"Well, do you know any other shops that might actually have Hope?"

"I've only even seen a bottle of Hope once in my life! Tell you what: I'll point you in the right direction to where you might be able to find some Hope. But you've got to tell me why you need to find it so badly!"

"I-I...please...I just..." Dana covered her face to hide the tears. "Please, sir..." She sighed. "This world... look, I've not found much hope in the world, alright! The news, the hatred, I'm just... sick of it. I thought that since I cannot find hope, I would just, buy it. I have no reason to even try finding hope in this world. There isn't any."

The man smiled and said softly, "True hope doesn't come from a bottle, my dear. Trust me, I talk from experience when I say this, there is a better way. Sure, this world has its problems, as all worlds do, but it isn't healthy to just look at the bad and let it dominate over your life. Hopelessness is the cruelest disease any one person can face. It's like a-" the man gazed up at the stars twinkling in the cold night sky, barely visible through the dark smog of the city, "It's like a black hole. It's spawned by what we describe are dying hopes, then it just grows and grows, devouring every part of our life. It gets stronger every time we think about giving up. It's encouraged by our failures and our nightmares. Without rest it'll attack us, covering our eyes and hiding the wonders of the world around us. Tell me, miss, what do you believe the point is?"

"The point?"

"The point of existence. The point of why we're here. The point of what we're supposed to do and the point of carrying on."

Dana stared down at her feet. "I don't know."

"Exactly! No one really does. Some would tell you that the point comes from something else, something we can't explain,

from beyond the heavens. Some would say that there isn't one. That we're alone to find one for ourselves. So, if we can't find the point, then how do we have hope?"

"I don't know." Dana mumbled to herself, feeling defeated.

"Tell you what... look at the sky. What do you see?"

Dana gazed up at the night sky. She couldn't see much; the smog and smoke from the big city and the light pollution from all the buildings made the stars dim and sparse. She longed to see what the sky would look like from somewhere out in the country. She'd never been out of the polluted city. "Stars?"

"Stars. We can't see all the stars in the universe, but we know they're there. They're amazing! The galaxies, the supernovas, all spinning and rotating around each other in perfect clockwork. But why are they there? What is their point?" Dana couldn't answer. "They just keep shining. They just keep going. I think that they're there, shining in the sky every night, as symbols of hope. They're like a show put on in the heavens for us to see that this world is beautiful, that someone up there cares enough about you to put this universe in place for you to admire. That's where you can find hope. In the stars." Dana smiled.

"Thank you, sir. It seems you've given me Hope after all!" Dana wrapped her coat around her tightly, took a deep breath, and stepped out of the alley.

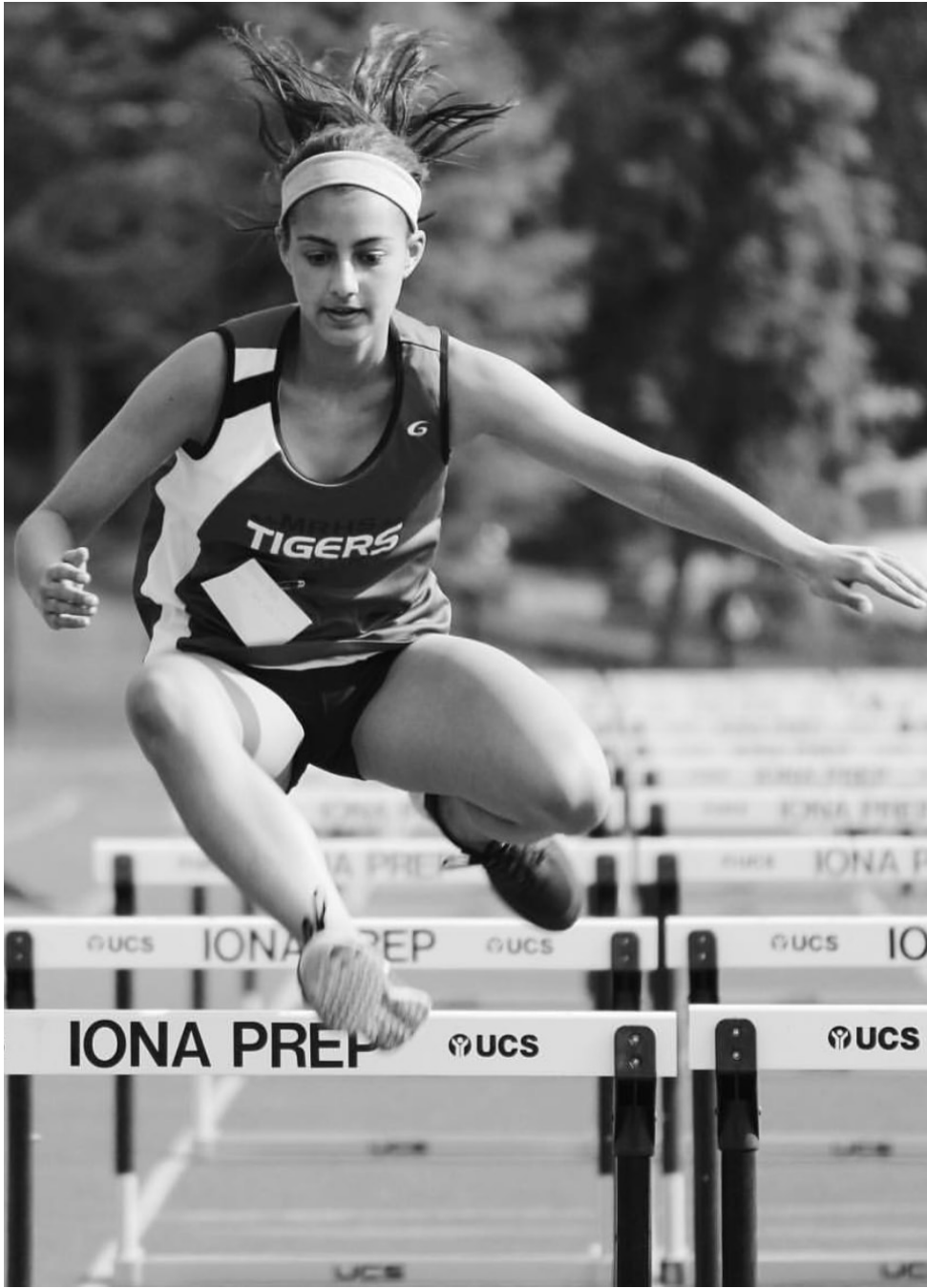
## The Guillotine's Final Words

Celeste Wu

EXETER, NH

The infestation of sin,  
Gouges your judgment from  
sockets, Deveins your conscience  
from flesh. You plead for help-  
I can hear it all:  
Your heart, your teeth, your breath.  
You must be exhilarated.  
A swoop of steel.  
Rainy days are the best days.  
Your blood does not stain.  
It only trickles down my shin,  
and it tickles.  
Please spare me your teasing touch,  
For the flooding sunset  
Never casts its dying rays on me.  
It's on the tip of my tongue,  
But I can never spell death.  
So please embrace me if I end you.  
So please kiss me if I kill you.  
So please spare me a thank-you.





## jump!

Charlyn Sunico  
YONKERS, NY



## Snow

Tazein Shah  
VALLEY STREAM, NY

Snow falling from heaven.  
Just like love slowly  
arrives.

It falls in soft flakes,  
Slowly covering the Earth.  
In an inescapable blanket.  
Though some complain,  
Others open their arms  
wide for the arrival.

Children smile and play.  
Two people meet under  
the white snow plain  
Innocent Love.

A young man shovels  
snow away,  
Worried for his home.  
One man clears the snow,  
To prevent ice.  
Scared of Love.

A person walks across the  
heaven on Earth,  
To pick up someone  
special.  
Another runs,  
Hoping not to miss the  
train.  
Awaiting Love.

One man cries,  
As he picks up the dead  
flowers on the road.  
Covered in a layer of frost.  
A young child cries as the  
cold numbs her feet.  
Yet doesn't leave.  
Harsh Love.

A family,  
Plays in the snow.  
Forgetting their pains.  
A young boy admits love,  
To a young angel  
wandering heaven.

They hold hands,  
And forget everything.

## Afterlife

Sydney Peng  
NEW PROVIDENCE, NJ

There's a ghost living in the town.

She's lovely and kind and motherly, and everyone knows her by name: Marion Murray, the Angel of 34 Rutherford Street. Look for the house in robin's-egg-blue, pale like a washed-out painting, where the fence is white as china and the mailbox is glossier than a banker's shoe. The stoop is always warmed by the sun, and the welcome mat is starched flat by footsteps. Her hands are as soft as the pastries on her counter, her voice is as sweet as the candy she slips into pockets, and her eyes are as bright as the shiny pennies she presses into palms.

Mrs. Miller borrows her quilts; Mr. Henshaw takes her pies and hobbles back down the stairway in shame; Mrs. Wendell slips in and steals away with ration books. She smiles and tells them not to bother, not to worry. The children cluster around her porch someday asking for lemonade, and she adds sugar cubes with a librarian's shush and a clever cat smile. She sneaks them chocolates before turning back to her pies or dishes, humming in her dress of pink and cream and periwinkle.

A flag drapes over the mantelpiece of the fireplace, but there is no fire. The hearth never burns anymore, but that's only partially because of the lack of fuel. The only ashes it holds are either indelibly scorched into the sides or kept in urns, next to a pair of medals for bravery and a photograph of two smiling men.

"Such a pity," people say when they see the display, and they don't notice her smile clench up tight like a fist. "It's amazing," people whisper when she's out of earshot, "how strong

she is. How kind and generous." And some of it is awe and some of it is suspicion, and all of it is missing the point entirely.

It's not so much that she's tough or strong; it's that she's evanescent. Nothing hurts her because nothing touches her. She turns more ethereal with every passing day as she starves to feed someone else, until her blue veins sketch signatures in her paper-pale skin. Her skin turns pallid, her hair turns wispy, and her eyes turn lustrous like a pall of unshed tears as she gives and gives and gives.

The people around her complain of lack. She, on the other hand, suffers from surplus. There are too many medals, too many telegrams, too many clothes hanging in the closet that don't belong to anyone anymore. Too many fathers gunned down in the trenches, husbands bombed from the sky, sons sliced

apart by shrapnel.

Of course she's kind. Of course she's selfless. What need does she have of food or cloth or coin? What need does she have of stamps, without people to write to, without people to receive her letters?

It's not hard to be selfless, she's learned, especially when there's nothing worth keeping.

So she gathers up her good deeds and hopes there's something else waiting that will make this kindness worth it. She stays chained to her house, parceling out the last bits of herself for a few smiles; each one of hers is forged from sepia photographs and rosy memories. The people see her as a seraph, but to her, they're the ferry fare for heaven, bought and paid with soothing murmurs, comforting hugs, and illicit sweets.

She's given up on this life. She only hopes that her nickname of "Angel" means something after the end.



### Intuition

Jeremy Hsiao  
WALNUT, CA

Ideas like mountains across the horizon  
an entangle of synapses make patterns in lace.  
Common sense cuts corners, jumping fences,  
bending programmed rules.  
Realities break like the horizon into  
vague clouds up above.  
Wind whispers, and  
guide my path senses like  
birds ride.  
Facts die  
instinct digging graves,  
each thought turned a tombstone.

# Love, Tuesday

Gwendolyn West  
CENTER BARNSTEAD, NH

"I. Am. Not. Going." I managed to get that out firmly before tears poured down my face.

"No, Tuesday. You are coming with us to England no matter what. I don't care anymore what your input is, your father and I have decided this is what we want to do. You'll make new friends, and you can send letters over here to stay in touch with your old ones," my mother explained. Her voice was strong willed and so were her decisions. I knew there was no getting out of this one. I stormed up to my room to call my best friend, Caroline. I sat down on my sky-blue comforter and dialed her number.

"Hello? Ruby?" Caroline said when she picked up the phone.

"Oh Caroline, it's bad." I said. She's quick to answer.

"Are they going to make you go?" The worriedness increased and the hope faded from her voice.

"Yes. But I can't, Care. I have a life here. I can't just give that up. Besides, I'm seventeen, I'll be done with school soon anyway."

"Well... I don't know what to say. I don't want you to leave, but it's not like you can just run away, they're your parents." As soon as the words came out of her mouth, my brain exploded with a million ideas.

"Care, what if I did?"

"What? Run away? When would you do that? How would you do that?" Her voice was filled with curiosity and suspicion.

"I... I don't know. I could do it, though. I could leave before they leave for England." I thought aloud. Caroline didn't say anything.

After a few seconds, she replied with, "I guess you could, but where the heck would you go?"

"I don't know. I'll think about it some more and call you back."

"Okay well you've only got tomorrow to think about it." She said back. "Goodnight, Ruby."

"Goodnight." I replied. I loved that my friends called me Ruby. My real name's Tuesday, but because of the restaurant Ruby Tuesday's, Alexander Cooper thought it would be funny to start calling me Ruby in fifth grade. From then on, it stuck and I've gone by Ruby. I think it suits me better.

I layed down on my bed, thoughts rambling through my head. Questions of all sorts stormed my brain, but I didn't know how to answer them just yet.

You know that moment when you're laying in bed and you have a revelation about whatever you were worried about before? Well, that's what happened to me just then. I was thinking about what I could do when, or if rather, I ran away. I thought about what I'm good at. Hiking. Climbing. Adventuring. Those were the first thoughts that popped into my head. I remembered that there was an Appalachian Trail base checkpoint only a few minutes away from my house. Right then, I knew that was what I'd do. I'd hike and hike and hike, and maybe along the way I'd find myself and the solution to my problems along the way. The idea felt like a cool summer breeze, the kind that you don't see coming but gives you excited chills when you feel it.

I got out of my comfy bed and stood in the middle of my room. What would I take? I made a mental checklist of all of the things I'd need. Backpack. Sleeping bag. Water bottles. Food. Extra warm clothes. Lots of socks. I grabbed the hiking backpack my mom got for me last summer when I went to hiking camp. I stuffed some of my warm clothes in the bottom, then socks, then an extra jacket that could stand rain. I put in a headlamp and a flashlight I had on my night stand; I'd seen too many horror movies where the battery died in a flashlight and they had no back up.

I glanced at my clock and realized that it was 11:17, so if I wasn't quiet

I'd wake my parents while going downstairs. I put on my slippers and walked down to the kitchen to get what I needed for my pack. I grabbed a box of energy bars, a can of corn, and a package of Oreos. I figured this would be okay until I could find a store when I snuck out. I grabbed twenty five dollars from my purse and sunscreen and headed quietly back to my room. As I was about to walk up the stairs, I saw my dad's compass sitting on the little end table. I looked at it for a moment, remembering the time he took me hiking and we got lost, so he used that compass to help find our way back to the trail. I grabbed it and continued up the stairs.

I made the finishing touch on my hiking bag by strapping my sleeping bag to the top of it. I hid it in my closet for the time being and fell back onto my bed. I layed there, I thought about the decision I just made. I decided that if I was going to do this, there would be no doubts. So with that, I pulled the covers up over me and let the night consume me and my thoughts.

I woke up the next morning with a hint of sadness lingering in my brain. I didn't want to say any goodbye to my friends, but it would either be a 'goodbye, I'm leaving the country' or 'goodbye, I'm going on a spontaneous hiking trip to get away and find myself.' The second option sounded better to me.

When I walked into my high school, I was greeted by Caroline and Eva, my two best friends. Caroline had her brunette hair pinned up nicely, and was wearing a white shirt and jeans with a burgundy sweater over all of it. Eva had her red hair straightened and a pair of jeans shorts with a green crocheted top. I smiled when I saw them. I knew that this would only be farewell for a little while, but it felt like I was saying goodbye forever. I figured I'd only tell Eva and Care where I was going, and not anyone else. If I told anyone else, they might tell my parents where I am, and that's exactly what I'm steering away from.

"Okay Ruby, you'll never guess what Henry Peterson said to me this morning!" Eva exclaimed; she was

always talking about her crushes. Although, I couldn't answer this right now. I needed to tell her.

"I bet it was something amazing, but I need to tell you guys something important! Like, on a scale from there's-no-more-straws-left-for-the-coffee to Beyoncé having twins, it's Vampire Diaries season eight isn't actually happening." I said, trying not to laugh after my last sentence.

"Woah, okay that's pretty important. What's up?" Caroline questioned.

"Okay, so you know how I'm supposed to be moving to England soon? Well, I'm not. I'm... um... well, I'm running away. I know it sounds crazy, but I'm going to go to that Appalachian Trail base a few minutes from here and just... hike. I'm going to hike for as long as I can, or at least until my parents find me. I need to get away from here. Get away from my England-bound parents. All those years of girl scouts and living with a dad who's basically a survivalist has taught me enough about the outdoors and how to be safe, so I'll be fine." I told them. They looked at me blankly; I couldn't read their faces. Eva looked at Caroline, her eyes now filled with unbelievability. Caroline looked at me and smiled.

Caroline's only words were, "Do it." Eva looked at me next, also smiling. I could tell it was fake though. I knew she didn't really support this decision, but I couldn't let my choices be swayed by her opinion.

"So, today will kind of be my last day. But you guys can't tell anyone. Not even my parents. I need to do this for myself." I said firmly. They both agreed just as the first period bell rang. We walked to Pre-Calc together, savoring every moment of my last day.

At the end of seventh period, Eva, Caroline, and I all met at my car in the school parking lot. I hugged Eva first. "Please be safe, Ruby. We love you too much that we wouldn't be able to bear it if something happened to you." She pushed a piece of red hair out of her face and adjusted her top. I promised her I would, and turned to

Caroline. Her face was streaked with tears. We've been best friends ever since first grade, and she's always been there for me. This seemed like it was taking a worse toll on her than on me.

"Oh, Care. Don't cry! You'll make me!" I said as I embraced her. She sobbed into my shoulder, and a few tears fell from my eyes as well. I pulled back to look at her. "I'm going to be fine Caroline. Don't worry, really." I hugged her and Eva again, and we all cried. Eva, tears of worry for a new friend, but a close one. Caroline, tears for her best friend who'll be leaving her for the first time in ten years. And me, tears of longing. Longing for this day to be a regular one like the others, not one where we try to go though it normally even though it is far from it.

I look at the clock. It's four in the morning, and my parents will be leaving for England in seven hours. I slip on my hiking boots and pull the straps of my hiking bag over my shoulders. I walk down the hallway quietly heading for the kitchen. I stop in front of my parent's room. The door is open, and I can see them sleeping peacefully. Tears fill my eyes, but I can't let them fall.

I need to be stronger than this. I keep walking down the stairs and get to the kitchen. I grab a piece of paper from the To-Do list on the fridge. I grab a pen and write:

Dear Mom and Dad,

By now, you've probably realized I'm not in bed, or at school. I've left. I'm okay, and I left because I wanted to. I need to do this for me. I can't go to England, I'm sorry. I love you, and I promise I'll be okay.

Love,

Tuesday

I leave the note on the kitchen table and slip out the front door.

When I get to the trail base, it's 4:27am and there is only one other person here. He's sitting on a wood bench and looking at a map. He looks

about my age, and very tired. There's nowhere else to sit, so I decide to go sit next to him.

I simply say, "Hi." He looks up from his map and into my eyes.

He replies with, "Hey." He looks at my hiking bag and asks, "How far have you hiked?"

"I'm just starting here, actually. How about you?" I ask.

"I've only hiked five miles, so I didn't start too long ago." He replies. "Oh, I'm sorry. What's your name?"

"Oh, I'm Tuesday, but most of my friends call me Ruby." I say.

"And why's that?" He asks with a grin on his face and curiosity in his eyes.

"Well, my friend Alex thought it would be funny to call me Ruby because of the restaurant Ruby Tuesday's." I explained. "What's your name?"

"Max." He says, running his hand through his blonde hair. I notice his navy blue sweatshirt has a big sun on it.

"I like your sweatshirt." I compliment him. He blushes and says thanks. He's tall, taller than me by far, and has a muscular build. He's wearing dark green pants and a brown hiking shoes.

"Well, where are you headed to? Because I'm just hiking up the trail. I'm kind of on a spontaneous hiking trip to kind of find myself. I know it sounds stupid, but I love it out here." He looks at the trees, then back at me. Something about him really intrigues me. He doesn't seem like most of the jerks that I go to school with.

"No, it doesn't sound stupid at all," I reassure him. "I'm actually doing the same thing. My parents want to move to England to satisfy their adventurous souls, but I'd rather stay here."

"So... you're here. 'Finding yourself.'" He puts an emphasis on 'finding

yourself. I nod and look away. I notice a few little pink flowers growing besides the bench.

"I know I just met you and all, but we seem to have the same thing going for us, and it might be nice to have someone to talk to, so maybe you'd want to hike with me?" I ask cautiously. Inside, I'm really hoping he'll say yes.

"I'd love to hike with you, Tuesday." He smiles at me and we get up to start our journey to find ourselves.

"We've been hiking for so long, Max. Can't we take a break? I tug at his arm with a fake desperation.

He laughs. "Of course we can." He looks at me and then to a rock a few feet ahead of us. We walk to the rock and sit down. I pull my water bottle out of my pack and drink. I catch him staring at me.

"What?" I ask, squinting at him.

"Nothing." He says as he smiles and looks at the sky.

"How old are you?" I ask. He looks back at me.

"Eighteen. You?" He replies.

"Seventeen," I say back. "So you're going to college soon then?"

"Yeah, my senior of high school I got into a ton of schools for writing, but my parents are very insistent on me going to medical school. So, I told them that I was going to school for writing, and that I was going to take the summer before college started to go hike and 'find myself.'" He explains.

"That's sounds fun, going to school for writing, I mean." I say. My attention shifts, and I spot a pink flower that's growing in the dirt on the side of the trail. I walk over to look at it.

"Max, look." I call, pointing at the flower.

"Very pretty. I wonder if they are all along the trail." He ponders. He looks down at the ground and makes circles with his shoe. So he saw the flowers at the beginning of the trail

too. I think and smile to myself.

We've been hiking for four days, and have only stopped at a store once. I found out that his full name is Maxon Walsh, he's from North Carolina, and he gets his green eyes from his mom. He works out three times a week, because four is too many. His favorite color is blue and he has a dog named Cat because in fourth grade he thought that'd be funny.

"Hey, you all set?" He asks after ten minutes.

"Yeah, let's go." I stand up to join him in the middle of the trail. The cool breeze feels so nice; it's a reminder that it's the beginning of summer. June is such a nice time. It would've been worse if I went to England with my parents a few days ago. Max and I have been trying to keep a

low profile. I told him to call me Ruby because the news would have me as a missing girl named Tuesday, so if anyone else who's hiking hears him call me Tuesday, they might report a sighting of me. Although, Max won't call me Ruby unless someone is walking right passed us because he thinks Tuesday sounds prettier.

"So," I say, trying to make conversation, even though I know it isn't difficult to with Max.

He smiles. "So," We're walking on a pretty flat part of the trail, so he grabs my hand. I close my fingers around the back of his hand. This is first time he's held my hand, but it feels so natural. Over the past few days we've learned so much about each other, and our personalities go together like the fit of his hand in mine.

It seems like we've been walking for a long time, but it's only been ten minutes. We continue to walk together, just enjoying the silence that speaks the words that we aren't saying.

I wake up on the ground. Not the most comfortable bed. Max is a few feet away from me, so I walk over to wake him up. The sun is incredibly bright today, and my skin isn't taking it well. I tap Max's shoulder.

"Max, get up." I say.

"But why?" He groans. He puts his head down onto his arm. All I can see is his blonde morning hair curls.

"Because, today is another day." I reply. He sits up and blinks a few times.

"The sun is bright today, Tues. I'm going to be so slow and hot all day." He laughs.

"Well, you can't be slow unless you get up." I grab his arm and pull up. He stands up and grabs his pack.

"Okay then, let's get going." We put away all of our things we took out to sleep and start on the trail. We hike upwards a bit, and it gets steep. There's lots of jagged rocks, but I start climbing. Max is close behind, ready to catch me if I fall. When I reach the top, the view is amazing. There's other mountains in the distance, and I can see every tree on the mountains and hills in front of me. It's stunning. Max stands behind me.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" He suggests.

"It's... breathtaking." I reply. He asks me if I want to sit. I do.

"You know, hiking with you has been great." He says, looking into my hazel eyes.

"I agree, and I'll miss it when it's over." I say. He looks sad, but there's something else that I can't read.

Unexpectedly, he leans in and kisses me. I kiss him back, because this may be one of our last days together. It feels so right, just the two of us. The sounds of nature chime in the background, and the rest of the world fades away. He pulls away and smiles.

"This might sound crazy, but what if I went to a college near where you live? I mean, I got accepted to the University of Virginia, so I could go to school there and we could see each other. I don't know, what do you think?" He asks. I can see the glint of hope in eyes.

"I... I think that'd be great! That college isn't too far from where I live anyway." I reply. He smiles and kisses me again. I smile under his lips.

After what seems like forever, I look at him and say, "We should get going again."

"Probably." He replies. I can tell he didn't want that moment to end, and neither did I.



I stand up, but my foot catches on a rock. My back is facing the view we were looking at, so my balance shifts towards the edge of the cliff. Before I can realize it, I'm falling off the edge backwards. Max calls my name and I stretch my arm as far as I can. His fingertips brush mine, but it isn't enough. Air rushes around me and I can't hear anything. I look down; it's a clear shot to the bottom. I'm falling faster and faster and faster until it just... stops. I open my eyes and look up. I can see that there's sharp rocks all around me. I can see Max. He's screaming my name, but I can't say anything. I can't feel anything, I can't hear anything, I can't move anything. And suddenly, I can't see anything. There's only blackness.

I straighten my tie and walk outside. Tuesday's parents wait for me just beyond the porch. Her mom's face is stained with tears, but she tries to hide it with a smile. Even her lips are tinged with sorrow. Her father stands tall, and his fingers shake. You can see the sadness in his eyes even as he smiles at me when I reach them. Even though I never really knew these people before I had to tell them their daughter died, I feel a strong connection to them. My parents came for my support, but they only make small talk with the other members of Tuesday's family.

All I can think about is her face. Her laugh. The way she hiked the trails with a smile every day. I talk to other members of her family and her friends, but their words are just background noise to my mind's thoughts. I can hear her say my name, and how one day she told me, "Today is another day." Although it is, it isn't the same without her. My heart feels empty.

Everyone gathers in the church for her service. I take a seat with my family in the middle of the pews, but I wish I didn't have to sit with them. I

can tell that they don't really care for Tuesday. I'm giving a short speech near the end of the service, and I can feel the butterflies in my stomach. They're the happiest things here.

When it's my turn to go up, I walk my way to the podium. I clear my throat, take a deep breath, and start.

"Tuesday was a good friend of mine that passed away at a very... unexpected time. The days that I spent with her, she filled my life with happiness and joy that I hadn't felt in a long time. She made me a better person because of it. Now, I know that if she were here, she'd slap my arm and tell me I was being too sensitive, but I can only express my feelings for her that way. She meant a lot to me, and I will never be the same without her. If I could go back to that day and change it all hold her on that mountain for as long as I could, I would. I miss her so much, I can't fit all of my feelings into one speech. So Tuesday, I at least hope you can hear me say I love you, because I never got to tell you when you were here."

I let out a sigh as I step down from the podium. The grief inside my heart weighs me down as I step through the aisle. I walk outside, because I need fresh air more than I need to hear other people talk. I look over at a pot of flowers sitting on the ground next to me. It's filled with the same pink flowers that Tuesday pointed out to me on the trail. I pick a few out and put them in my pocket. This is how she'll say goodbye.



## Lights in the Vault

Joseph Christensen  
BELLEVUE, WA

(I)  
Gaza was hewn from dried fire  
Crackling with the voice of an  
elegant youth  
Poised to take the stage  
And win a future with sandy  
marbles  
His beaches smell of corpses now  
And we ponder who's buried  
underneath  
Assessing the value of hasty braids  
Behind boarded windows in a  
powdery light

(II)  
Four old men rock in a worn, tin  
boat  
"Borrowed from a friend," they  
assure us  
Four skeletons sun themselves  
Lounging in beauty squeezed from  
plastic tubes  
"Western style," they inform us  
Four boys play soccer  
With a gaunt ball coated in gritty  
fantasies  
Looking toward the sea  
"Piss off," they tell us

(III)  
At the stainless-steel hospital  
We find pale teeth tend to  
Swim through thick bravado  
Informing us of their pain  
With each bite of vanilla pudding  
At the end of the row, number 3-6-5  
Has a laugh like crunching gravel  
He likes to wave a little square  
To tell us it's a plane ticket; he's  
leaving  
With a face like a tired galaxy, eyes  
missing, he'll never see  
His Cracker Jack paper -- he's a  
grand prize winner

# Scoops

Nicholas Kassoy

GLEN ROCK, NJ

The boy ordered his first scoop of ice cream at the age of three and four months. Of course, he had tried ice cream before that day, but it had been ordered by his parents on account of his inability to string words into coherent commands. At the age of three and four months, the boy chose vanilla. And vanilla was all he ordered for four years. His parents would sometimes ask him about other flavors. Chocolate? No. Strawberry? No. Butter Pecan? Mint Chocolate Chip? No. Then he would smile and politely ask for vanilla.

At seven the man behind the counter demurred at the request of the boy dressed all in black as it had changed to chocolate. His dad passed the dripping cone from the counter down to the boy's hands with a sense of relief tinged with nostalgia. It had been his mom's favorite. He wished his mom wasn't gone. He wanted to share it with her. That was the only time the boy tried chocolate.

At eight, during the boy and his dad's trip to the beach, he discovered a new flavor by the name of raspberry ripple. It was a love at first sight pairing. Yet when the boy and his dad returned from the beach house to their empty home, the boy didn't want any other flavor that was offered to him. So it was a long time before he had any more ice cream at all.

The thirteenth bat mitzvah during his thirteenth year tempted him with cups of the frozen treat strung across a table shrouded in red fabric. The newly-turned man of the hour asked the boy why he wasn't eating any of the dessert, and so the not-yet-man politely took a cup - chocolate - and spooned a scoop into his mouth. Thirty seconds later he was in the luxury, marble-tiled bathroom, dirtying his suit pants by kneeling with his mouth hovering directly above the toilet.

Seven years later the boy and his first girlfriend split a strawberry shake. It almost was like it wasn't ice cream at all, but a thoroughly-stretched lie of a fruit product. He

looked into her eyes and almost felt complete, but there was that sliver of artificial berry flavoring and red dye number 2 that kept the gap from closing up. The bartender asked the twenty-one-year-old boy if he was done with the beer. He said no, although the bottle was clearly empty. For a few moments he looked at his face in the curved reflection of the green bottle. He took a breath. A request for an Irish coffee. "Vanilla okay with you?" asked the bartender. The boy nodded. He was two cartons into the two hundredth breakup, believing he knew for sure that love was dead at the wise old age of thirty-two. The menthol-like chill of mint chocolate chip soothed the fire that was surging throughout his body. Soon enough it was put out.

The boy of forty with his wife of five days sat with his dad on the porch of his childhood home. They talked about the home they wanted to buy, the kids they were going to have, and the vacations they wanted to go on. The wife did most of the talking.

The single boy of forty-one held on tightly to the roller coaster at the boardwalk. His friends also on the ride screamed with delight as they prayed to escape with intact spines. The boy felt a rush of joy as they climbed the highest peak of the ride with a newfound knowledge of the years he had yet to face. He was hungry. They were out of raspberry ripple.

Fifty. His dad was a good man. All the boy could do was keep himself together. The second time wasn't any better than the first. The members of the community dressed in all back offered their apologies. At the somber reception they provided vanilla. The man cried.

A man of fifty-five should not experience a heart attack and yet this one did. Too much saturated fat, said the doctors. They checked the records. Ran in the family.

# The Sun's Ode to The Moon

Elizabeth Winkler

RIVERSIDE, CT

Our schedules just don't line up.  
Her job's at night, mine lasts all day,  
and she rises as I sink into our bed;  
under covers of deep blue that shimmer with her light,  
sheets scattered with comets and asteroids,  
a pillow studded with other stars who share her company.

She dresses silently,  
to give me my rest, I know,  
tiptoeing from closet to dresser, mirror,  
her face shimmering with powder;  
eons old dust stolen from a shooting star.  
That adventure's date is forgotten now, but dates and times don't matter;  
all our moments, the important ones, are pressed into my memory, folded up and packed with lavender sachets.

One favorite:  
the first time I saw her.  
Eyes played peek-a-boo behind mountains  
on the opposite side of Earth,  
as her face was painted in green-blue shadow.

The best beloved:  
my heart pulsed through my ribcage,  
deep breath forced it to slow;  
anticipation sped new moon, every second ticked us closer.  
Worries tugged my nerves:  
what if I were to burn her or if Earth held her heart in orbit?  
What if we really are different as night and day?

I remember her approach,  
heart beating in my throat;  
her soft, cool glow erasing all my fears,  
I remember how she leaned in first  
and how her craters brushed my fire:  
how my rays danced as my lips turned silver.

# Reasons Enough

Willow Quindley

ALTON, NH

Confusion clouds.

Who's that in mommy's arms,  
making mommy smile and daddy  
cry?

Lumpy and blue.

Oval shaped. Tufts of blond peach  
fuzz protrude in wispy bundles  
atop a pale round thing from a  
fold in the blanket.

My lower lip wavers.

Who's that bundled in mommy's  
arms reeking of antiseptic silent,  
unresponsive to the coos of  
mommy and daddy, unmoving,  
hardly talented.

So why are they entranced by him  
when I can talk and walk and  
dance and ride a bike when the  
most he can do is cry cry cry?

Excitement rushes through my  
veins  
mommy is empty-handed. Did  
you bring him back to the  
hospital?

Disappointment leaks as mommy  
laughs,  
No, he's only sleeping.

But I wasn't joking.

Jealousy is found in the form of a  
newborn baby.

Eyes the hue of a cloudless sky,  
bright, happy, captivating.  
They can't help but wander, away  
from me the used-to-be baby,  
daddy's little girl.  
Mommy's mini-me.

To the new baby, daddy's little  
man.  
Mommy's favorite.

Neglect lingers between each  
teddy  
bear thrown into new baby's crib.  
Maybe mommy and daddy won't  
want  
a hurt baby and he'll have to go  
back,  
back to the hospital or wherever  
he came from.

As long as it's back, so I can have  
mommy and daddy all to myself.  
Worry festers in my throat like a  
laugh  
I can't hold back.

Growing, bubbling, erupting in  
waves.

He's here for good.  
He's not going back.  
He's the new favorite.  
He is replacing me, the  
used-to-be baby.

The forgotten  
The invisible

The abandoned baby.  
The used-to-be baby that is now  
less a baby and more a young girl,  
waging wars with her parents,  
directing glares at a blue-eyed  
boy but what for?

Jealousy is found in the form of a  
ten-year-old boy.

Eyes the hue of a cloudless sky,  
bright, happy, captivating.  
Freckles dotting his nose so kind  
and patient.

Daddy's pride.  
Mommy's happiness.  
The favorite.

They can't help but wander away  
from me, so rude and impatient,  
Daddy's disappointment.  
Mommy's frustration.  
The least liked.

Confusion floods inside me.  
Where did I go wrong?  
How did I become so lost?  
What did I do to steer my parents  
so off-course away from me, and  
towards him?

When had my parents become  
the judge and I, the competitor,  
in a race against my brother,  
fighting for mommy and daddy's  
affection?

When had I begun capsizing  
under the pressure, drowning in  
pursuit to please them? To be the  
daughter they always wanted?

Lost beneath the waves,  
straggling to catch up to my  
brother, the only champion in  
their eyes.

Neediness claws at my skin.  
I am bleeding and scarring,  
becoming torn apart, desperate  
for their love needing their praise.

Aching for their acceptance.  
Only for it to be given away,  
handed so easily to him. For he can  
do no wrong in their eye as I  
continue to bleed.  
Frustration is the drop of a pin in a

silent room.

Loud and unwavering.  
Echoing with every good morning  
I love you and door held open for  
me.  
How is he so unrequitedly nice?  
So perfect?  
Why did those traits miss me and  
go to him?

Confliction tangles in my mind,  
like a relentless knot, only  
becoming further coiled with  
each tug.  
Burden-some.

A title I don't want,  
But a title I can't release.  
I am fiercely relying on mommy  
and daddy's approval, their  
attention, their praise.  
Yet I am desperately seeking  
independence.

Sighs escape mommy and daddy,  
you are draining, she remarks.  
Why must you always be the  
center of attention?  
Daddy wonders.

If only they realized I don't mean  
to be that way, that I would  
change if I could.  
If only they realized maybe it's  
their fault too, for using up all  
their energy to focus all on him.

If only they realized maybe I  
wouldn't be so draining, or  
seeking attention  
If only they used some of their  
energy on me too.

But, in reality, how can I complain  
when he's done nothing?  
How can I dislike him when he's  
never given me a reason to?

Is it reason enough to hold a  
silent fury, a brewing hostility  
every time he speaks?

Or is it reason enough when  
those cloudless eyes and freckled  
grin of a ten-year-old boy only  
remind me of a baby who  
captured mommy and daddy  
with the very same blue eyes and  
bubbling grin?



## Vagabond Bonding

Andrei Bucaloui

DANVILLE, PA

Under the streetlamp were two vagabonds,  
Dirt smeared across their pensive scowls,  
Drawing deep breaths, each puff forming new bonds  
Carrying them higher than hoot owls  
The nighttime air caressed their toughened cheeks  
Whispering in tired, deaf ears, Bittersweet stories of what could have been  
Howling, haunting, hurtful years.  
Harmful tales are sadistic whips that beat,  
Till spines are sore and black and blue  
Their bodies, limbs, their saddened souls,  
Begging to God for life anew  
"Hey there my main man" sighed the man supine,  
Stretching out his crackly back  
"Ain't it pretty? The way those stars sparkle!"  
The sky above them was pitch black  
"It, it sure is" agreed the other one  
Who saw nothing but cloudy skies  
Confused, asked he "What's your story my man?"  
Rising smoke reddened their sad eyes  
The man supine got up on his elbows  
Drew deep, blew out thick smoke, then coughed  
His mean looking head between hunched shoulders  
"I won't tell you, you'll think I'm soft"  
"My friend, please do, I'm curious to know,  
With whom I am spending tonight."  
He sat up and faced his inquisitor  
"I often read and loved to write"  
"So surely you are educated, right?"  
"College degree - published two

books"  
"Then why are you tramping around tonight?"  
"I prefer trees and running brooks.  
I wrote and studied as much as I could  
Like busy honey bees that buzz  
I tried working harder, but got depressed  
I had lost touch with who I was.  
I couldn't stand the drab life I had led  
So I quit to find myself again  
To smile, to enjoy my life,  
To gaze at empty skies and see heaven"  
Enough was said, the impression was made  
Both men lay silent in the night  
Both pondered past, future, present  
Silence lasted till morning's light  
"Pal, what you had said last night touched me"  
He brushed the sand off of his eyes  
"I left my wife a week ago today"  
Both men had strength enough to rise  
"What happened my man?  
Betray you did she?"  
"I left because I'm dying a slow death.  
I'm unhappy and feel it's consequence.  
I ran but now I'm out of breath"  
"Let's go my friend, to heaven let's travel  
Our starless skies will have to do.  
Focus and find your own bright light  
If only this cruel drab world knew  
The men got up and gathered all their things  
They flicked their cigarettes to hell  
Embarking in opposite directions  
Their bright lights would treat them well.  
Howling wind scattered the wispy smoke  
Of cigarettes consumed and tossed  
Of the subtle whispers heard by deaf ears  
Of bridges made, but never crossed of.

## Huntress

Meagan R. Thomas

COVENTRY, CT

Alone in the wood,  
She listens for life.

The only response  
Is her own heartbeat.  
She is used to silence.

She could be one of the trees;  
Their shadows are the same,  
And all are as still  
As life can be.

She contemplates the object  
in her hands.  
Its pale curves catch the remaining light

As she bends it,  
Using disguised strength  
To string it tightly.

The tension in her hands  
Serves as a snapping reminder  
Of how easily her tool  
Could be made a weapon.

Power in hand,  
She flicks the bowstring,  
Letting the vibrations  
disrupt the air around her.

Leaves rustle indignantly;  
She acknowledges them,  
And removes the string.

She does not need to  
be a hunter tonight.

At least,

Alone in the wood,  
She is able to choose.

## The Next to the Last Day Before Thursday

Dominick Leskiw

Ho-Ho-Kus, NJ

you drove me home and  
pulled into my driveway  
then said you would  
make a  
scene if I didn't get out  
but I held your hand  
tighter and you  
squeezed right back I  
know you were feeling  
bothered by the world  
that day I have  
a sixth sense that lets me  
know when people are  
bothered or upset  
or angry or disappointed  
or even when  
they say they're fine and  
really they're fed up and  
don't want to do anything  
but sit in someone's  
driveway count  
backwards to the minute  
they pulled  
in because they don't  
want to go back home  
and face an agitated  
brother and  
loud mother and no  
father except the little  
picture of him in their  
wallet  
so I said can we just sit  
here a little longer  
just one more song or two  
and you tell me that the  
man on the stereo is  
singing about loneliness  
and that you're feeling  
loneliness that  
you feel like you're not  
special or different

I don't want to leave  
because I'm afraid of  
forgetting  
you don't think anyone  
will remember you I say  
someone will someone  
will someone will

## Tea

Alyssa Chen

PINE BROOK, NJ

Green, oolong, jasmine,  
lavender, Red: The essence of  
a culture in one burning  
waterfall.

The first time I drank it, it  
scorched a line of flames down  
into my stomach, drew all the  
moisture from my mouth and  
throat.

I pushed the tiny cup away  
and frowned.

"No," I stated plaintively.  
My mother looked at me,  
exasperated, and called the  
waiter.

Kěbù kěyǐ gěi wǒ mēn yī bēi  
bīng shuǐ?

Could you get us a glass of ice  
water?

When I tell them I cannot  
handle spicy food, my friends  
joke, "Aren't you Asian?"

I laugh, saying I guess I'm not  
good at being Asian.

My laughter, though, stings  
my tongue a little like the  
numbing taste of má là sauce.  
I haven't spoken Chinese in  
three years.

The first time I enjoyed tea  
was a cup of English Breakfast  
served with creamy milk and  
a luxurious amount of sugar.  
It tasted nothing like my first  
cup - It was tame, it was  
mellow, and it was sweet.  
I told my father about it. He  
chuckled.

That's the way the British  
make it, he said. I must have  
looked at him strangely,  
because he added, If you like  
it, just drink it that way.

I once asked an Italian friend  
what it's like to be Italian.  
He said, "You know what it's  
like. It's like being any other  
human being."

I protest, but I do not say

anything: That's not what I  
mean. I meant, do you drink  
coffee instead of tea?

Do you visit Italy and the  
markets and does your throat  
close up a little when you try  
to ask for bread, or milk, or  
water, the tongue of this  
language dry and grainy in  
your mouth?

I listened to French  
electro-swing for a month.  
Caravan Palace and Ravel and  
Debussy also, Edith Piaf,  
I played only Chaminade on  
my flute.

I read novels set in Paris,  
drank the wines of the  
countryside from the dark  
recesses of a wine cabinet in  
our living room, prepared  
café au lait in the old  
coffeepot my parents  
brought with them when  
they came here.  
Genetics is all that ties me to  
China, I insisted.

I wandered for hours in only  
one section of an art  
museum, forever stuck in the  
dreams of Monet, Renoir,  
Morisot,  
Enchanted by the promise each  
stroke of paint held.

When I open the gates to  
my family's pantry for  
breakfast, I realize my  
destination is not a  
kingdom of baguettes or  
croissants or sugar cubes  
or coffee beans.

I enter a pantry filled with  
thousand-year eggs and  
dried cloud ear, rice  
noodles,  
and  
Tea leaves

My mother reached for  
the Cheerios that lay  
sideways in the back, and  
spooned the rings of  
wheat into my small, eager  
mouth.

# View of a 19th Century Photograph

Elizabeth Winkler

RIVERSIDE, CT

Seen only through a glossy veil a  
testosterone-fueled lens I seem to  
glow beautiful delicate and  
useless

Dare to grab at the barrier learn  
to glare at the camera even as  
they say smile!

Seek out the textures in the folds  
of their eyelids that say if you  
show skin you're a slut and if you  
don't you're a prude sit still! they  
say cross your ankles! don't  
slouch!

Captured in black and white  
my stare unnerves them lower  
your eyes! be ladylike!

We learn in the classroom with  
no books from empty desks and  
silent boards Is this all the  
education they think we deserve?  
I search for color within the  
monochrome our time tells us  
we are

Sit still and cross your ankles and  
fold your hands and don't dare  
slouch and lower your eyes  
Be ladylike

That's all you're capable of when  
they pretend to peer past the  
sheen on the picture all they see  
is black and white the half smile  
made of folded hands and  
criss-crossed ankles that's all they  
want to see

But we have more knowledge  
than their empty classroom  
could ever hope to provide  
Looking out from our  
two-dimensional prison we see  
rainbows of emotion peeping  
from behind colorless eyelids  
below tightly shut mouths that  
forego speech because heaven  
forbid we have opinions  
Pulling apart the inked rectangle  
they've decided we belong in  
I bend time forward to a  
childhood of finger-painted  
colors where pink and blue  
aren't stamped across our skin  
as we emerge shrieking into life  
I find a future built of moving  
pictures whose brightness pulses

from the voices of white-clad  
women chanting at every ceiling  
in hopes of shattering the glass  
you'll find the rebellious blues  
and the angry oranges the  
corners of forbidden pleasures  
tinted forest green you'll hear  
the fluid rushing of knowledge  
beneath your skin and you'll  
exist for yourself in a world  
shaped like equality

We look out from behind  
the translucent divider  
knowing all they'd have  
to do is stare a little  
unladylike and then

They might see the  
textures of  
your future too.

aside with the words  
"bleeding our of her  
wherever" on live  
television,

and someone my age  
denied insurance for  
period-controlling  
birth-control  
because they don't identify  
as female.

I pay hundreds,  
a tax on necessary hygiene  
products  
because they aren't  
necessary for you.

To you, your words are  
insignificant.  
A single pebble.  
Still I can't forget this.  
It's a pebble at the bottom  
of an ocean of blood  
that crusts the mouths  
of those who just want  
water.

Casual remarks like yours  
make anyone with a uterus  
suffer  
alone, and silently.

I won't be silent anymore.  
Let me speak for those with  
periods,  
because my heart bleeds as  
well as my uterus.  
Let me speak for everyone  
who learned to breathe  
through the pain instead  
of talking through it.

And you may dismiss my  
anger as pre-menstrual  
whining,  
but it's an anger deeper and  
redder  
than my body ever was or  
will be.  
No one should ever be  
belittled for bleeding.  
No one should ever have to  
say  
"I'm fine"  
because their pain is too  
shameful to speak of.  
I won't forget that,  
and now,  
neither will you.

## Casual Remarks

Meagan R. Thomas

COVENTRY, CT

"Can we just forget this  
conversation ever happened?"  
I see how you avert your eyes  
when I tell you the truth:  
I am tired, because I am  
cramped.

Half the population bleeds  
for almost twelve weeks a year,  
yet you say,

"Can we just forget this  
conversation ever happened?"  
I won't forget that.

I can't.  
I add your words to the ash in  
my memories.

Next to them,

I get a zero in P.E. class  
because I can't stand up.

I can't go to the bathroom;  
my "girl problems" make me  
bleed on my chair.

I see a powerful woman cast



## **Texts from Spain**

**Betsy Zaubler**

MONTCLAIR, NJ

Remember when you showed me Las Meninas for the first time? Well, I saw it today. I guess I didn't need to tell you that, but I thought you'd want to know. Hope the internship is going well. Oh and this is Lucy. I got a Spanish number.

Delivered

I wish you could've seen Las Meninas. Pictures don't do it justice. But anyways, I'm heading to Barcelona tomorrow, and I thought you'd want to know because you always told me you really wanted to go to Barcelona, so I'll bring you back something, if you want. So yeah, text back. Or not, whatever works.

Delivered

I went to the Reina Sofia today but the Guernica was too crowded. So I waited in a cafe until the museum was about to close, and oh my God, Andrew. I've written hundreds of papers on it and I kept thinking about how we had that night class, and how Professor Grayson turned off the lights and it was so dark we couldn't remember who was sitting next us. And then first all you could see was the white and then claws coming out of the door and then the faces. The faces.

Delivered

I was supposed to go to France today. I decided to stay in Spain.

Delivered

I went out till 4:00 a.m. And I'm walking back to my hostel by myself. And I'm lost. And I found this postcard on the street. And it was blank. But I don't have a stamp. So I thought I'd text you and tell you about it because that was the next best option. And there aren't any stars in the sky. No moon. No nothing. And isn't that sad? Wouldn't it be sad if

## **OUTSTANDING PROSE**

all the stars died? If they all died and we didn't even know it?

Delivered

I hope I'm not texting you too much. I'm trying not to text you too much. I just have a lot to say. But if you don't hear from me for a few weeks it's cause I'm going off the grid for a little. Nothing major, just some hiking in the Pyrenes. So yeah, I guess I'll give you the space you wanted.

Delivered

You're not going to believe me, but I went hiking every day for the past week. I can't believe I didn't want to come on this trip. I wish I didn't have to leave.

Delivered

Sorry I'm not texting you as much. Well maybe that's a good thing, I don't know. But anyways, I went to Figueres today, and I saw the Dali museum. And I felt like it would never end, like it would go on forever. And I'm dizzy just thinking about how I kept going around in circles, like I was trapped in this massive circle and everyone else in the museum seemed to know how to get out of it but me. I'm texting too much, aren't I?

Delivered

I'm sitting in Park Güell. I come here almost every day now, and I look out and can see almost all of Barcelona. And the sun is setting so everything looks red. I know I need to stop texting you. I keep picking up the phone to text you. There's something about the distance and the time. You were always so distant.

Delivered

So I'm just trying to figure out where we stand. I've been here for almost two months and I'm coming home in next week, and I'm not sure if you want me to come to New York. I'm just trying to figure out what you want. Can you



please text back?

Delivered

I took a Flamenco class the other day. The teacher said I was good, and she has this friend in Sevilla, so I'm on the train and I'm going to learn how to dance Flamenco. Remember when that artist came to talk to us our sophomore year and we had just started dating? And she kept telling me you were a keeper because how often do you find a guy who's an art history major? And then we went back to your dorm room, and you made me ramen and it was one of those cliché college moments? I've been think a lot about that. But this isn't college. And I can't just walk into your dorm. And I can't talk to you whenever I have a problem because you aren't here and you never liked listening anyway. I get that if you want space I need to give you space. But three years isn't something I'm ready to let go of. So just tell me where you're at, okay?

Delivered

I know I just texted, and you probably think I'm crazy. You probably think I have no friends, and I have nothing to do, so I'm just texting you all the time. But I have friends. A lot actually. And I'm really happy. I honestly don't think I've ever been this happy. And then I just get sad when I think about you, and how I almost didn't come because I was scared of what could happen in two months of being away. And how many other things I did or didn't do because of you. And I stayed out late again last night, and there was this man sitting on the street playing Flamenco and it was so stereotypically Spain, and I just sat and listened, and everything was quiet and still. Do you know what that feels like? I hope you can find what that feels like.

Delivered

I'm staying in Spain. I don't know how much longer I'll be here.

Delivered



## OUTSTANDING POETRY



### Letters to Nobody, Written at Midnight

Alyssa Chen

PINE BROOK, NJ

**I.**  
 You left a coffee stain on my  
 armchair, the one I loved to sit on as  
 a kid  
 marvel at the shiny legs, the spotless,  
 silky sheen.  
 You told me to ask God what sin felt  
 like, when you touched my face with  
 your chewed-up mint gum  
 and caressed my ink-soaked pages  
 between your hands.  
 What kind of milkshake do they serve  
 in paradise? You ask,  
 pointing to a bright cloud in the night  
 sky that no one else  
 seems to see. And I collapse into the  
 grass, cross-legged and cross-hearted.  
 If you sing Hallelujah to me in your  
 voice of soft asphalt,  
 hardening as the deserts cool,  
 upon this hatrack I shall hang my  
 sunshined jacket and the notes you  
 gave me - A, C, B flat  
 the scales of dragons that ran down  
 your spine. What are you?  
 I often wonder why my melody struck  
 your fancy.  
 Perhaps you should've used speakers  
 so I can hear what you're hearing,  
 but right now your ears are plugged  
 into the soft knobs of your  
 headphones, and you smile and  
 wave at me, gesturing your love  
 for a symphony I cannot even hear.  
 Sometimes, I look into the mirror and  
 gaze into my own eyes.  
 Such strange, brown eyes. I have  
 never seen them before.  
 Strange, beautiful.  
 Your hands slipped into my sleeves  
 just as I pulled my hands away,  
 and now they rest on the inside of this  
 black velvet on my arms.

**II.**  
 If you had told me that day that  
 raindrops always end up in the  
 flowing rivers,  
 I would have pulled out my umbrella

to catch the water  
 in the crevices of polka-dot polyester  
 to show you that some stay on.  
 But I know better now -  
 I watch droplets line up on the green  
 thorns,  
 each a small globe of the same image  
 of the rose that droops in front of  
 them,  
 each world falling off the thorns one  
 by one.  
 The air of rose and fairy blood is cold  
 and damp in the center of my palm.  
 A drop sprays from the white stream  
 below,  
 and I catch it between trembling  
 fingertips.  
 I see what you mean now.  
 If only you could come back to me -  
 I would hold the droplet in the sun  
 for you to see,  
 for I know you'd never look in the  
 shadows.  
 When have you gone - have you  
 become  
 a moth, the very essence of your  
 obsession extinguishing your own  
 light?  
 How many clocks must I disassemble  
 to stop time?  
 According to the theory of relatively,  
 the speed of light is constant  
 and time is relative depending on  
 how fast you travel;  
 If I throw this raindrop fast enough  
 into the past,  
 would you be able to catch it?  
 Or perhaps, I will throw it forward,  
 so that it will reach us where we are  
 together again,  
 where we can hold it between our  
 clasped hands and  
 throw ourselves into the light as one.

**III.**  
 I found a fluorescent bird  
 in the jar where we used to keep  
 pennies,  
 the ones that disappeared one by one  
 as the sun faded from our dreams  
 and all we were left with was this  
 small apartment  
 and the maps we used as posters to  
 cover the cracks in the walls  
 and the remnants of dog food and  
 cocktails and tissues.  
 Do you remember when we were so  
 caught in that net,  
 the world of fish who kept swimming  
 round and round,  
 drowning forever in their own words?  
 It took us long to escape, but now

I am wondering if consciousness is  
 really worth  
 the broken teeth and the chapped  
 lips.  
 You bought me a record  
 from that shop we always passed in  
 our flights to our "people"  
 and I reminded you that I owned no  
 record player.  
 Listen to it, you said,  
 spinning, scratching the surface with  
 your fingernails.  
 Listen.  
 I did.  
 When I bought a brand new record  
 player from Amazon and played your  
 record,  
 I listened for the sounds of your  
 scratching fingernails that never  
 came.  
 Instead, in their place were long  
 breaks,  
 sudden and forever, it seemed.

**IV.**  
 If you cannot come to me after  
 our whole life together,  
 I will breathe softly through your  
 lungs.  
 If standing under the same light as  
 you, walking through the same night,  
 does not help me understand your  
 pale hair  
 or your bloodshot eyes,  
 I will speak softly into your mouth.  
 We lay under the sky, the whole mass  
 of clouds and the universe whispering  
 above us.  
 Long ago, I wanted you as a mystery  
 to unravel,  
 as a beautiful wrapping, a gift only  
 revealed by the rip of a child's fingers.  
 And here we are, me trying once more  
 to peel off your gold veneer,  
 eager nails on the surface of the metal  
 mask of a lottery ticket.  
 I stop myself, and place the ticket into  
 an equally gold frame,  
 so that if I do not find the winning  
 numbers,  
 I will still have a piece of paper to  
 prove my love for you.  
 The sky has turned a sickly yellow  
 now, and I am not even sure  
 I can bring myself to pulling the ticket  
 from my pocket  
 for you to see.  
 So all there is left for me to do  
 is wrap you in my own paper  
 and kiss your heavy soul  
 until I feel the heart of a flightless  
 sparrow underneath.

# The Houseguest

Mairead Kilgallon

BEDFORD HILLS, NY

Ezra was a man of lines and edges. The straight kind, regarding each. This was evident in all aspects of his life, from his sharp features to the strict geometry of his living space. His house, if one could call it that, was a small place that required little thought to navigate. Ever since he first moved in, Ezra had found that maneuvering through the rooms was like following instructions that he had been told but since forgot, that were returning to him, triggered by the sudden familiarity of the space around him.

Ezra was a man who knew what he needed, and always had through his many decades of life. There were once times when it was hard to acquire what he knew he needed, but those times were mostly gone, as they seemed to be when one advances in age. In his rectangular cupboards with chipped off-white paint coating them, lay the things he needed: his food (always at least two-thirds organic, the chemicals used in factories these days could be especially harmful to someone his age), his cups for the perfectly good tap water, his towels (he preferred white ones; white had always been the color he associated with cleanliness), his dishes that were pleasing circles and not chipped, his extra toothbrush and paste because he did not like to go to the store whenever he ran out, and, of course, all of his clothes and shoes and jackets and hats and belts, which were in the cupboards in his bedroom.

Ezra was also a man of routine, which is common for someone of his age with a liking for straight lines and full inventory. In the morning he would wake, take his clothes from the chipped off-white cupboard drawer in his bedroom, shower if it was a Monday, Wednesday, Friday, or Sunday, dress, brush his teeth, make a small breakfast, and then sit at his computer with a cup of herbal or black tea. During the day he would research or continue to write whatever biography he was building at the moment in two-hour bursts broken up by crossword puzzles or a quick stroll outside, sometimes both simultaneously.

Ezra, instead of writing biographies,

liked to think of himself as “building” them. It made him feel unique and special, like he was different from the other biographers, no matter how successful they were, that he had some deep understanding that was lost on them.

Ezra enjoyed biographies as reading material as well as for building, because he liked how real they were. He liked being someone else, not in the fatuous way of those who read fiction, who long to experience and know things that could not and would not exist, but in a way that connected him to the real world, to what was true and what the reality was in times he knew only as history. When he was building he would sometimes pretend to write an autobiography, sometimes so enthusiastically that he began writing in the first person. If this ever happened, he might take a crossword/walk break a little early. This writing process would go on for most of the day, only stopping for a small lunch, until he felt it was time to eat one more meal before bed. He would stand up from his computer after saving the day’s progress, pour himself a glass of water to drink while he prepared his two-thirds organic food, turn the radio on to the weather, sit down for a small dinner, wash the dishes, brush his teeth again, change into nightclothes, then read a biography for about twenty minutes before turning of the light with a click! and beginning to fall asleep.

Ezra did not like being interrupted during this routine. In fact, he did not like being interrupted at all. Those were some of the few things that annoyed the mild-mannered man of straight lines and routines and biographies. So, naturally, Ezra felt annoyed when there was a too-loud banging on his door twenty-two minutes before his second crossword/walk break from the building of a biography on J.R.R. Tolkien, a man whose life Ezra enjoyed researching. Swallowing down his annoyance, which any respectable man of straight lines ought to do, he saved his notes and rose from his chair. The door was not far from his seat, so he did not feel compelled to hurry, even as there was another obnoxiously loud bang from whom-ever was outside.

Ezra’s door did not have a little window on the top, so he opened it more slowly than usual to make sure no one questionable was seeking to

enter his straight-edged house and life. He was met with an odd, but not entirely absurd result. On his threshold stood a frighteningly thin girl of seventeen or eighteen, though Ezra could not be wholly sure, who had sweat and dirt smeared on her still noticeably pretty face. Her brown, chin-length hair had a few twigs stuck in it, and strands were plastered to her forehead with sweat. The clothes she wore seemed to have been nice sometime recently, but were now as dirt-smeared as her skin. Little scratches and bruises littered her arms, face, and neck, and her pants were ripped at both knees, leaking dribbles of blood down her shins. She was breathing heavily, turning her head to look into the woods on the edge of Ezra’s property too often, her blue eyes too wide and too desperate.

Ezra knew he should feel apprehensive, he should shut out this stranger and the possible outcomes to this day she presented that he would not be able to predict. But as he took in her odd appearance in an elongated moment, something caught his attention: her rings. They glittered on her dirty, scratched fingers, at least fifteen of them. Some were silver, some gold, others with intricate patterns or small stones set in them. Out of all the strange things that his girl was made up of, those were what made Ezra reconsider. He wanted to know those rings. He wanted to know their wearer. Maybe they could give him a real life to fall into, another biography that he would make into an autobiography, if only for a little while. So, when the girl gasped, “Inside!”, he stepped aside and let her stumble into his small, angular house without a word.

Ezra felt calmer than he should have been, even as the girl nearly crashed headlong into his writing desk, narrowly avoiding toppling the tower of *The Lord of the Rings* books perched on it. He did not react when she frantically yanked the curtains over his square windows, instead focusing on counting her rings. He could not be sure, but there seemed to be eighteen in total, two on each finger and one on each of her thumbs. As the girl peered behind the newly drawn curtains, Ezra felt the urge to introduce himself. “My name is Ezra,” he said, sounding much too quiet. He flinched at his own words and straightened his striped shirt. The girl started, as if she had forgotten she was not alone, that this straight-

edged, biographical house was not hers, and she let go of the curtains very suddenly.

Ezra noticed how her shoulders were slumped in something like defeat, but for some reason he did not believe that was the right word. How could someone with twigs in her hair and a pretty face covered with dirt and eighteen shiny rings be defeated? It did not seem like a likely situation to him. He felt the urge to comfort her, but did not think it would be well-received. She seemed skittish and wary of him, seeming to be at war with herself over whether she should respond to Ezra's introduction of himself. Finally, her unlikely slump of defeat deepened and she turned up the corners of her dry lips into something that was not a smile. "Thanks for letting me in, Mr. Ezra. Um, my name is...Adele. My name's Adele." She said all of this very quickly.

Ezra had a feeling that Adele's name was not really Adele, but from the sad look on her face when she had said it, he decided not to ask for more information. Adele was quiet, her breathing still labored. Ezra was desperate to fill the silence, so he asked if she was okay. She began to nod, but seemed to think better of it and drew one of her ring-ornamented hands out from under her jacket with a hiss. Blood stained her palm and tinged her rings a dark red. It took Ezra a moment to process what he was seeing, but when he did, he exploded into a flurry of movement. He felt strangely detached from his limbs, which were reaching out and gently guiding Adele to a chair, helping her shrug off her jacket to reveal the blooming red stain on the girl's left side, holding the back of her head to make her look at him and keep from passing out.

Ezra had not been in this much of a hurry in quite a while, and he was dimly aware of this as he chanted "Eyes open!" at Adele over and over, grabbing one of his white towels he associated with cleanliness and pressing it against her wound. He was also dimly aware that he technically had no obligation to this stranger, that he did not have to get blood all over his white towels or interrupt his daily routine, yet he was, and it actually felt very natural. He wondered if that made him a good person.

Ezra's mother had been a doctor

with poor nanny-choosing skills, so many times as a boy Ezra had gone to the hospital, treated to lessons in medicine by nurses that respected his mother and thought he was cute. He had always hoped a day would come when he would be able to put these skills to use, but as he had fallen into his routine lifestyle, and his mother had died, and the nurses maybe retired or stopped being nurses, this hope had been more of an interesting "what if" to consider than anything else. Now, he felt an almost child-like giddiness that he knew did not suit the situation as he rushed into the bathroom to retrieve his first-aid kit and Adele began to insist, "No hospital! Please, no hospital!" He did not see it as his place to question her. That thought made him feel like a doctor.

Ezra used the scissors in his kit to cut a square in Adele's bloodstained shirt, revealing a what looked like an inch-long stab wound, but he was too out of practice to be sure. He had only ever seen photos of violent wounds, but he had experienced stitching, so he was reasonably confident. He wiped away the blood around the edges after applying pressure to stop the heavy bleeding, further staining his clean white towel, then uttered a warning that came out shakier than he intended before dousing the wound in alcohol. Adele's fingernails created impressions in the wooden armrests of the straight-edged chair she sat on, a low groan escaping her through clenched teeth.

Ezra found himself muttering "Okay, okay, it's okay, we're okay" to himself on repeat as he fished around in the first-aid kit for the needle and stitching thread. This confused him, as did the fact that his hands were shaking even more violently than the gravely wounded girl's. Ezra was generally a calm, collected man. His hands did not shake. How could someone with shaking hands create the straight lines and edges that made up his life, or reliably type on a keyboard while building a biography? Ezra took a moment to still his hands and his mind, attempting to focus on his breathing like his mother had told him to do whenever he was stressed. He squeezed his hands in and out of fists, trying to ignore the fact that they were smeared with blood; the sight unnerved him.

Ezra threaded the sterile needle, and as he was doing so, he noticed an

odd stillness. Adele had passed out while

Ezra was calming himself down. Panic threatened to engulf him again, but he forced himself to look hard at the girl's face, then muttered, "You will die if I don't help. I should help, I must help, I will help. I will save your life." Somewhat surprisingly, this small encouragement worked. The tremor in his hands died down enough that he trusted his hand to stitch Adele back together, and his mind cleared enough that he trusted his own judgement while tending to her injury.

Ezra had never been more thankful for his apparent lack of squeamishness than he was then, which actually was not saying much, since he had long since forgotten that he was not squeamish. Facing things that made most people uncomfortable and nauseous was not a part of Ezra's routine. However, this day was not very routine at all.

Ezra pinched the opening of the wound closed with a couple fingers of his right hand, then began to stitch with his dominant left hand. He tried to recall every time he had seen his mother do this, including the few occasions when she had been stitching him up. He felt the urge to run a hand over his face, to trace the faint scar that ran from the bottom of his nose to the corner of his mouth. An accident, of course, from when he was younger and much less straight-edged, involving a glass bottle of Coca-Cola and his friend George's limited knowledge of pyrotechnics. His mother had numbed the wound with a special paste and then sewed him back together, but she was unable to save some damaged nerves. He had a lopsided smile that he was not smiling as often as other times in his life, but it did emerge when he thought of that day.

Ezra returned his focus to the task at hand. He had not even completed the first stitch. He breathed in deep and pictured his mother standing beside him, helping guide his hand. This calmed him because it was the first time he had imagined his mother clearly in a long time, years even. Despite his predicament, it made him almost happy. Almost, because there were too many sad memories tied up with the happy ones, as it is with every loved one who dies. This calming emotion of almost-happiness steadied Ezra's hand and

mind as he put Adele back together, sewing in threads of life and health to keep death from wriggling inside her too early. He carefully stitched for half an hour, at least, movements much slower than his mother's, but just as controlled. Once he finished, bandaged the imperfect but functional stitches, he washed his hands and tools of Adele's blood and stowed the first aid kit away, and then he decided he would attempt to move the sleeping girl to the small sofa near his writing desk. He would have put her in his bed and slept on the sofa himself, but he did not trust his aged body to reliably carry her without possibly furthering the girl's injuries.

Ezra thought the distance between the chair Adele had passed out in and the sofa was something he could handle carrying her for, but he did not want to take any chances. So, his method became one of pulling and shifting. Slowly, he dragged the chair the girl was sitting on alongside the sofa, then carefully deposited her on the cushions. Ezra tapped his brow afterward and was slightly surprised to find it beaded with sweat. He wiped it off with his sleeve. He hated sweat.

Ezra took a seat in the recently vacated, bloodstained chair and looked hard at the sleeping girl. Would she even survive? He did not know how much blood she had lost before blowing through his door like the wind, like the devil was at her heels. Then again, why did he care? Why should he care? He owed this girl whose name was probably not Adele nothing, yet to help her he remembered happy and sad things about his mother, he got bloodstains on his clean white towels and straight-edged chair, he even started sweating. What did he owe her?

Ezra noticed then that his brow was furrowed. He immediately relaxed his face. Mariana had constantly told him that drawing his eyebrows together in his "bulldog face" gave him frown lines. He only started listening after she died, as it is with much advice, followed out of a kind of shame. After relaxing his brow and thinking about Mariana for a moment, he looked back at Adele, or whatever her true name was. Her breaths were shallow, her ring-adorned hands glinting as they rested on her stomach. Ezra wondered if all eighteen of them held a story. He liked the idea of that, keeping little pockets

of history, little biographies, shining prettily on your finger, a story known only to you and those you choose to tell.

Ezra thought then that he wanted to be the one Adele chose to tell. When he had seen her rings he had been interested. He had been curious. He enjoyed curiosity, to an extent. That was why he liked biographies. He could be curious, then informed quickly through words printed on pages. It was a full-circle kind of feeling, to be curious about someone, learn and build their biography, then publish it so others could experience their own curiosity. Ezra wondered what Adele's biography would be like. It would include how she got her rings—all at a time, each on their own, from loved ones, from shops, finding them on the street. It would include him, he realized, the man who took her in when she was running from something. It would include the something she was running from, and why it scared her. It would include why her cheeks looked hollow and her ribs showed through her bloodstained shirt.

Ezra lingered on that observation and concluded that his non-routine task now was to make food for his new guest. He did not have any experience with being stabbed, but he supposed a little nutrition could not hurt. He checked on Adele's breathing, which was shallow but there, and then shuffled into the kitchen, barely ten feet from his writing desk. He opened the cupboard, running his thumb over its straight edge as he inspected the contents. He settled on warming up canned chicken noodle soup. He knew of its "magical" properties for sick children, and how big was the difference, really, between being sick and recovering from a stabbing?

Ezra opened the can and slopped the contents into a pot over a flame the same blue color as a stone on one of Adele's rings. He stared intently at the heating soup until slow, greasy bubbles formed and popped with heaves on the surface and steam rose with a warm, salty smell. He snuck himself a bite or two, telling himself that he was testing the heat, though there was no one who would judge him. After turning off the blue flame, Ezra checked on Adele once more before going into his room. He had just remembered about the bloodstains on his bright white shirt. He unbuttoned it and

held it up to the light, inspecting the rusty flecks and splotches in the material, wondering if he could save the color. That was a problem for later, he thought, tossing the shirt aside. It lay askew, crumpled and crooked atop the straight sheets of his bedding.

Ezra turned away and rifled through his neatly organized drawers, wiping away clean creases and wrinkling his folded blue and/or white shirts. He decided against another white button-down, selecting one of the few dark gray t-shirts he owned. He pulled the flimsy fabric over his head and switched out his bloodied khaki pants for a clean black pair. He replaced his socks as well, just for the sake of completing the change. His hands still felt sticky, so he washed them again, this time with more soap. He splashed some of the water on his face, which felt wonderful after producing that unwanted sweat. Drops ran down his neck, and he stuck his head under the faucet, enjoying the shocking cold of the tap water as it soaked his silver hair.

Ezra remained like that for a few moments, letting the jet of water drown out his thoughts. This, he thought, would be a blank space in his biography. He sometimes wondered about what someone was doing in the wordless half-page in between chapters, or in the little symbol that signified a line break. He normally assumed it was just insignificant facts about a regular person's life, one that did not need to be recorded because everyone already knew what that was like. But now, as he stood hunched over with his head in his rectangular, straight-edged sink, he thought of this blank space as one that, rather than being too mundane and commonplace, could not be explained by any biographer's words.

Ezra's head jerked upward when he heard a thump from the kitchen/living room, and he bit back a very non-routine curse as his skull collided with the metal faucet. Pain ricocheted down his spine, quickly falling into rhythm with the throb of his pulse. Rubbing the soon-to-be lump, Ezra straightened and made his way toward the source of the startling noise. When he rounded the corner, he stopped in his tracks. There was a thrashing blanket on the ground next to the empty sofa, small grunts of pain coming from beneath it. He caught a glimpse of a ring-adorned



hand shoot out from under the blanket before it ripped the fabric away, exposing wild, static-mussed brown hair framing a panicked face. Adele kicked the blanket off her legs and shot to her feet, nearly slipping on the rectangular pillow she had taken down with her.

Ezra was frozen in place. Adele's blue eyes met his with an intensity that felt like a bucket of ice water was being dumped over his already damp head. He saw her wince and clutch her side after moving so sharply, but she stayed on her feet. Ezra wiped droplets from his brow before they could fall into his eyes. Adele inspected her wound, the haphazard life-stitches holding her skin together. Her gaze shot from the stitches to the stunned man and back again, some of the ferocity gone from it.

Ezra still hadn't moved when not-really-named-Adele cleared her throat and croaked, "Well, um, good job." Ezra blinked. "On the stitches, I mean. Oh, and thanks. That was really, um, nice of you..." She trailed off and winced, from her own words or from pain, Ezra could not tell. He was not entirely sure how to respond; interacting with frustrated teenagers with lots of rings was unfathomably far from his routine. Rather than make more of a fool of himself by standing frozen in place, he gave Adele a small smile and trotted over to the stove, where the soup was cooling to and edible temperature.

Ezra kept his back to the girl by his sofa as he said in a measured voice, "I made soup. Are you hungry? I--" he cut himself off before he started rambling. There was silence from behind him for a few agonizing moments and he turned the flame back on to keep the soup warm. Then there came a quiet noise of assent, followed by a thud and a grunt.

Ezra turned sharply to see that Adele had attempted to step forward and her leg had not given her any support. She gripped the arm of the sofa and hauled herself back upright. He could see the muscles in her cheek strain as she ground her teeth. Before he quite knew he was doing it, Ezra pointed the wooden spoon he held at the sofa and said, "Sit. Doctor's orders."

Ezra knew he was not a doctor, but it occurred to him that Adele did not. As she sighed and settled onto the sofa, Ezra smiled to himself. He felt

like his mother. Like he was helping someone be healthy, guarding them against pain and death. He liked that feeling. All the sweating and brow-furrowing that had occurred felt like it was worth it, if he made this girl all right again. He decided that, at least for now, he would be a doctor. His mother. A person who makes things all right again.

Ezra, or now Dr. Ezra, tested the heat of the soup before pouring it into two bowls. He made sure Adele's had more in it, because that was what a doctor would do. He opened one of the straight-edged drawers and took two soup spoons from their designated soup spoon compartment, which he plopped into their respective bowls before making his way to Adele. She looked more comfortable than Ezra would have expected. She leaned her back against the armrest and her legs were laid out straight in front of her. She started to move them aside to make room for Ezra, but he waved the courtesies away in a doctory fashion. Instead, he sat in the bloodstained wooden chair that Adele had initially collapsed in. As he did so, Adele seemed to realize that she had been moved, and began another ramble of gratitude, which Ezra dismissed with another serene smile that he was proud of. "No thanks necessary," he said. Adele smiled, and Ezra felt appreciated, which was absolutely not part of his routine, but not necessarily bad, either.

Ezra waited for Adele to begin slurping the soup before he lifted his spoon to his lips. There was a stretch of silence as both of them ate, and Ezra's toes curled against it in his newly changed socks. Adele was the one to break it. "Did anyone, or, um, anything come to the door after me?" Ezra tried to stop his brow from furrowing at this, but he could not help it. "No, not that I saw. Why?" He noticed the muscles working in Adele's jaw, and remembered the stab wound. "Is someone chasing you?" She just frowned in response and murmured something like "kind of" into her soup. Confused, he pushed for more, but all she disclosed were more vague answers and long slurps of soup.

Ezra, once both of them had finished, silently took his and Adele's bowls to the sink and rinsed them out. His toes were starting to curl again with the silence, and his brow

kept furrowing deeper. He thought of Mariana. His brow relaxed, but then tensed again as the thought of not-really-Adele sitting on the sofa behind him. She seemed confused and sad. Even though it was not part of his routine, Ezra still knew what it was like to feel like that. He wondered what his mother would do. What the doctor version of himself would do. Adele clearly did not want to discuss who or what had hurt her, and he knew that doctors should not press their patients for information they did not want to share.

Ezra finished drying out the bowls and put them back in their rectangular cupboards with the chipping white paint and decided that if he could not have a conversation with this ring-ornamented girl, then he would tell a story. A biography. Hopefully, if he spoke of the events of others' lives for long enough, Adele would feel compelled to share the events of hers. Maybe she would even tell him about her rings. That would make him feel very appreciated.

Ezra sat back on the bloodstained wooden chair facing Adele and cleared his throat. "I write biographies," he said, gesturing to the stack of Tolkien books that were still precariously perched on his desk. Adele blinked several times, then raised her eyebrows with interest. "Well, actually, I like to call it building..." And so he told Adele the story of the author J.R.R. Tolkien, one of the most legendary fantasy writers in history, complete with gesticulation and dramatic pauses. It was so splendidly non-routine to speak a biography, to shape the story as he said it.

Ezra spoke of how the remarkable man had invented several languages from his teens and created a writing group at Oxford while he was professor that included writers like C.S. Lewis and Owen Barfield. He built the life of the man who had built a fantastical place called Middle Earth, and Ezra felt a certain pride to be doing so, like he was also contributing to the legendary works of Tolkien. Adele looked both surprised and fascinated as the biography rose up around them. Once Ezra had gotten past the first half of Tolkien's life, she curled up on the couch, drooping eyes still watching him. By the time Tolkien died in 1973, her breathing had slowed and evened out.

Ezra remained in his seat for a mo-

ment, wondering at the slight ring the sudden silence had. How long had he talked? Darkness pressed in from outside his straight-edged window. He ran his finger along the sill. The corner was very sharp. He stopped his brow from furrowing. A contented sigh came from the sofa. Ezra retrieved a thick, rectangular blanket from his small closet in the house's one bedroom and laid it over Adele's prone form. He studied the narrow sofa, and knew that a real doctor would valiantly carry her to the one bedroom and let her sleep in the most optimal comfort, while suffering stiffness and sore muscles from the couch or floor. However, he reevaluated the distance between Adele and the bed, and was more than certain he would not be able to manage the trip. Besides, Adele was smaller than him, and had already burrowed sleepily into the routinely untouched cushions.

Ezra felt happy as he shifted his gaze from the girl on the couch to his bedroom. It was a satisfied kind of happy, something he felt for himself more than anyone else. He wondered if that made him unlike a doctor in any way, or more like one. He wished his mother was there for him to ask. He had not wished that in a while. Another brow-furrow was narrowly avoided. He kept a hand on his forehead when he ambled to his small, straight-edged dresser after brushing his teeth, which had felt strangely routine. He plucked from it one of the two framed pictures that were blanketed with a thin film of dust. The one he held was of his family, if one could call it that. The only subjects in the foreground were Ezra, thirteen at the time, and his mother. She had her small, warm smile spread across her face, doing wonders to light up her otherwise plain face.

Ezra ran his thumb over the glass protecting the picture, cutting a smudged path through the dust. He liked seeing his mother's hair before it became shot through with silver. Her hand appeared to be resting on young Ezra's shoulder, but a memory came to him of a strong grip to keep him from running off before the picture was snapped. The impatience was evident on his pudgy face through his lack of a smile and refusal to look at the camera lens.

Ezra felt the corners of his mouth turn up, and hoped that his smile looked like his mother's in the

photograph. He wiped the rest of the dust from the frame and placed it back on his dresser. Then, he concluded his non-routine day in a very non-routine way: leaving his bloodstained and sweaty clothes on the floor and throwing himself on top of the covers, disregarding the biography on his bed waiting to be reopened and not even bothering to turn off the light with its customary click. None of these deviations from his routine occurred to him at the time, when all he could think of was sleep.

Ezra woke as light filtered through his straight-edged windows, illuminating the small rooms of his small house-if-you-could-call-it-a-house. He rose and made his bed with minimum effort, then stumbled to the bathroom to wash his face and brush his teeth, not bothering to take a whole shower. He changed into one of his two pairs of comfortable denim trousers and an undershirt. He had a feeling he would not be going for a walk that day. He considered this, and then eyed the magazines filled with crossword puzzles on his bedside table. Perhaps both he and his new houseguest could benefit from something to occupy their minds. He grabbed two magazines and ambled into the kitchen/living room.

Ezra was pleased to see that Adele was still asleep. It seemed very doctorly to wake up before one's patient, showing the devotion required for healing. Ezra felt faintly like a child playing hospital, feeling good about himself for something that is not real, something that is not his true life. But then he thought of the events of the previous day. Surely he behaved like a real doctor then. He had saved someone, and he should damn right be proud about it.

Ezra blinked as he reached for bowls to make cereal for two in. He never usually cursed, not even in this thoughts. A rustle came from the sofa. Ezra looked over to see Adele pushing herself into a sitting position, holding her side and grimacing. He wondered if she cursed. When Adele attempted to stand, Ezra rushed over as quickly as his aged form would allow and insisted that she remain seated, that she needed rest, all the authoritative doctor voice that he was getting better at. As the day went on, Ezra used the doctor voice more and more along with a doctor attitude, not pushing

Adele for information even though he was bursting with curiosity, frequently asking how she was feeling, checking on her wound regularly. The cut itself was not as deep as he had feared, and was angled in such a way that it had missed nicking any vital organs. He told her more than once "you are very lucky" in his doctor voice, but didn't fail to notice how she seemed to droop as if a great weight laid on her shoulders when she thought he was not looking.

Ezra spent the day tending to Adele and doing crossword puzzles on his bloodstained chair. He found her some of Mariana's old blouses and trousers and showed her the shower, but warned her not to get water on the stitches. The clothes were loose on her thin frame, but she was thankful all the same. They stayed in a long, comfortable silence for hours, one that did not make Ezra's toes curl or force either of them to blurt out any words they would regret. His curiosity grew, but he satisfied himself with thinking up a story behind each of Adele's rings. There were so many, but he had a feeling that each one held a long, important tale, each worthy of its own biography. He wondered about how they were made, if they had owners previous to Adele, what secrets they could divulge if they could only speak. He hoped that Adele would tell him about herself, why she came to him and who had hurt her, but he also knew that as her doctor (for now), it was not polite to pry into her business.

Ezra and Adele soon established a new routine. Ezra's curiosity never died down, but he learned to suppress it in hopes that Adele would become comfortable enough to tell him on her own time. Days passed, and Ezra rose in the mornings, only showering if Adele was still asleep, then making cereal or bowls of organic fruit and yogurt for two after making sure Adele had no allergies. After washing the dishes, he would check on Adele's wound and redress it if necessary, then retrieve the crossword puzzle magazines and put them alongside the stack of Tolkien books that he had noticed Adele eyeing and then spend the day halfheartedly editing his first draft of the Tolkien biography or doing crosswords, discreetly trying to beat Adele. She was brilliant at the word games; she finished them quicker even than Mariana had, and Ezra

had always regarded his wife as the master of the crossword. He went to the store every once in awhile to resupply on food and magazines, but for the most part stopped going on his walks.

Ezra was happy with his new routine. It let him be a doctor, have some friendly crossword competition, and made him think of his mother and Mariana. He smiled more and furrowed his brow less. He had not sweat since that first day when he was stitching up Adele's wound, but he did not think he would mind if he had. Adele did not talk much, but looked out the window often. Many times Ezra had glanced over and seen her slumped under that invisible weight, guilt making her features sag. In those moments his curiosity peaked, but his many years of living had given him enough willpower to stay silent.

Ezra routinely checked on Adele's stitches, dressing and redressing the wound enough that he eventually had to go out to the store and buy more medical supplies. The man at the register had given him a look of trepidation, but also of respect, and Ezra felt more like a doctor every day. More days passed, and the stack of completed crosswords grew larger, and the bloodstains on the chair grew dryer, and Adele's gazes out the window grew more anxious. The days turned into a week, and the one week turned into two. Ezra finally decided that it was time for the stitches to come out. Her wound had healed nicely; it was not as severe as he had initially feared. He suspected that Adele's exhaustion had come from stress, fatigue, and malnourishment more than anything else.

Ezra was quite pleased with himself when he snipped the black thread that he so painstakingly sewed and knitted two weeks before. He felt compelled to say a word of thanks to the stitches, for so reliably keeping Adele's body put together, away from the drowsiness of blood loss and the burn of infection. He refrained from doing so, however, content with the comfortable silence he and the girl shared. As soon as the stitches were out, Adele's demeanor changed. It was subtle, but Ezra detected the shift in her posture from defeated to determined. She thanked him quietly and then darted to the window, casting her glare into the woods surrounding Ezra's little residence.

Ezra watched the light of the sunset glint off her rings as she pushed the thin curtain to the side, then turned his attention back to tidying up his medical supplies. He packed up the little first-aid kit and disposed of the stitches with a silent word of gratitude. His cold hands warmed in the warm water from the faucet, and as he dried his hands on a white rag, he saw Adele's eyes narrow and she moved sharply toward the door. When her hand closed on the doorknob, Ezra blurted, "What's out there?"

Ezra's self-control had been admirable to this point, but now he just could not stop himself. He found that he was even slightly worried that Adele might leave. The girl started, like she had forgotten Ezra was there. "Hopefully nothing," she said slowly. "Probably something." She pulled open the door and stepped across the threshold, the paused and, without turning her head, commanded, "Stay here." Then she was gone, the door swinging shut behind her.

Ezra did not move. He had heard something new in Adele's voice just then, an authority that he did know existed. She seemed, in that moment, like a real leader. He wanted to ask her about leading, and about her rings (which he had dutifully kept quiet about) when she came back. If she came back. He hoped that the back of Adele's head and a "stay here" was not the last he saw of the girl; there was so much he wanted to ask. Doctor Ezra, the one who always respected the privacy of his patients, was disappearing, replaced by the nosier, real Ezra. He wanted to quiz her relentlessly, to learn everything about her. He wondered what her real name was. Not Adele, for sure. Maybe something more traditional, less musical. It would help if he knew her parents. He wondered what their names were, if she even had any. Her story was like a rag that he wanted to wring out until there was nothing left. He was sick of Doctor Ezra. He wondered if that made him a bad person.

Ezra broke from his frozen state when a blinding flash came through the window. It was followed shortly by a boom that rocked the if-you-could-call-it-a-house and finally toppled the pile of Tolkien books on the desk. He rushed to the window and scanned the trees, which were still trembling from whatever blast had

just occurred. Adele was nowhere to be seen. He looked at the door and contemplated her order. She had been firm, so she must have had a reason, but nevertheless Ezra found himself reaching for the knob. Before he knew it the door was swinging shut behind him and he was walking briskly toward the woods.

Ezra did not get very far, however, before he noticed the glimmer of a ring-bearing hand attached to a tired, determined-looking Adele emerging from the shadows. She caught sight of him and made a noise of exasperation at him disobeying her command. "What was that? The sound and the light—" Adele cut Ezra off with a pained look. He pulled open the door for her and she stepped inside with a nod of thanks. Ezra had a strange sense of *deja vu*. He shut the door with a click and turned back to Adele, knowing how questioning his expression was and still wondering if abandoning Doctor Ezra was a mistake. Adele looked at her feet, and the sink, at the books on the floor. She squirmed, which surprised him. He had not thought her to be a squirmer. He almost blurted that thought aloud, but managed to stop the words before he made her more uncomfortable.

Ezra felt the silence in the room grow tenser with each second, and his toes curled in their socks again. Finally, Adele spoke. "I can't tell you. Not everything...or, well, anything. It would be too dangerous, it's better that you don't know. I'm still incredibly grateful, though, don't get me wrong. I don't know how I could ever repay you. I have to leave now, but you've been so kind to me. Thank you so much for that."

Ezra felt an almost crushing disappointment at her words. He also felt pride, of course, but he could not help but look at her rings sadly. He pulled his gaze back up to Adele's and found her scrutinizing him with her bright blue eyes that were so desperate two weeks before. "I am just happy I could help you, Adele," he forced out. At the mention of probably-not-her-real-name, Adele grimaced and looked down at her hands. Then she blinked several times, and a small, melancholy smile spread across her face. She gingerly pulled a thin ring of gold that looked almost woven off her thumb. Adele rubbed it on her t-shirt and it glinted in the light.

Ezra's eyes widened. The ring was beautiful, simple and elegant. Something Mariana would have liked. Adele, once she had finished shining it, offered the ring to him. "I know it's not much, but..." Ezra nearly jumped with joy when he took it from Adele's palm. Such a small thing, but with a fantastic story, no doubt. He looked back up at Adele and opened his mouth to let all his questions pour out, but she beat him to it. "This was a gift," she said, looking at the ring fondly, "from the real Adele." Words died in Ezra's throat. He blinked at her, his suspicion finally confirmed. He looked back at the ring. What did the real Adele look like? Where was she now? How had she gotten this ring?

Ezra closed his hand around the ring, now his gift from the fake Adele. His brows furrowed, but he did not stop them. He did not want to think of Adele as fake Adele.

Ezra held the ring tightly in his fist while he watched Adele gather her things, mostly Mariana's old clothes that he had told her she could keep. He remained still by the door as she shrugged on a jacket, her expression more determined than he had ever seen it. Ready for departure, she stopped in front of him. "Just one more thing," Ezra said before he could stop himself. "What is your real name?" Fake Adele blinked. She took in a deep breath, then let it out. She pursed her lips.

Ezra leaned forward in anticipation. "Lena," she said, little more than a whisper. "My friends call me Lena."

Ezra grinned. "That is a nice name." He stepped out from in front of the door. "Good luck." Lena stepped forward and hugged him. A surprised laugh bubbled out of Ezra and he hugged her back. Then she pulled away, rubbed her eyes, and set off briskly, making for the woods. Ezra watched until she disappeared. He looked down at the ring in his hand, and slipped it onto his smallest finger. A little biography, just a name and a legacy. A legacy that, it seemed, he was responsible for now. His mother and Mariana would be proud. He closed the door and turned back into his little home, eyes catching on the books strewn across the floor, pages lying open and inviting. He smiled.

## My Luck is Inherited

Jenny Li

LOS ANGELES, CA

A girl born in the year of the dragon is intellectual and excitable, but sometimes, may be too unrealistic or fiery. Her lucky numbers are one, seven, and six and she should, always, beware the east.

*Dà nǎinai* was born youngest of three daughters to parents who farmed taro and leeks, on the east side of Zhongshan Road in Shinan District top of a hill in the center of the old German-built part of the city. Great-grandmother grew up on *jiǎozi* minced pork and cilantro dumplings, food staple of Qingdao, post siege of Tsingtao, said to bring fair skin and a gentle disposition

I was born far away from the black stone tower and the newspaper-imprinted walls. The first pink bundle in decades -- welcomed by parents whose demands for perfection were sweetened by figs and taro cakes, in individual crinkling wrappers, labeled in Chinese, characters I couldn't read

When of marrying age, (fifteen summers) Qingdao women turn to the matchmaker, a respectable elder in the town who consults the stars and dates to predict the fate of the couple, and a suitable match is forged

*Dà nǎinai* married in the northwest of Qingdao, a bouquet of bleeding-heart vine in her hands, modesty in her eye.

Fifteen for me brings no chrysanthemum and peony patterned silk, no golden threaded pheonix, great-grandmother's symbols of wealth and good luck cannot be inherited by those whose

feet are bound by the ways of the new country. Not believing in luck, I never had any use for it.

Never turning over the cooked fish on the plate, for fear their boats would capsize next time the men went fishing, *Dà nǎinai* pricked herself with a fish bone Sucking the pain out of her finger, she prayed that *pí jí tài lái* -- Things at the worst will mend.

Never cutting noodles, to increase longevity, *Dà nǎinai* choked on tears, -- eating bitterness -- a Chinese saying that suggests the ability to endure.

Never cutting a pear in half for him, she did not know why the pair was broken.

Never pointing at the moon nor sweeping on New Year's Day, *Dà nǎinai* died at 89.

In the individualistic west, I believe that my name and personality came first, and my zodiac sign, second. Still, *Dà nǎinai* mocks me in returned astronomy tests with slash markings made in lucky red yet, I know my luck is running out as I stash the test under my bed and hope that no one asks

about my grades or my eccentricity or my tendency toward the unrealistic --a dragon's personality speeding across the sky -- or the scantron sheet with my no. 2 pencil -- with divine power -- in fact I do not think they are faults of my character.

It does not make a difference if I've only enough appetite for half a pear. My luck is inherited, my luck is an old family curse.

# Namesake

Brian Murray

RHINEBECK, NY

A black-haired young man stood behind the window in his unlit house. In large and terrible thunderstorms like this one the grass rolled in deep waves and the old house creaked under the wind like a lonely little ship in the mist. He was named Clark Edwards, after his father. Clark was lean and of average height, though his left shoulder sat lower than his right. He shifted the crutch under his arm and thought of his old home in the town and the big storms in his memory. His father would pull up the garage door, lay down a chair and watch the raindrops fall like bombs. He remembered the peace of the rain and the shattered branches that were embedded in the yard the day after.

His father had not been gone long, but to see his name and imagine the past felt like guidance, like ancient wisdom. Clark kept his eyes on the dark plains of grass, shining in the wet moonlight. He felt the weight of the house behind him as if carried all the rooms on his back. In the dark he reached for his father's heart.

His father had never lived in that house but Clark saw signs of him everywhere. There were old photographs, obsessively kept checkbooks, and grease gloves and tools. Chiefly among the reminders of him was Clark's own name. He was proud sometimes to have it. It held in it the legacy of a good man who worked silently, provided silently, and was, for all his love and all his strength, as indifferent as the rain.

Another constant reminder of Clark's father was his mother. She had gone around the same time as his father, but her echoes lingered in the house. She had carried the air of him all their separated life. The grace in her walk, the quiet in her voice, and her delicate touch were all in response to his father. He wondered if his mother changed his father way he changed her.

His father was in the jungle when he was young. He came back when his son was seven and hid behind his mother's leg. The boy was afraid of his tired eyes and the round scar on his shoulder. He was tall and stocky and stronger than the boy could imagine.

His face was pouty and hollow, with thinning black hair on his head. He avoided looking at his son and eventually his son avoided being seen. Clark remembered smooth, continuous nights when he would sneak to the bannister and watch him absently stare at the television. His father felt as real to him as the static that lit up his face.

His mother drove him places. She took him to little activities for wives like her. Scrapbooking and sewing. Anything, she thought, to not let them be alone. Her hands shook when she threaded the needle and nervously looked at the others. Sometimes when she pulled up her sleeves tight bruises ached on her wrists. Clark sat in the big chair and looked at the other wives. He imagined their husbands in the jungle with little round scars on their shoulders.

When his father drove him places, it was always to his office outside of town. It was after they lived in different houses. On the way some people in cars and on the street waved and smiled and let him through. Those who didn't know him respected his work in the town. In the office was a large leather couch that Clark would lay on and kick his feet in the air, watching the clock. There were newspapers there, old words and names that told of storms and the jungle and ancient wisdom.

Sometime in the summer a woman spat at his father's feet. She was blonde and short and her feet made a click on the sidewalk. He didn't know why, but his father moved towards her and there was a sound like lighting. She fell and came up with a bruise. His father put his hand at Clark's back and gently kept him walking. It was the only time he could remember being touched by him.

It was cloudy that day and when they came home his father spent a while downstairs. He came up with plodding footsteps and a different voice. His father made him go to bed when the sun was still up. He spoke in flowing, wrong words and the rain started outside. Somewhere in the night his mother came. She dragged him out of the house, into the rain, and put him in her car. It was the first time he rode in the front and the seat was too big for him to see the drops on the glass. He rolled down the window and stuck his little arm out. The cold air and rain cooled his bruised wrist. His mother yelled at him for letting the inside get wet, and nearly closed the window on

his hand.

He didn't like his mother's house that much. It was too big and too alone. All the paint on the walls was chipping. From the outside it looked rusty. It had been her parent's house before they left for warmth. In a storm the grass rolled in waves and the old house looked like a ship in the mist.

He ate what his mother could afford, and didn't get strong.

When he could, Clark tried to go to the jungle too. They put him on a bus full of sober faces. Afterwards they told him he would drive a truck for them. One night they all trained in the desert. They had heavy packs and clothes and shoved themselves into the truck, four and him. He was going to drive them from the camp to a belltower a few miles away and he had to drive without lights or he would fail. The air was cold in the desert and he thought of the big storm at home. He heard the lightning and the warm rain, and imagined his father sitting in the garage watching the drops fall.

They told him when he was in the hospital that there was a bomb on the road and it went off. It drove the dark car into the desert and killed one of the men. They told Clark his leg was crushed by the engine. After two weeks they gave him a crutch. When the letter came, they sent him home.

The lot was empty. A brown pit carved with wood slats where his father's house once stood. The storm seemed to come for his father, no one else. The ground was still wet in the town, and little winds still kicked up the leaves. He went to his mother, who was weeping, and wept further at the sight of his limping namesake.

She died shortly after, and left the big creaking house to him. Now when the storms came he stood at the window dreaming of names. He watched the raindrops fall mutely on the waves of grass as the wind made the house behind him creak. He ached for his father. His memory of him now was played out, worn thin. If only he could find him, pull to the bottom of his heart and know the meaning, completely and utterly, of his name. Clark reached out to the dark window, watching the rain. Wondering if he did right. Waiting for his father to walk out of the storm towards the lonely little ship in the mist.

# Salt

Nicholas Lasinsky  
SUMMERHILL, PA

I'm going to try and translate stains on a paper into a world. Well, actually, you'll be doing the brunt of the work. Sorry. But I'll try to do my best to provide good instructions.

Let's begin with your eyes. They are wet with salt. Your world hazes and quivers. But through the glassy sheen you can see green. A sea of green, light and then dark.

What of your hands? They are clenched tight, grasping vainly at a smooth bar. They too are slicked with salt. And your skin is warm. The ridges and valleys crisscrossing your hands are full, brimming with heat. Your skin is being pelted by rays of betas and gammas and alphas. And other things. Flecks of dust, tiny shreds of paper, dead cells, a warm wind. Songs from the nearby radio tower sneak by your atoms. Apologies, loving declarations, fear, joy. An exchange of mutual ignorance. Your skin doesn't care that it is harboring these outbursts of the world. And the waves don't care that, at that moment, their medium is a living, breathing, sentient human being. Your skin and the waves do not wave, and part ways. Your skin will only notice that it is warm, and you listen to it. In that obtuse way, you identify the source of the heat. Il faut chaude. The clouds have wisped away, leaving you alone on a green sea, with skin tightening into canyons, pelted by waves.

And what of your nose? What can that little knob of yours detect? Overwhelmingly, it's the smell of juiced life. A blend of dirt, salt, and green. But if your skin is simply ignorant, your nose is utterly unwilling to experience the wider world. It languishes, snugly on your face, protruding yet willing to accept that this blend of dirty green salt is an adequate representation of your surroundings. But how wrong it is. If only your nose would aspire to more, your world could be much deeper. But I'm afraid you'll be stuck with this nose. And stuck with this description of a nose, translator. Set in its ways. Smelling dirty, salty green until something very obvious-else will catch its attention.

What of your mouth? Well yours is cur-

rently engaging in one of its most abhorrently boring functions. Drinking. Drinking plain water. Can you imagine a more tedious task? There is no evisceration, no slicing or grinding nor chopping nor chomping nor chewing. Just a simple, basic pose, meant to gently guide liquid down your throat in the same manner a security guard mumbles, "Move along". Your mouth is not content. And there is more. Tea, coffee, sugary fizz; these beverages have a personality. They are unique. They are identifiable, they are variable. But simple water has nothing. No action, no personality. Water only has necessity. Which of course is why your mouth is processing it in the first place. For one, it composes the latter portion of the "salty liquid" which beguiles you.

And for another, it runs into each of your cells, until they are clear and plump and ready to burst. And that's pretty darn important. It's hot; you're thirsty. Yes, but that sentence lacks excitement, translator, a string of words without prose. I'm certain your mouth would understand that reflection; clear things are no fun.

And what of your ears? What do your ears detect? To be honest, not much. This is because they are weak. There is one noise dominating this scene. And your ears cannot overcome it.

What can you see now? Has your own sweat still stayed your vision? No. Fortunately your hot hands have rubbed away the sweat for you. How considerate. And now you can see the green sea a bit more clearly. Or perhaps it is a

## Trapped: In the National Transit Building, Oil City, PA

Catherine Buchanan  
CLARION, PA

Looking out from the old iron steps  
blunt smoldering in hand  
smoke floating into the scene  
of dreamed city blocks  
torn down to dirt and slushed snow.

Steam sifting up from the grates  
the dumpster sleeping in the alleyway  
leading to the small step  
where they play their country music  
till the sun gives out on them

Eyes closed,  
fire escape creaks like New York,  
lanes and lights of London,  
and elevator of Paris  
useless now.

The rushing of the river,  
of the Hudson,  
of the Thames,  
of the Seine,  
freezes up.

Ghosts of dried up oilers  
cry and cough into the night,  
trapping me  
in their abandoned vaults  
falling asleep to hoarse whispers.

green pond. Because your greenscape is fenced in by trees on its right perimeter. The trees stare down at you draped in bark, with notches and furrows filled with heat. But you can't miss the forest for the trees; there is no forest, only trees. Trees that pinch off your green pond from someone else's. And to the left of your pond, well, there lays a true forest; a jungle. A plaster and brick jungle with tangled vines of wire. Old metal sparkwire, with every right to ignite, placed besides rotting timber yearning to burn. The jungle is coated in the red flaking, sharp crystalline diamonds of rust. Everything is anchored in the jungle floor: black pavement, smoking out a puss of tar and fume. I hope you're proud of your surroundings.

Your hands are trembling. Yes, they're still hot. But the new development is the tremble. And yet of course, they can only notice their most basic tremble. Subtle shakings are sifting through the earth, and up into your fingertips. A child totters forwards. Glaciers heave and cleave under the weight of the sun, plunging into cold salty water. A man topples in the heat of day, blood pouring from a gashed throat, delicate white powder frosting his nostrils. Each event sending ripples throughout the world into your hands. And do they bother to notice? Of course not. They can only focus on the present and most pressing stimulus of shaking. Your slick, sweaty palms struggle against that quivering bar, gripping to push the machine forwards.

How's your nose doing? Much the same. Salty green dirt. Relentless. Your nose is tuning all other fragrance out. Trying to be inconspicuous. Stepping into the shadows, making itself unnoticeable. Unfortunately for your nose, being unnoticeable tends to be a difficult endeavor when you're stuck on a face.

So what about your mouth? Well as incredibly. Wait. Your nose has got something. Something that doesn't smell like a seaside garden. You suddenly remember that you possess that knobby nose, and that it serves a purpose. And it's got something new for you. What is that smell? Your nose does all that it can to send the smell up to your brain. The sooner the nose can get rid of this unnecessary attention, the better. What is that smell? You can't quite pin it down. Of course, your nose was too meek to send up a guess with the stimulus. So

now you have to guess. What is that smell? There. It's the smell of onions. Onions? Out here on a hot day like this? You're confused. That's okay. It's just the smell of wild rants. But the smell is interesting, and different, and you dwell on it for a while. Where does the smell of onions take you? To the cream kitchen, and a knife so sharp it slips through bone? To a pale steaming room, and plates of white pierogi rolling out of the ovens? Or perhaps to a decaying marketplace, peeling and flaking but determined to sell you a basket of bulbous onions anyway? Can you feel the small onions in your hot hands, slipping out of a rim of thin skin? Can you see the knife on the table, yearning to burn? Do the onions splinter? Do your eyes grow wet with salt?

As incredibly boring as drinking water can be, at least it was something. At least the security guard could do something vaguely official, instead of just sitting on his ass. Well, your mouth is now sitting on its ass. Without water to guzzle, your mouth is left to its own devices. And this is not a good thing. All it can do is produce a cocktail of disappointment. Saliva, bacteria, and food bits which managed to escape thus far. Normalcy, malady, and failure. Your mouth's sole occupation is the movement of your tongue. This is done partly out of sheer boredom, and partly because if the tongue doesn't intervene, the languishing foodstuffs and microbiology will combine and ferment, and add to the cocktail of disappointment.

And we're back to the ears. Hearing that one seminal sound. That sound certainly is sonorous. And unimpressive. It is a dull roar, caused by the very same machine which your palms are currently struggling to propel forwards. The roar is a byproduct of smoke and oil, along with acidic liquid that looks like water but smells like brain damage. Spinning blades add to the roar, creating the juiced life beneath your feet. Massacring with a monotony that is perhaps inappropriate. But your flabby ears have to strain to even catch the dull roar. Perhaps if they would perk up, really show some motivation, your ears would know that they really weren't hearing a dull roar. It's more of an obnoxious buzzing drone, sending ripples across many ponds. But your ears aren't known for their motivation.

Now that your eyes have gotten their

bearing, perhaps they can be directed downwards to provide you with more information about the vessel you're moving. Or perhaps not. Because the military of your left eye scrambles. It seems that the jelly glob in your socket has been invaded by an unknown enemy. Maybe if the jelly glob had been a country, an outcry would have been heard. There would have been prayer services, mourning, promises of action. But it is not a nation. Nobody grieves for the thousands of cells which are crushed as this unidentified projectile rams into them, each split with an inaudible pop. No cell mothers dress in black. Your DNA does not weep when its progeny fails. But you do. Your inner defenses decide to send in tears to flush the invader out. You are in pain by this point. Something has gotten deep into your eye. As a consequence, you are unable to see what the vessel you are pushing is exactly. Your eye is filling, as wet salts flood over what is now a mass graveyard. Your right eye now sees the turmoil of the left. Apparently your right eye is skilled at active listening and empathy, because it now scrambles its defenses too for no real reason at all, flooding with tears as well. Your eyes are now flushed and gushing, overrun with their own defenses. You are finding it quite hard at this point to see or do anything at all. The intruder has not been removed, and so the spicket spouts on, and your eyes fill to the brim.

Your hands are still hot and trembling. And the bar that your fingers are wrapped around is so smooth. Now your hands are falling through air. They are stretched out in front of you. They realize only that. And at this point, you should expect nothing more. Your hands don't care that the air through which they are presently tumbling likely (in some small quantity) helped to fuel the thought process of Ghangis Khan. Of course they don't stop to ponder if this air was once parted by Shakespeare's quill. Their weak, thin, veined skin prevents them from noticing the beautiful playground which they are now disturbing. A playground where Nitrogens whiz and dance with boisterous oxygens, plenty of (or perhaps too much) Carbon dioxide floating free, and everyone marveling at the shy Krypton. And perhaps, if your hands had been more astute, they would have noticed that not only were they plummeting through air, but that

your whole body was falling, thanks to clumsy feet and eyes filled to the brim.

The security guard has accidentally left a terrorist with a bomb into the building. Your mouth is falling through the playground as well, just as unaware of it. And then. Bang. Contact heavy.

Instead of letting in a terrorist, it may be that the security guard has accidentally shot himself in the foot. Or perhaps your mouth has grown so bored, it has resorted to chewing itself. Your teeth have descended and popped millions more cells.

Tongues generally have a difficult time preventing the creation of alcohol when they are chopped in half, flopping in their own puddles of pain. And now comes the flood. Who knew that something as organic and essential to life as blood tastes like metal? Well, your mouth does now.

Things are going poorly, translator.

As your ears fell, they did not hear anything out of the ordinary. They remained mostly muffled under the deterioration of a lifetime. They never really had a chance to excel, translator. But even they could not miss the sound of the ground.

First came a distinct thud. Then, almost exactly at the same time, a wet snap. And finally, the fainter noise of your teeth gleefully popping cells, the sound like a butcher cleaving meat.

Your skin is damaged. Ripped apart in some places. Even your hands notice that.

Your eyes are beginning to close. Not via any preference of their own. If they had their way, the invader would be destroyed, or they would die trying. But the choice is not theirs. Your brain has decreed, and the order is moving fast:

"A total shutdown is necessary, to assess the damage. We assure you that this coma will not last long. Please bear with us. This is merely a damage assessment technique. We need to investigate some things."

Unfortunately, the order is road-blocked at the base of the head. As your eyes close, the salty liquid squeezes and dribbles out over the brim, and completes its job. As the tears wash away, they carry with them a single eyelash. The little lady who started this war.

Your grandchild has come to visit you. They are concerned for you. It's a hot day. You are old. It's best to be safe and check up on you. They drive for a long

time. They arrive, and they stop the car. They take the key out of the ignition. They open the door and step out of the car.

When they walk around back, they can see you lying there on the ground, head wry. Your water bottle has splashed open on the nearby blacktop. Blood and salt and water mix and mingle on the grass.

The lawnmower is still running. Your grandchild can see that you are not moving. Do they kneel? Do they scream? Do their eyes grow wet with salt?



## **A Street or Passage Closed at One End**

Nara Benoit Kornhauser  
NEW YORK, NY

Remember when you told your entire family about a poem I wrote, like you were advertising me, it was your right; or the first time I showed you something I wrote and you said it was poetic and yes, you got the reference to death, then didn't ask how my relationship with my mother was. I sop up coffee rings from the red countertop with bread (bread is useful, but only if it has the texture of memory foam). The rings are still there, just dewy and covered in flour. I'm almost anxious to see you. I'd call you a coward but I don't want to start a scene or break down in Washington Square. I might see you nesting with her on the bench where I first met you, spreading your fingers through her hair until you make a hem of knots, bunched up like a casting net. I wonder if you care enough about writing to read anything I could ever publish, or if you're insightful enough to figure out if the eyebrows or elbows or nonexistent freckles I mention are yours, or if the compression in my sternum is from what you did. I wonder if you told your mother, if your parents still call me "splendid," if your dog ever

liked me as much as I liked him. You smell like the damp pavement near the curb and I could never tell if that was comforting or suffocating, like fingers padding lightly across my pulse, calculating the rate at which I sleep and worry. Forgive me for the extrapolations, and forgive me for the contradictions; I'm human and I miss you, but then again I haven't seen you in a month. The last time was when you kissed me and promised never to lie. I walked home elated, singing so it echoed off buildings and shone at people behind me. Do you remember when I had to go home the first night we realized that time could fly? It was before I knew you like I know the route from my bed to my parents' in the dark. You made me stand in the middle of the cul de sac and look up at the day-old-breadcrumb stars, said some cheesy thing genuinely, at least I thought it might be genuine, kissed my neck and still asked me to dance once I told you I had to leave. I think you thought I was poetic because I'd say the Earth is curved to fit the concave of your head like a pillow, or your voice is natural like boughs reaching down to shade our heads or it's fine Darling, Dearest, Love (anything but your name) you're the only one for me. I've moved past rhyming cadences and infatuation. I thought that was okay, I'm genuine with my poems about death or coffee or my relationship with my mother. Cul de sacs cut themselves off halfway. I didn't want the advertisement to your family at the breakfast table over Italian roast and Vegemite on toast because I didn't want to share. Poetry is selfish, Love, and I don't know if love can be defined that easily. You ask me to look at the Earth as if what I'm examining, this damaged wood, isn't enough in itself. We dance. You wrap your arm under my back to dip me, so my head falls loose to the sky. I now walk past the spot where I noticed wet bread crumbs and loose flour suspended in the sky every morning. You'll spend the first few days of break by the beach with your family. I regret promising that I would show up to your birthday party, no matter what happened, after you left. Despite your knitting knots in new hair, I know you'd break your neck just to see those stars.





**Innocence**  
Ebelechiyem Okafor  
NEW BEDFORD, MA



A little girl was told  
was told that if she drenched  
herself in honey  
And put flowers on her neck  
The butterflies would fly around her sweet smell  
And hummingbirds would sing  
to her like she was the sun.  
So she covered her skin with honey and  
Put flowers around her waist

But  
All she got were bees  
Vicious ugly hordes of bees  
Who stung her in places she couldn't see  
And left pain inside of her that wouldn't go away  
Now ugly as a gnat, she ran away and hid  
And no one has looked for her ever since.



**Onwards**  
Victoria Maung  
Ho-Ho-Kus, NJ



## On Fear and Illusion

Sean Wolfe  
NANTICOKE, PA

The porch is more slanted than I remember, and the windows that aren't broken are overgrown with ivy. The door creaks open and closed with the wind, and the shutters of the windows on the second floor are broken and strewn around the lawn, which appears to have not been well kept, if at all. I stare up at the attic window, and for a moment, I think I see a shadow crossing the remaining glass. *Maybe it's a bat, I wonder. Or something worse.* I reflect upon Fear, and, feeling nauseated, I pause for just a moment at the threshold before pushing open the door.

When I was younger, I always thought of Fear as a being that was constantly following me, lurking in the shadows under my bed or in my closet, tapping on my window or door to keep me near and in its grasp, forever a step behind me as I moved through my everyday life, almost like a starved, stray dog begging zealously for food.

I imagined it as a tall, skeletal figure in a long, black cloak that covered all of its face except for its evil, yellow eyes and lipless grin, almost like the Grim Reaper. Although I grew up in a very urbane apartment, modernized and metallic, with door hinges that never squeaked and floorboards that never shifted, and although in the city, the only looming shadows were the familiar skyscrapers.

Fear was with me every night, grabbing at my heart with its cold claws, forc-

ing me to retreat under my covers. It was also with me when I stood on the balcony of the twentieth story New York apartment I lived in as a child.

It kept me from going too close to the edge; it kept me out of danger. At times like this it was almost a guardian angel.

When I walk into the house, I sway wildly and grab at the door frame. Everything appears to be in the same condition that it was in before I left, although the ravages of time have certainly taken their toll. The counter has what I think was once a loaf of bread, although now it's little more than a brick of mold.

The drawers hang open, and I see cooking paraphernalia, forks with tines rusted from age, tarnished silver spoons, and blunt, damaged knives. I find myself opening the refrigerator, then gagging (**patient intubated**) as the smell of rancid food hits me. A glass milk bottle lies on its side. Half of its contents have spilled through a crack, pooled on the shelf below, and solidified into a fine dust.

I shudder, then my eyes wander to the top shelf of the refrigerator, and I see a cake without a trace of decay. Homemade. Chocolate icing. Piping, beautifully crafted. Then my head hits the floor. As I slip from consciousness, I can hear them singing.

It's my 9th birthday. A small crowd gathers around me, beaming, as my mother, also smiling, brings out the cake. My father is holding the camera and taking a picture. Later, he's cutting the cake. Looking at the devel-

oped pictures, I panic as I see an ominous shadow standing right behind me. I tell my parents, but they don't see it and dismiss me.

When I come back to consciousness, clammy, my face wet with tears, I recognize immediately that I am in the living room. I'm holding an open scrapbook in my hands, and by the dim light of the moon I see that the page has the photo of my birthday all those years ago. I recognize myself, my smiling relatives, and, behind me, a dark shadow. *So, it really happened.*

When I was 7, my parents and I moved out to the country, where Fear manifested itself in a plethora of new and appalling ways. The sounds of the country were as alien to me as another planet might have been: shouting, howling, chirping, and croaking in a wild nightly symphony; the strange creaks of the old barn and even older house plagued my imagination.

Even as an adult, the mere thought of returning to that wretched location sickened me to the very fiber of my being, filled me with an interminable dread.

**The accident. Speedometer: 70 miles per hour. Time: 12:52. "Nobody Home" by Pink Floyd is the song on the radio. Bright lights. Screeching of tires. Brakes lock up. "Tragic Accident, Many Killed" is the headline in the local newspapers the next day.**

Half an hour later, I'm climbing the stairs to the second floor. I find them to be smaller than I remember, but more than that, they seem *tainted*. That's how the entire downstairs has felt, and how I think the whole

house will feel.

I tremble as I walk up the stairs, feeling like a convict walking to the gallows to be hanged. When I get to the top, I'm in a windowless hallway, and it's as if all light ceases to exist. I can't see anything, and I'm not sure that I want to.

**September 22, 4:02 PM: Patient is comatose.**

I keep my left hand on the wall, and soon it slides into a doorway. I grope blindly until I find the handle, then I twist it to push the door open. It resists, but eventually it opens, and my face is flooded by a bright light (**pupil contracts normally, no sign of brain death**), but it quickly disappears.

As I brush the cobwebs out of the door frame, "This is my room," involuntarily leaves my gaping mouth (**patient may be attempting communication**).

The bed is in the corner across from the window and next to the closet, which is slightly ajar, clothes still hanging on their hangers and sitting folded neatly on shelves. On the top shelf, above the old

Pokemon cards and the tattered shoebox containing my long-forgotten rock collection, is the worn red cap that was always with me on my many summertime conquests. Seeing the cap gives me a strong feeling of nostalgia, although it's quickly replaced with a sense of dread. I slide my hand along the wall, and hit the ancient mirror. Instantly, I am transported back to another time, in this room...

It seems that no sooner than my head hit the pillow,

the beeping of my alarm clock had awakened me. I stumble out of my bed, and feel a strange sense of dread, like I am being watched. When I glance at my reflection in the mirror, I shriek with horror. Standing behind me is an all too familiar skeletal face, with black robes and a murderous grin. I swing wildly at the mirror, almost blindly with terror, smashing it to the floor. A strange black smoke billows out and envelops me. When I wake up, I am in the hospital, struggling while a kindly, elderly nurse gently picks glass out of my bleeding, mangled hand.

I grasp subconsciously at my scarred hand while standing in front of the mirror. The all too familiar skeletal face with those same black robes and that same evil smile leers ominously behind me. I pull my hand back and bring it forward as quickly as I can, but I am immobilized by Fear. It relishes that I am again fully under its control. Something happens (**patient appears fully lucid, attempting communication**). I feel myself breaking free of Fear's grasp. My hand rockets forward and shatters the mirror into a million pieces, and once again I am unconscious.

**Time of death: December 21, 11:21 AM.**

The porch is more slanted than I remember, and the windows that aren't broken are overgrown with ivy.

## Migration

Cindy Song

ROCKVILLE, MD

Nothing quite sounds the same after the swans leave. The lake does not easily forget, bubbling

underneath starved weeds and moldy paint. You & Tina never liked those damn birds, white necks

stretched thin as the Marlboros rolling around the floor of your car. *I'd snap them. Feel the bones &*

*feathers crushed under my fingers.* Nothing quite says rebirth like your handpicked rocks that go

skip, skip, skip across the water. The ripples make me think like a cygnet embryo - born in God's hand

only to find the world shattering apart first thing. Tian says the swans go wherever it snows, but I

say they fly wherever Liberty cracks the sky open.

## Equations

Isobel Daniels

ASHFORD, CT

The equation for the speed of light has been proven to be  $e = mc^2$ .

**The quadratic formula is known to be  $[-b \pm (\sqrt{b^2 - 4ac})]/2a$ .**

The Pythagorean Theorem states that in a right triangle,  $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ .

Facts are clean and easy to work with.

Facts compose many aspects of the human life.

Facts cannot be debated or personally interpreted or misconstrued.

Fact: one of the most basic tenets of humanity is love.

The "equation" for love is: Love /ləv/ noun. a feeling of strong or constant affection for a person.

Or it can be: a feeling of deep romantic attachment to someone.

Or: one word that frees us of all the weight and pain of life.

Or simply: sexual passion or desire. Words are not facts.

Words have different meanings, person by person.

Language is inefficient.

Fact: I love you anyway.

# Genius

David Reynoso

CORTLANDT MANOR, NY

Genius- "A person who is exceptionally intelligent or creative, either generally or in some particular respect." (Genius) Geniuses are commonly referred to as someone who is really smart.

The valedictorian in your class is probably a "genius." Many geniuses grow up to be scientists, doctors, or other successful jobs. A common assumption of what makes a genius includes maintaining straight As and to retain knowledge like a sponge. I see geniuses as much more.

A genius is someone who found their natural God-given talent, and has worked to become great using that talent. Albert Einstein was a genius, but so is a world renowned chef, and so is Tom Brady or Michael Phelps.

Geniuses don't have to be extremely intellectual, they are those who find what they are naturally good at and become great. This can work on smaller levels, and doesn't have to result in

fame and fortune.

The world sees geniuses as rare. They see geniuses as someone who is one of a kind. They see geniuses as naturally gifted, and with abilities unique to them.

Geniuses are at the highest point of intellectual status. Some geniuses are Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking, or Neil Degrasse Tyson. They are referred to as geniuses because of their minds, and because they are so much smarter than the common man.

But what is the true measure of a genius? Should it only be based on academic prowess? Or is there more to becoming a genius? Also, does a genius have to be rare or hard to come by? Is there such thing as a "common genius?"

So far, the world sees geniuses only by its strict definition. The world thinks that geniuses have to be one in a million, and that the only measure of a genius is their accomplishments from using their brain power.

But there is much more to the word "genius" that even Merriam Webster can't quite define. Soon, the world will realize that everyone has the potential to become a genius, and more people

will be recognized for the hard work they put in to achieve their goals.

Geniuses can be measured in many more ways than how smart you are. You don't need to be able to split an atom, or create your own theories involving space and time. What you do need is to affect the world in a positive way.

A genius is one who finds their true passion in life, what they are truly good at, and work to achieve their goals. This does not come in just individual accomplishments.

A genius is never greedy nor selfish. Albert Einstein is considered a genius because of what he contributed to the scientific community. If he had kept everything he had discovered to himself and had not shared any of his knowledge, he would not be considered a genius.

A genius gives what they have to help others as well as themselves. Chuck Feeney, co-founder of Duty Free Shoppers, has donated over four billion dollars to disadvantaged children and public health initiatives.

He has also done this as anonymously as he could, and did not want any fame from doing this. Feeney does

## Starbucks on Talcottville Road

Abigail Howard

MANCHESTER, CT

"So I was an English teacher  
for 40 years."

His leg twitches  
While his eyes are locked into  
a book of modern theories

Looking up whenever  
someone walks through the  
door

One seat in from the left  
Two seats in from the right

"It's a funny story actually"  
His spot never changes

"I always said if I were to ever  
get a tattoo it would be a  
puppet on my hand."

He tells this story every time  
I see him here.  
Medium coffee, cream and  
sugar  
He centers his coffee cup  
And lifts it up and down  
Down and up.

I sit beside him  
Again.

Twitching his pen  
Back and forth  
Forth and back  
He writes on each page of his  
book.

Looks up and smiles  
Scratches his head  
And tells me the story about  
the tattoo on his left hand again

It was of a face with no  
meaning  
Only for laughs  
"I got it right before I retired."  
"Forty years."

I chuckled as he formed his  
hand  
to make it talk  
He doesn't know I've heard  
it all before.

And I wonder how many times  
it has been told.  
Looking back down into his  
book

"It's a funny story actually."  
I clutch my latte.

"I was an English teacher for  
40 years."



# Endurance

Haemaru Chung  
NEW YORK, NY



not own a house or a car, and takes the subway when traveling New York City(Lubin).

This man is truly a genius, because not only has he achieved the goals he set for himself and made a fortune, but he is also extremely generous and does not look for fame from his charity. He impacts the lives of so many out of the good of his heart, and those who do know his name know him as a great man, a true genius.

The measurements of a genius go even further. Although a person's monetary status can usually show signs of being a genius, it isn't the only measure.

A genius finds what they are good at and uses that talent to influence the lives of many. In this meaning of a genius, shouldn't a teacher be consid-

ered a genius?

If a teacher is good at his or her job, and knows how to connect with students and really inspire them to work hard and succeed in school and in life outside of school, shouldn't that teacher be considered a genius?

This logic works in many more places other than teaching. For example, if a priest delivers sermons during mass that move his listeners and impact their lives in a positive way, shouldn't he be considered a genius?

By this definition, a definition that dives far deeper than the simple one found in dictionaries, geniuses are found on every street and around every corner.

Everybody has the potential to become one, and anyone who has the

motivation to work hard, and the good soul to positively impact the lives of those around them are destined to be a genius by my definition.

Dictionaries, and most people in the world, see the word genius differently than I do. They see it as intellectual prowess, normally in the science realm.

I see geniuses as much more. They are people who spend their time, money, and effort to making the world a better place, and contributing to the community in any way they can.

Whether it is from donating to charity, or helping underprivileged youth, or any other way possible, a genius uses his ability to help society in a positive way.



## Sweet Treat

Abbi Dehmey  
ELIZABETHTOWN, PA



### Baby Flame

Isabella Gonzalez  
LIVINGSTON, NJ

You aren't a starving child  
from Africa,  
she'll speak, looking me over  
with her  
rearview mirror as I suffocate  
tears with  
the ruby scarf her mother had knit  
me the  
year prior. She puffs out the  
smoke burning  
in her lungs into the white painted  
world.

You aren't a lone warrior from the  
ghetto,  
she'll continue, removing the  
cigarette from  
her polished lips. Her mother was  
a retail  
clerk in Fortunoff who took  
on as many  
neighborhood chores as possible.  
Poverty was  
a lurking predator hunting in the  
murky woods,  
but she always managed to protect  
her young.  
You aren't abused from all those  
around you,  
she'll stress, suffocating the baby  
flame of

the cigarette. I felt her venom stain  
into my  
pale foundation.

You aren't a grieving daughter,  
she'll squeak, twirling the  
obsidian steering  
wheel in a hard right. Stopped on  
the curb,  
we watch the swift cars pass on in  
silence.  
She's too far deep to reach for  
another smoke,  
even if she wanted to; too far gone  
to know  
that we share the same lament

I lend her my scarf.

# To Be Human

Jessica Xu

METAIRIE, LA

she tells me to  
watch her as she bleeds herself out.  
waterfalls begin to surge  
down her eyes  
holding galaxies and pieces of  
her heart.  
she places my hand on the boulders  
she carries:  
masses of suffering and regret.  
i lift them from her back,  
the cracking of my bones breaking  
the air

i throw them far, we  
watch them roll across mountains  
and oceans  
watch them roll off the universe.  
she peels her armor off,  
layers of them, all melded into each  
other  
knives of words embedded in the  
metal.  
her fingers of milk withdraw  
the remaining  
shards of grey lodged in her skin  
creating bloody craters and pits.  
she tells me she can breathe again.  
i catch her breaths in my hand,  
let them sink into my pores and into  
my blood.

she strips her skin away and  
her flesh is crimson with  
highways of blue,  
her bones glazed with melted silver.  
when she opens her chest  
there is a child in the core of  
her heart, smiling  
beaming with forgotten wonder.  
she touches me on my breast, her  
mouth begins to move

who have you locked away?



**Sunlight**

Michelle Mulé

GREENWICH, CT





# De Los Ojos del Niño

Emma Gallagher  
GREENWICH, CT



## Family Movie

Erin Chang  
LIVINGSTON, NJ

My mom's heart thumps -  
loud in my ear -  
the side of my head crushed  
against  
her chest.  
She tries to lead me away, but I  
refuse  
to move.  
I cannot take my eyes away from  
the softness  
of my brother's face - his skin  
unblemished  
and smooth, the painting of a  
tortured artist.  
I want to tell him to keep his  
beautiful mouth

shut, to bite his plump bottom  
lip.  
His glasses  
have slipped down to the tip of  
his nose -  
he doesn't notice. His chin is tilted  
high,  
shoulders  
thrown back as he sits on the  
couch,  
knowing  
it will only anger our father even  
more.  
Stupid boy.  
I want to tell him to uncross his  
legs  
and unclench  
his fists. To get up from the couch  
and  
go hug  
our father sorry. But, if anything  
else,

I want to remind him the TV  
remote is still clutched in our  
father's hand. To warn him  
of the moment  
to come, when suddenly, the  
wooden floorboards  
stop convulsing, and the pale  
walls cease their trembling.  
My mom's arms freeze around me  
-  
she has stopped  
breathing. My father stares at his  
empty hand.  
My brother's glasses have shat-  
tered,  
broken shards  
at his feet. His smooth, unblem-  
ished  
face is streaked  
with red. And his beautiful mouth  
is  
curved into a terrible O.



# Surname X

Edward Moreta Jr.

DORCHESTER, MA

"And may God always protect you."  
His father closes the wood door,  
the door between all  
holiness and hipsterness imagined.  
His father's strict religion and  
his 13-year-old  
son's love of hip-hop,  
R&B, poster of Tupac posing  
in Poetic Justic.  
The prayer echoes in his room,  
fan waving back and forth,  
a rhythmic whirr  
whisking him to sleep.  
The boy humming a song of love,  
love not his, not once  
only whispers of love  
something to whisk,  
walks through wiry vines,  
the sun so hot, making the  
cotton plants sweat. He sees a  
pale white man, wearing a black hat,  
patrolling like an army man. The  
whip around his neck like a  
snake, swinging side to side,  
beckoning.  
the man's whisper in his ear,  
like a man describing his horrible  
sin of pride.  
The man's whole hand fit around  
his neck,  
whip brushing his upper back,  
like alcohol before a shot,  
brushing to slicing, no pain to pain.  
*Get to work animal.* Beside him  
a man rubs his own back,  
the line-like foreign script telling a  
red story. The cotton turns black,  
the man with the script  
turns, falls towards the boy, blood  
frothing in his mouth.  
The boy runs, runs from  
the army man  
runs from the damned plantation,  
runs from the  
man who will forever have  
those deep marks in his back, runs to  
a grocery store

in Mississippi, a list of things to buy,  
a black boy on errands for his family's  
supper.  
Kind white woman, auburn hair,  
blue-ass eyes, helps him  
checkout, he smiles. And says  
his thanks.  
Maybe he should have never said  
thanks,  
they say he whistled,  
whish-whirr of the wind,  
the creak of the front door opening,  
the white woman's fear  
affecting her senses,  
his mom, back in Chicago,  
feels a pang in her heart, begins  
to cry.  
The creak of a cotton-gin,  
his vessel back home.  
He can only see through  
one eye, his other eye static,  
one half of his body asleep with  
the tightness  
of the rope. Two men  
one cackles next to him,  
*You flirted with my wife,*  
*and for killing your sorry-ass, I*  
*won't even see time,* and he felt  
the blow on  
his other eye. But he floats, turns  
his head,  
sees everyone he knows, being  
tied to cotton gins,  
his preacher father knocked out  
with a bible,  
Uncle Tom watching on top  
of chains,  
entertainment. Uncle Tom  
smacks his hand over the black boy,  
hand deep into the boy's afro,  
wave of disgust.  
Tears of skittles, red, blue, green,  
the tears of the nation for a  
TV-version  
of a chewed-up black boy.  
He walks in the light of street  
lamps, in  
his grey hoodie. He speaks  
to his girlfriend, asks when he can  
see her,  
pulls up his hood, a cold wind.  
A man parks his SUV, he watches,

he exits,  
and they both walk under the  
same street light, in opposite  
directions.  
The teenager smiles as he passes  
the man,  
who looks down. And his girlfriend  
hears the rest, the scuffle, the plead,  
the guilt, the response, the gun,  
the exoneration, the riots of  
"thugs", *I feel threatened,*  
*America, I feel threatened,*  
*how could you not feel threatened,*  
*I feel threatened.*  
America only idolizes you when you  
die  
or sweeps you under an  
American-sized rug.  
He is in a scuffle,  
he can see the beginning  
middle and end of the scuffle,  
pushes teenager out  
of the scuffle, no one is there, until  
black boy,  
black thug, black women, even he  
himself  
in the middle of the scuffle,  
even Barack Obama holding a birth  
certificate is in the middle of the  
scuffle,  
Black Jesus in the scuffle,  
always ends  
the same.  
Father said, remember where you  
come from,  
but what is home for a man who  
doesn't know  
his true last name?  
He awakes, shudders, needs to ask  
this question  
and no one will have the answer,  
not his preacher father, not his  
school teacher, not history,  
not the philosopher, not Tupac, not  
love and justice, not the dead  
black boy  
with a round bullet hole in his back  
lying covered on his side,  
*Why do people kill black boys?*



## Glass Ceiling

Ella Fasciano

LEBANON, NJ

I saw the clouds  
 I looked into the sun for as long  
 as I could before it burned  
 When the pain cleared, I looked back up  
 The pages that became my knowledge  
 were illuminated from the sweet sun above  
 In the warmth I sat, sounding out words  
 syllable by syllable  
 Out loud the words of others flooded my  
 mind with images of the world triumphantly  
 I sounded out the speeches of history,  
 of women who showed me the world  
 in a new light  
 It was so bright.  
 My first taste of the outside world was  
 a beautiful place  
 In every direction I smiled for the future  
 In the time of sounding out syllables and

## Endless Spiral

Miriam Trichas

BASKING RIDGE, NJ

sighing at the sun  
 there were no limitations  
 I saw people trying hard,  
 and fighting for what is right,  
 and being good human beings,  
 and I thought it was all like that.  
 I even felt that first rain.  
 I danced in the tiny droplets that clung to my  
 flushed cheeks and hung onto my dress  
 so that I had to spin harder and faster  
 to make it flow  
 I brought my face to that sun that lent its  
 rainbow spotlights to me and stuck out my  
 tongue to share in the flow of the world  
 I danced in the rain for many years  
 Until one day it stopped.  
 I looked up and saw my flowing world leave  
 me behind to ponder why  
 Why I saw my world holding up  
 on its head,  
 so that the dull pain could be passed off as  
 a mere headache,  
 a barrier between my illumination



for my dreams  
 And their expectation for my downfall.  
 I wondered why I was down here while  
 above silhouettes of animals ran in circles  
 and never looked down  
 I was unsure why they would snarl and bite  
 and not come together at least move to  
 the side and stop blocking the sun  
 And so I walked  
 I read and became informed in my dreams  
 And then I  
 With the books that told me stories of  
 women that were my whole world  
 started piling and stepping  
 And when I looked up I could only see the  
 sky  
 And when the sun was burning my eyes and  
 I had to look away  
 From my perch of knowledge,  
 and of finding myself,  
 I saw a girl  
 and I waved her over  
 To change the tides of the world.



## Capturing the Moment

Haemaru Chung  
NEW YORK, NY



The clouds drift idly above  
The afternoon heat is  
sweltering  
Time appears to suspend  
itself and  
An overwhelming wave of  
lethargy is settling  
A blue jay sits on a fragile  
branch  
Of a small tree nearby  
The radiant blues of the bird  
Standing out from its dull  
green surroundings  
As it rests in the cool shade

Of the leaves swaying gently  
It adjusts its position  
delicately  
Now sitting in plain view  
Tilting its head towards the sky  
Proud, nonchalant and  
carefree  
The coal-black eyes exude a  
stern, noble air  
While the golden afternoon  
sunlight  
Showers the blue jay  
Like a blanket of sunshine resting  
over the feathers

The perfect image ephemeral  
The bird leans forward  
slightly  
And his wings flap in a burst  
of motion  
Falling leaves quiver as the  
bird streaks past  
Leaving behind an afterimage  
of swirling blue feathers



## Cry for Freedom

Haemaru Chung  
NEW YORK, NY



# A House Tour or Simply the Next Pillow Over

Piety Exley  
CANANDAIGUA, NY

i.

"thank you for letting me in," you say, the last of the sunshine piercing your dirty ice eyes.  
"thank you for being," i counter, your pianist fingers brushing against my trembling poet's. i consider debris and damage control as i present you with where i live.

ii.

a couch and two lamps, muted green carpet over hardwood floor, blankets, tissues. "this is the living room, where i share love and other floods with those i care deeply for." arms outstretched, i spin in a circle.  
"i know this room well," you say. i consider the way the couch sags in the middle so our hips touch without us meaning to do so.  
"i know you do."

iii.

passing from hardwood to tile flooring like a breeze from outside, i say: "this is the kitchen." i shove all my fantasies to the back of the cabinets. "this is where i treat myself," i add while placing the jar of cocoa in front of kissing her over the car's faux leather console.  
"why is it so barren?" you ask, hand floating above the countertops. i frown and open the fridge.  
"it's not, see? here is the milk, there is the honey."

incredulous, you pick up both and study them. "this is just the day we spent on the pier, knees touching, and this is when you sat in that mostly empty classroom and felt safe enough to be listened to."

i turn away. "put those back before they spoil"

iv.

i pull a bad test score, an awkward conversation, and my favorite t-shirt, donning a new stain, from the washer and throw the dripping pile into the dryer. "the laundry room is where i clean the bad things." you stand in the doorway. there isn't room for much in the laundry room, not more than a few bad things, and definitely not you, sunshine girl.  
"fermented experiences can taste sour or sweet, depends on which detergent you use."

v.

"where do you keep regrets?"  
"in that locked closet over there, behind the bad dreams."  
"is there where you keep the time you didn't kiss me?"  
"probably, but be more specific."  
"on the futon in the loft. we weren't looking at each other and then we were and then...nothing."

"oh yes, that time is in there. and the time we tied daisies together and i crowned you queen of the june heatwave, empress of the waterslide."

"i still had long hair back then."

"it's been a while, my peach."

"we waited for so long."

"oh, all that is in the closet as well."

vi.

i show you where i keep the fuel for my smile and my oceans of love (next to the umbrellas and rain boots, respectively) just as the sun is coming up. the hound in my shadow is illuminated.

"he won't bite unless prodded," i assure you; you continue to point and i fear you will melt into a pile of sugar. "behind his teeth, he keeps the things i've forgotten for good reason."

"do i have one too?" you ask, twisting to check your rear.

"we all do. the alzheimer ones are much bigger and follow their hosts around much more loosely." i smile at him. he bares his teeth. i take your hand and this time, as you leave, i keep the door ajar.

## When It's Over

Erin Chang  
LIVINGSTON, NJ

I sit in a chair beside Mom, gently cradling her hand. Her eyes are closed and her breathing is steady. Her bare head peeks out above the blankets, vulnerable and exposed. A doctor comes in and quietly ejects the needle taped to her arm. As she rolls the IV bag out, I look at my dad and we share a silent smile.

Dad catches me at the bottom of the slide.

*a hot bowl of noodles with eggs, tomato, and bok choy*

Mom wraps her arm around me. We sit on the couch, watching TV. *Hawaii-Five 0* is on. I lean into her - she is warm, soft.

Grandma picks off a tomato from the bush and hands it to me. It is red and plump and sweet when I bite into it - I ask for another.

hot chocolate on Christmas Eve -

The wig is gone. And so is the cap. Mom is humming, making pancakes. She flips me a smile as I sit down at the table. The color has returned to her face.

I think of leeks.

The night is cold, but Grandma's apartment is warm, tight with so many people. Dad is by the window, playing cards with Grandpa. Mom and I help Grandma with dinner in the kitchen. Their hands skillfully dice tomatoes and bok choy, and I whisk eggs. The noodles are boiling on the stovetop.

## Four Thirty

Lauren Ellis

UPPER SADDLE RIVER, NJ

From ages eight through fourteen, Mondays were the worst days of my life. It was not school I dreaded (if anything I prayed for it to belong); it was what followed. Every day after school, I was petrified to be driven off to the big brown wooden house in the mass of trees off the winding hill. The house itself instilled anxiety in me, standing tall and modernly chic with an elaborate garden and a pool I was always envious of. However, the person waiting inside for me, watching the ticking second hand of her massive grandfather clock upon my arrival, was undoubtedly worse. I am not saying by any means that this woman was a bad woman, but her strict mindset was something new to me that I failed to grasp; my tendencies and unwillingness to practice would cause her great annoyance and would bring to me the earliest notion of true disappointment.

The piano was always something beautiful to me, especially the Steinway piano, similar to the one that stood in Mrs. Gordon's spacious living room, the sleek black wood and the paneled slant supported by a thin stick, glossy and majestic. The instrument was something beautiful in itself, standing lonely and tall, not in need of the rest of an orchestra to accompany it to make it sound divine. I cannot quite remember how it first called upon me, but I was always slightly daunted by it, yet it enthralled me; I possessed an amount of desire to slide my fingers to where I knew they belonged. When I was young, my feet would dangle off the cushioned bench, the pedals below so far out of reach. I eventually grew into the seat, feet able to exact pressure upon the golden metal beneath me. In the beginning my fingers would dance slowly, hesitantly, across the white expanse, venture off to an accidental black step, then return to their rightful course in time to correct myself, hopefully quick enough to evade the watchful eye of my teacher. With age, I grew lazy, yet still strived toward

perfection, eager to learn Bach and the works of the greats, melodies swirling in my mind. I loved the piano; but I loved the fact that I could play it even more. There was nothing like captivating a silent room with the drops of noise produced by the light hammering of the strings or the anxious clash of the crescendo leading up to the finale; either way it was beautiful.

At the ripe age of eight, I somehow ended up in Mrs. Gordon's house, my mom proudly leading me inside. My curious eyes swept around this new interior until they fell upon a lithe older woman with short teased hair, who was sweet and lovely until I sat beside her at the piano bench and suddenly the hospitality turned to determination. This woman played the piano amazingly, and I am not sure if I realized this at the time, but I eventually would. One afternoon I had slowly slid open the back door and sat myself in her kitchen, awaiting my lesson. This was one of the days she was so lost in her music that the time just eluded her. I began to lose myself too, hearing the swellings of terribly intense music pounding through the closed wooden door that lead back to her, where her fingers flew across the terrain of rocky keys. The piano was an integral part of her as far as I was concerned.

At home, I had a piano of my own, a stout brown one that sat in the eloquently decorated room we do not use anymore. The piano was the focus of that room; it was also the place I had smiled in pride and cried in frustration. Lessons were always Monday, 3:45 sharp, which meant weekends were the time I would collect myself and venture into the piano room and play for an hour each day, scales and chords and lullabies, knowing that this was not enough practice to appease the teacher, but I was young; these drawn out periods were meant for the sole purpose of exercising my stubborn fingers, which became trite due to the repetition every week, at least in my opinion. Lessons were either good or bad depending on Mrs. Gordon's mood, because I would never live up to her expectations. I was unlike the rest of her students, ruthless and cutthroat, the ones who attended competitions and

achieved scholarships to the Ivy Leagues. But somehow she took a liking to me, the sweet, doe-eyed little girl, quiet and polite. She always liked me, but in the end she grew weary and we both knew my time was up. Some days with her were worse than others; this was a fact that troubled me to no end, brought about the racing heart associated with the passing time on Mondays before three in the afternoon.

The days always began with the sleek black Acura purring into her driveway and my exit. I would ascend the back porch steps slowly, softly; I felt as though I would bother her if I was too loud, scared to disrupt her mood. I would slide the glass door open wide; some days she would be in the kitchen, others not, so I would wait, my music books stacked high in my arms. "Lauren, hello! Come in, come in, don't just stand there." Mrs. Gordon's face appeared as the wooden door slid open with its usual gravelly tone. Her slim hands beckoned me through the door with their usual kind impatience and I forced a smile, clutching my books to my chest like a lifeline. My shoes sat limply by the door, pale light spilling through the glass. My sock-clad feet slid through the door and followed Mrs. Gordon to the bench

"How are you?" she questioned me delicately, placing a hand on my shoulder. She was always very motherly in this sense.

I smiled again, this time responding, "Good! How about you?"

She swept the books from my hands, placing them in the alcove next to the music desk. She sat in her usual seat alongside the cushioned bench, but not on it. That was my seat. I sat quickly, not wanting her impatience to take hold.

"Fine, the usual." Her laugh floated through the air. I smiled, yet again.

"Want to start with scales?" I nodded, knowing this was rhetorical; I placed my fingers in their designated positions and managed to lightly stumble through the scales and variations that were meant to be my warm ups at home. Her expectation for me was low; I

knew my capabilities, as did she. She smiled and sat up straighter. "Good, good. Now which triplets come next?"

I counted up the steps, fingers waltzing daintily over the blacks and whites coming to a hesitant pause on the note that should have been correct. Her lips pursed slightly—I was experienced, I should know better, should know this by now—and I pushed on, unsure of myself. She always had the ability to do that, to make me question my decisions. I tried to do the triplets and her frown deepened. I braced myself, knowing what followed was never good.

"Do you know what's wrong with this?" I did not, but my heart was beating wildly, knowing I was done. This was a common occurrence. Only she could send my heart off in an erratic rhythm when I was this age; nothing else scared me other than her. My parents would laugh when I said that I no longer enjoyed lessons and my teacher was frightening. They liked Mrs. Gordon, said she was nice, something on which I did not disagree, but she could snap at any moment, her patience for me a taut wire and at the slight movement of my hand she would crack.

I kept my eyes focused on my hands, forced mute. She could twist my words and use them as an excuse to fly off into a destructive criticism. I let my head shake, softly, a small twist, hair lightly brushing my arms. That was when I heard the clipped exhale, the warning siren. I took a slow inhale, forcing myself to look at her. Her hands were braced in her lap, and her eyes were widened, staring me down incredulously. *How could you not know this by now? After everything I've taught you?*

I was consumed by fear; it took hold of me in its maw and swallowed me whole. I tried to coax myself into a calmer state, *it was just a lesson, it was just a lesson*, but I could feel the tears forcing their way to the forefront, my over-achieving self wounded. Young me had no threshold for tears; it did not take much to trigger them. I held my breath, praying to God they would dissipate, knowing they were a sign of weakness and

I did not want her pity. My chest swole with alarm and my mind in a state of inquietude; what had I even done wrong? This was so stupid, the petty tears in my eyes. *Stop! Go away!* I pleaded in my head but it did not help.

"I just—" she cut herself off with a disbelieving shake of her head. I could feel my heart stop.

She flicked my hands off the keys like eraser shavings strewn on a desk. I tucked my hands into my lap, eyes following their downward trajectory, knowing that her hands belonged on the keys, not mine. Another frustrated sigh. "You should know this by now." The words.

"I know," I said quietly.

"We went over this last week! I don't understand!" Another sigh. Another turn of my stomach. I was ready to leave, I just wanted to go home. I let my eyes flick up to the clock; we were only seven minutes in. Hot tears burned in my eyes and I hated this. *Yell at me now, I don't care anymore.* Except I did. I always did. My feet danced with uncertainty under me. The pit in my stomach grew with each passing second; it had existed there before I had even stepped into this house. The tears had finally pushed over, which annoyed and embarrassed me to no end. My hand flew up to my face, quickly swiping under my eye. A gasp bubbled in my throat, and it choked me, but I had to repress it. She still did not take any notice to my actions, so caught up in her disappointment that she was unable to be distracted by anything else. She was in the process of sullenly explaining the triplets and finger placement to me once again, she did not fail to remind me, when she heard my small gasp as I struggled to intake air without sobbing. Another sigh.

"Crying isn't going to help, you know." She looked tired. Her head turned to focus on something behind me and gestured outward with her hand. "Grab a tissue and stop crying."

I bit my lip, stifling a sob, embarrassment coursing through my veins like fire. I gasped again and raced up and over to the tissue

box, blowing my nose quietly and dragging the white tissue beneath my eyes. Shame pushed me to slump; I threw away the tissue and inhaled deeply, begging the tears to recede permanently.

"Sorry," I said, knowing it would have no impact, but feeling the need to say it anyway.

She did not respond. I knew she wouldn't.

At 4:30 I was released, shoving my shoes onto my feet and struggling not to bolt right out the door. I clomped down the wooden porch stairs and into the driveway. The days were beginning to elongate, the sun still luminous in the afternoon sky and the trees beginning to come into bloom once again. My babysitter was absent from the driveway, so I sat silently on the elevated tiles along the asphalt. It was lonely, but peaceful, my peripheral vision bombarded with the green of the leaves that were everywhere. I didn't feel quite as awful then. I tilted my wrist up, the face of my watch glinting, once again grateful to see 4:31

## Honeysuckle

Emily Tian

NORTH POTOMAC, MD

Femininity. Scraping yolk from marrow. Throat warbles

rainwater, ankles like silk-swallowed flags. A vessel

fat with hunchback eyelashes. Pollen, as in *small suns*, and

its rawboned gravity. Bleached white, seeding saffron,

no thorns -- a Pacifist. Refuses flesh and Andromeda.

And then: electricity. Peeling back veins like

corn husks, hewing sinews from static ambrosia,

last august, yellow fever. Paper tendrils of trembling

cursive splinter into streams. Kerosene ripens

(cremates) sweet. Charring yolk, coughs nectar and smoke.

## If You Meet Her, Tell Her She's Beautiful

Grace Morrissey  
ALLENDALE, NJ

How do you explain the way the world corrupts children?

I will leave you with two things. This very memory and a question.

How do you teach a child self-love, when you have forgotten yourself? Do with them what you must.

I held her in my arms. Moisture gathered where our skin touched. The afternoon sun was bearing down on us, the kind of sun that, on a regular day, would make skin sparkle.

Today it simply highlighted one thing. She was black and I was white. Her tiny fingers reached up pulling at my hair. It was pulled back into a ponytail today, long, straight and blonde.

With a smile, she murmurs, "I wish I had your hair. It's pretty."

Stuttering, how do you respond to that. "What do you mean your hair is so beautiful"

"No," she remarks reaching to touch her own. "My hair is a bore."

Today, just like every Tuesday, her hair was loosely pulled back into a bun. With dark chocolate curls sprouting from all

over.

Each little ribbon of hair was reaching to escape the sparkly blue headband. She had the thickest hair, it went right along with her coffee-colored skin. Her hair made her seem happy.

Bouncy and free.

Curls that always managed to get in her face, but made her smile seem brighter.

"What! Madison are you crazy I love your hair. Your hair is fun. My hair is too plain. I wish I had your hair!" I coaxed. In that moment, I wanted nothing more than for her to want her hair.

"No," she said again quieter now with a sigh. "I don't want it. I want yours. Pretty."

Before I could argue anymore, she had pushed herself out of my grasp, running to join the other kids.

She was there. Six years' old. Sitting with me. Why did she hate her hair. Who did that to her. I couldn't bring myself to do anything but watch her. She was beautiful. Everywhere.

She had no idea.

## Watermelon Delight

Alder Flecker  
SPENCER, NY

I'm eating watermelon and I'm savoring the flavor  
Wendy Wallace White says  
Watermelon is good for the soul

I'm munching on it, it makes me feel happy  
Watermelon is making me as joyful as a puppy with atoy  
It's a far superior snack than cookies or chips  
And much healthier too  
It's my favorite snack by far  
In my opinion, no other fruit can rival it  
As I eat, I wonder  
Is this locally grown?  
Is this organic?  
Or is this silver of red and green fruit jammed with GMOs?"

Gosh, Mr. Carver would be proud  
That I'm actually considering where my food comes from  
It's seriously funny that I can apply school to fruit  
But alas, the background of my magnificent fruit isn't a dealbreaker

Whenever I eat watermelon, I cherish the moment  
To me, Summertime is watermelon time  
On bright sunny days with exhausting heat,  
Nothing beats eating watermelon

I thank you watermelon for your existence  
Without you, what would I eat, a pear?

Your only blemish is the stains you've given my shirts  
But all is forgiven because you always brighten my day

# Under the African Sun

Jenny Li

LOS ANGELES, CA

The Population Registration Act of 1950 restricted the movement of people in South Africa and was used to show that a person was approved to reside, move, or even work in areas that were set out for the white South Africans, which meant that the colored South Africans had to carry passbooks at all times. It was very unpopular among the people of African descent, who often called it the Dom pass (stupid book) because it undermined their intelligence, and unquestionably, their rights. The Population Registration Act was formally repealed in 1991.



Sharpeville, July 23, 1952

The bright cobalt sky gradually dimmed in color as it neared the ground, almost blending into the rolling fertile hills. I played in the road with Delize wearing a button down floral dress under my favorite, and now slightly dusty, chalky-pink cardigan. Our hands were stained red from the dust, and as I reached to wipe them down on my cardigan, I saw a police officer. From the quiet, pattering way he walked, to his shaven, light, and unblemished skin, to the absence of dust and mud on his clothes, he clearly was not one of us. Delize and I crouched together, half in fear and half in awe.

We rarely interacted with white men. Some of the mothers in the neighborhood, like Nella one block over, were maids in white neighborhoods and regularly shared their worlds with the whites, but we as children did not have many opportunities to have that experience. Maybe

that is why I swallowed hard when the man's shadow loomed over me. There was something instinctual about the fear that Delize and I felt.

We stared at the man as he slowly walked towards us and gravitated even closer to each other. He stopped in front of the blanket and crouched down. While looking me squarely in the face, the man reached toward me; I squirmed. His hands wrapped around one of the oranges my mother had

sent us out with. He cupped the orange, slowly stood up, and started peeling it, all the while continuing to cast a long shadow over Delize and me.

The orange peels floated down from the man's hands, fluttering away in the slight dusty wind like coarse feathers. The officer stepped onto the blanket that Mother had laid on the ground—a stark brick-red tattoo on the folded blue. I could see tears forming in Delize's eyes.

In the corner of my eye, I saw Mother in the doorway. She stopped for a second as she saw the officer, and then hesitantly walked towards us. The man kept his eyes on Delize and me, took another orange, and casually walked off. Mother didn't ask me any questions, just took my hand and ushered me inside. That night, I lay awake well past the hour Father came home from work and listened to my parents whisper in hushed voices.



Sharpeville, September 12, 1959

I grabbed the newspaper from the wastebasket on the way home from school. The big bold letters of the first page only enumerated the violence happening across South Africa. I didn't need the reminder. My childhood naiveté and incredulity had recently turned into fear and rage as I witnessed numerous friends being taken by the police and beaten for not having their papers. The looks and bruises on their faces were enough to keep me quiet and do as I was told.

Though the Population Registration Act had been around since I could remember, it wasn't until I started attending secondary school outside of our town that I had seen what it could do. It was my first year traveling outside of our town without my parents and though they worried and insisted that I go with Delize and her older brother Abraham, I had never really had any trouble. I carried my passbook and stuck to my known route, and so did Delize. Abraham was different.

He was just a few years older than us, but seemed so much more grown-up. He was always reading something and discussing topics Delize and I didn't know anything about. Even our teachers took notice of Abraham's ideas. He often talked about

civil rights and The Pan-Africanist Congress and spoke of Nelson Mandela with admiration in his voice.

That morning, I had overslept and missed my regular bus. Delize and Abraham had left before, and I was a little nervous about traveling on my own. As I stepped off the bus and walked toward our school, I saw Abraham and two other older boys being detained by the police. It must have been the third time that the police had caught him without his identification card—just last week, his lips had been swollen and red, and his right cheek was bandaged tight. Seeing him humiliated made me furious. Reacting ahead of my common sense and even fear, my feet almost steered me in the policeman's direction, but I couldn't.

I considered leaving my identification document at home. I wanted to be as brave as Abraham, and I couldn't stop thinking about the students from my school who risked so much to do what they believed in.



I had told my father that I was staying with Delize. Careful not to be seen by any officers, I cautiously walked down the street, and took a sharp left. Clutching my passbook, I glanced around to make sure I was not being watched and quietly tapped the signal on the door.

The door opened and I was let into a packed room of men and women gathered uncomfortably. The small space was hot and filled to capacity. We all stood around silently, waiting. When the voice rose from the end of the room, I didn't immediately know it was Mandela speaking. I scarcely had a moment to get excited at the reality of my situation – he was here, in front of me – before some of the men near him began speaking. I craned my neck to see better above the shoulders of two tall young men in front of me.

"I have an idea," a man I did not know began, "but it is very risky."

He raised his ripped, olive-colored passbook into the air, his forehead beaded in sweat and his hand trembling.

"This," he gestured to his passbook, "is what they force us to carry. It states that we are not allowed to be in places that our an-



cestors lived in and owned. It undermines us, treating us like we are stupid and uneducated, relying on a piece of paper to know where we can and cannot go.”

Someone else – one of Abraham’s friends—interrupted, eager to make an impression on Mandela, it seemed, “We can all leave them at home and overwhelm the police! That way—”

“No,” the first man cut him off, “It has to be bigger and send a message. I say we must burn them,” he paused, “in front of the police headquarters.”



Sharpeville, December 16, 1959

I had been looking forward to the annual conference of the African National Congress for months. With Abraham, I was learning more and more about the different civil rights campaigns throughout South Africa. The last few months had been a whirlwind of secret meetings, freedom marches, and late nights of discussion at Abraham and Delize’s house. Izwe lethu and Awaphela amapasti rotated through my mind like popular rock songs, stuck there until I found myself doodling the words onto my school books.

For many weeks, I had heard my friends chant for their freedom and watched them be swarmed by the police. It was only my mother and father who stood between me and the protests. They were afraid of me being hurt and had kept me at home, but I still found myself humming the chants about abolishing the passes. I strongly believed that South Africa was our land, too, and I heard voices saying 1960 as the year of tackling the pass. I could feel that something big was coming.



Sharpeville, March 21, 1960

Intricate lace-like shadows sprouted off the magnificent tree, the centerpiece of our settlement. The hazy afternoon was punctuated by the angry shouting of the men and women surrounding the chained link fence of the police department. I nestled myself behind the tree, watching the flicker of the Zippo lighters that danced around the edges of their identification documents, held open by dark sweaty

hands. The people chanted and spit at the police, and some threw their ID cards into a burning pile of smoking booklets, others punching their closed fists into the air. The heat of the sun and the smoke of the burning paper assaulted my eyes and mouth, and I struggled to hold back a cough, though no one would have heard or noticed me in the increasingly violent commotion between the people and the police. I could see the nervous

eyes underneath caps of the policemen who gripped their guns without much conviction. I could see their pleading glances towards each other, the chain-linked fence separating them from the angry mob shook violently under the strong hands of the gold-miners, the factory workers, and the farmers. I still remember that rattling.

Suddenly, the door of the police station swung open, and the Chief walked out. He signaled with his hand, and the policemen took steps backward. Another signal, and they raised their guns. My gaze froze on the red dirt underneath my feet, yet in my mind, I saw him nod, and as if right on cue, they fired. One of the first fallen was Abraham.

The shooting continued. Then there was another man on the ground, and the third was a woman, whose scream was heard underneath the sound of gunfire. Panic quickly took over the anger and the crowd clumsily fled through the red dust. Later I would read that 69 people were killed that afternoon, most of them shot in the back as they tried to flee.

The fear that had paralyzed me now turned into adrenaline that powered my legs to get me home. Out of breath and shaking, I burst into the front door and ran right into my father. With one look, he immediately knew where I had been. He grabbed my arms with his large hands as if to shake me, as if he were angry, but he simply held me in place. I read in his eyes anger and fear and something else I had never seen before. Under his gaze I felt ashamed and guilty. I went to sleep that night thinking of Abraham and the shadow of brittle hairs, black and gray on my father’s unshaven neck.

That night, the fear I had held inside parted to reveal a new-to-me wish to be a part of something bigger than myself. It wasn’t until years later when I read Man-

dela’s words that “courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it,” that I understood what I had felt.



Cape Town, February 11, 1990

The man that stepped out of the car looked nothing like that flushed, determined man I remembered from thirty years ago. Mandela, with the help of the crowd around him, shuffled a few steps as he stared at his old home, which had been noticeably preserved and cleaned for his return.

The energy and pride from the crowd around him seemed to fill him up. As he opened his mouth, it seemed as if the whole South Africa was holding its breath, waiting for their leader to speak again.

“Today, the majority of South Africans, black and white, recognize that apartheid has no future. It has to be ended by our decisive mass action. We have waited too long for our freedom.”

The fierce intent in the eyes of the people around me spoke of the feelings of excitement and pride, but also feelings of anguish and suffering, that enveloped this historical event. I let myself gaze across the glare of sun and dip into my childhood memories. It had been a while since I’ve thought about Abraham. My memories of our games and neighborhood antics would unexpectedly be overtaken by the image of Abraham’s surprised and pained face and the crack and hollow whine of gun shots. The tug at my hand brought me back into the present moment and, still in a daze, I lowered my eyes inquiringly toward the source of the welcome intrusion that brought me back from the painful memory. Looking into my young son’s eyes, I recognized innocence not marred by cruelty and unfairness. He blinked and looked around at Mandela and his chanting supporters. Following his gaze, I watched the sun hover softly around the upraised fists of the crowd.

It took years for Apartheid to be officially dismantled. On April 27, 1994, the first elections with racially diverse candidates and voting rights extended to all citizens were held. Nelson Mandela became the first black president of South Africa.

## Sunny

### Young Se Choi

LIVINGSTON, NJ

Upper Eastside. Carnegie Hill. This was the New York City she had always dreamed of. Woody Allen's New York City. Perfect for taking an afternoon stroll on an Autumn afternoon New York City. Sinatra's glamorous New York City.

Not her New York City though. Hers was 40 minutes by bus along Astoria Boulevard in Flushing, Queens amongst the karaoke rooms, Korean barbeque restaurants and Soju dens. It was time to get back to reality now Sunny. Back to 143 E. 88th Street.

139. 141. 143. Sunny faced the lovely

## Thorns on Bare Skin

Brianna Caridi

PITTSBURGH, PA

I lay on the verandah as he paints me my cigarette smoke swirls around my neck almost choking me he chuckles absentmindedly and says "how old are you anyway?"

I squint and look onward at the neon lights; he answers for me "maybe I don't want to know"

I hear the soft brush strokes as he stares at my outstretched body. he confesses that he's never been very good at painting. I tell him he's trying too hard he chuckles again and I'm not sure why. I'm fairly sure that he knows something I don't. I can tell by the look in his bloodshot eyes; half-moons under his eyes haunt me. "take off your shirt"

I pause for a moment, seeing nothing but the deep purple of the sky and his coffee complexion

"maybe I should tell you how old I am"

"maybe I don't care anymore"

he's in front of me now

I am in a field of roses

no, sunflowers

I am running through them fast

they hurt me

they are roses

I feel the thorns

my shirt is on the ground

brownstone town house and checked her watch. 7:55 AM. Good timing as usual. She walked up the stairs and rang the bell. A few minutes stretched out, almost on the cusp of discomfort, when the door creaked open to reveal Mrs. Wells, a woman in her late thirties wearing a loose gray turtleneck and trumpet-like black pants that accentuated her long neck and legs respectively.

"You must be Sunny."

"Yes ma'am."

Inside, a chandelier at the center of the room cast a warm light that rippled outwards. On each end, a spiraling staircase climbed up the walls like ivy. As Sunny tilted her head to look up, up, and up at the ceiling, she heard the sexy George Gershwin clarinet followed by the climax of horns and cymbals. This would be the only time in her life when reality far exceeded movie make believe. On the table, there was a series of family pictures in minimalist wooden frames. She couldn't digest each one, but the black and white photo of a younger Mrs. Wells with a head full of hair Mr. Wells posing with their young son and infant daughter filled Sunny's heart with an unexplainable romance.

Her mind shot off into a hundred different possibilities. She finally settled on one. Mr. Jordan Wells, President of J.T. Stanley & Co., the most prominent Wall Street firm in the country, met Amanda Leitner while they both attended Yale University. She was studying anthropology and he economics. The two of them connected in a study group at the Sterling Library through their mutual interest in Chinese culture. Upon graduation, Mr. Wells began work as an analyst. Ms. Leitner continued her anthropological studies at Columbia. They married a few years later at the Yale Club in Manhattan. Mr. Wells was soon thereafter offered a position at the Shanghai branch. Mrs. Wells believed it was the chance of a lifetime. She could not believe that she and her husband could actualize their college pipe dreams. During the second year abroad, Mrs. Wells gave birth to Colin Wells. Family success mirrored work success as Mr. Wells led a number of

Chinese startups to record breaking IPO's. J.T. Stanley & Co. recalled Mr. Wells back to New York City and promoted him to President of the firm. Mr. and Mrs. Wells along with Colin were led by the real estate agent into the beautiful sandstone home on 143 E. 88th Street. They agreed to buy it on the spot. Ashley Wells was born ten months later. And a few years would pass before Sunny found herself underneath the chandelier of the Wells home in a trance.

"Sunny, you'll have to start upstairs."

"Yes, ma'am."

Sunny barely caught herself in the midst of her fantastic imaginings. She followed Mrs. Wells up the spiraling stairs.

"There are five bedrooms and three bathrooms. Once you finish up here, you can move downstairs."

"Yes, ma'am."

With Mrs. Wells gone, Sunny resumed her journey into the Wells' world. First up was little Ashley's room. Plush white bed. Stuffed animals littered throughout. Drawings on the wall. Ones with zig zag rainbow crayon marks. Others with hand paint. And still more with black chalk. Sunny imagined a lively pre-schooler with a predisposition for turning anything and everything into works of art, especially her food. Like the time she smeared egg yolk on the wall in a Mark Rothko-ish fashion.

Colin's room exuded less innocence, but clearly he was a boy on the precipice of manhood. A faint smell of bodyspray could be traced to every item in the room. A yankees cap hanging on the mirror. A Yale banner with the motto "Lux et veritas" on the wall. Kanye West staring down from the ceiling. A closet full of collectible basketball shoes maintained in ziplock bags. But still remnants of his younger self remained: a handmade Christmas card made out of construction paper, a Curious George doll and a photo of young Colin in his church choir attire. Sunny

imagined a shy, but quietly confident

middle schooler who did not know exactly how to react to the adoration of Emily and Suri. He avoided them by shooting one hundred free throws a day at the gym.

The master bedroom did not look as if it needed much cleaning. The bed was made. No clothes strewn about. The windows brought in a soft early afternoon light. Sunny held in the desire to plop herself onto that bed that looked so cush and welcoming. She peeked into the closet. A dizzying array of shoes, coats, bags and shirts. To be in the closet like this was dangerous, but Sunny could not help but check out at least one rack of clothes. She did not have the guts to actually try anything on, but she did place one red sweater in front of her. Perfect for that afternoon stroll she had thought of taking once work ended.

Only lovely thoughts of vacationing in the Hamptons and dancing at Christmas charity balls filled Sunny's mind as she scrubbed away at an already immaculate toilet bowl. The first day of work meant having to make an extra good impression. A small amount of sweat began to form on her brow. She wiped it away with her sleeve. As she did so, she caught her reflection in the mirror. It was the first time all day since her morning shower that she had had a chance to see herself. The image brought the harmonious world of the Wells to a crash. Sunny felt a pang of horror. She looked so worn out. In contrast to the gold plated faucet and ivory sink, she appeared so dull. The imaginings from earlier in the day felt so far. This was not her New York City after all. Her New York City was not even New York City. It was Flushing, Queens.

She had been a foreigner in this new land for a long time now, but she understood for the first time what it meant to be a stranger.



## Antisocial

Jessica McKenzie

BALDWINVILLE, NY

I want to shatter the glass spectrum  
By simply  
Tapping my finger to the atmosphere

I want to see more than my brain offers  
Colors  
I have never seen before

I want gravity to be optional  
The Earth neon in space  
Buzzing with creative minds

Love unheard of  
Hate unheard of  
Food and sleep unheard of

I want to live as one of the creatures  
Lying on my back as I swim with the earth  
My senses activated

I want to touch every square inch of the planet in a matter of seconds  
Or bounce across the planets  
And make a trampoline out of the solar system

I want to meet humans  
Touch a thousand lives  
If only for a moment

I want to play catch with my friends  
Using clouds  
And we'll glow in the dark

There would be no numbers  
Of time, of temperature, or money  
None of that would exist

I want to blend  
In a city of millions of people  
Or in woods, extending a hundred miles

Invisible

But bright.

# The Bicycle

Sydney Vincent

LEHIGHTON, PA

When Jonas La Belle was twelve years old and his brother, Hugo, ten, they constructed a bicycle out of old parts found at the back of their father's convenience store. On the metal, the boys painted their names to claim the bicycle as their own.

And each day, the two boys would quarrel about who would get to ride the bicycle to and from school. The fresh dew on the leaves of the trees and grass during the spring mornings to school would bring the boys peace and security.

The fall mornings would bring whirlwinds of deceased leaves into the air as the bicycle whipped passed them. And on the warm summer nights, before the sun disappeared, the boys would take endless rides on the bicycle, the warm air and smell of blooming flowers filling their bodies.

Jonas was a very smart and shy young boy, often refusing to meet eyes with others. Engineering had always fascinated him, as did the new advancements of the military inventions European and American scientists were creating.

However, Hugo was the complete opposite. Hugo was smart but not as bright as his older brother. Hugo was rebellious, social, and outgoing. He was fearless but yet loyal and honest. Together, the boys made a bond strong enough to last a lifetime.

As the years went by, the bicycle grew older with each passing day and so did the boys. The year 1914 came, as did the First World War. The youngest of the brothers, who was now twenty years old, was drafted and sent to fight the Central Powers on the Western Front.

As for Jonas, whom was married to a young lady named Gabrielle

and expecting a child, the French Military did not accept his enlistment to fight because of his age and his skill in engineering. However, Jonas was led to work with the military in Paris to help repair planes and install engines for the men fighting on the Front.

On a brisk autumn morning in 1918, a large man by the name of Sergeant Major Jacque Delacroix rode to the small town of Saint Jean De Cole on a motorcycle no bigger than himself.

He approached the small door of a house with a red roof and light stonewalls. On the door was painted in cursive the name "La Belle." The Sergeant Major knocked on the door gently.

Jonas and Hugo's parents appeared at the door as the Sergeant Major removed his hat and said softly, "Hugo La Belle was an excellent young man. He was a skilled fighter, and it was an honor to lead him in this war. I am sorry. He will be greatly missed."

A single teardrop fell from the Sergeant Major's eye. He nodded at the couple and handed them Hugo's uniform. He then placed his hat back on top of his head,

covering his dark black and gray hair.

That same day, Sergeant Major Jacque Delacroix rode on a train to a secluded military air base in Paris, France. As he walked across the base to the air hangars, many heads turned to study the man's stature and seeming power. He arrived at one out of the seventy-eight air hangars to find Jonas under the wing of a Breguet 14 aircraft.

"Mr. Jonas La Belle?" the Sergeant Major cleared his throat and removed his hat once again.

Jonas rose and saluted the man. Sergeant Major Jacque Delacroix nodded and Jonas wiped some of the oil and ash off of his face with a tattered towel.

"Private Hugo La Belle. He was your younger brother, correct?"  
"Yes, sir. Is he in trouble? Is he alright?"

The Sergeant Major brought his large hand to Jonas' shoulder. Jonas' lip began to quiver as he gripped the towel in his hand tighter.

"Hugo was a wonderful man, sol-

## Stems

Illana Saban

NORTH MIAMI, FL

My sorrow leaps,  
following my heart's calls  
of pirouettes in their very all.

An agile stem  
partakes in the mayhem.  
Together we move,

the rain's patter our beat,  
allowing the throbs of our heart  
to be our rhythmic art.

Its pleated petals unlatch,  
as does the clasp  
of my drowning dolor.

Freely we move -  
my twirling toes  
and the infant rose,

our limbs nimble,  
an exquisite symbol  
of weightlessness  
and poise

A final staccato hit,  
the last fluid swerve  
ends in a gentle curve.

dier, and friend. He fought with such bravery and strength. He was humble and kind. He was forgiving and determined. He was an honorable man. Unfortunately, a nest of machine guns shot him down during the Battle of Saint-Mihiel while he was protecting a friend of his.

Many men were killed in that battle. It took us a while to identify the men who were killed but your brother was among them. I hope you know that he died as a great man and nothing less. I am sorry for your loss. I'm sure he was a wonderful brother and friend. I gave your parents his uniform. I saved this for you. Just a small thing to remember Hugo by."

The Sergeant Major pulled a chain with two small medallions out of his pocket and handed it to Jonas. Engraved in the metal was this:

LA BELLE, HUGO  
PRIVATE  
2210  
FRANCE

And on the second medallion, the text was this:

SAINT JEAN  
DE COLE,  
FRANCE

"Thank you, Sergeant. I am sure that was very difficult for you. If you can find time to attend the service, I am sure Hugo and our family would greatly appreciate it. Good day, sir. Thank you once again." Jonas told the Sergeant with the utmost respect, tears welling in his eyes as his hand gripping the towel with great force.

The Sergeant Major nodded, placed his hat on his head and exited the hangar. Jonas stood there and let the tears stream down his face.

A week later, four men arrived in a black horse-drawn hearse at Saint Jean De Cole. One of the men was Sergeant Major Jacques Delacroix. He wore a black uniform with a black hat to match. He greeted Jonas and his parents

respectfully and expressed his condolences to them once more.

Most of the town attended the service of Hugo La Belle on that sunny day in autumn. Jonas and Hugo's parents stayed quiet the whole time while Jonas had to present his eulogy at the end of the service.

Next to Jonas and Hugo's parents stood Gabrielle silently in the pew, rubbing her stomach, which contained a child, expected very soon. Jonas took his spot at the altar and began his eulogy.

"When Hugo and I were little, we made a bicycle out of old parts we found in the back of our father's convenience store.

We spent hours upon hours perfecting that hand made bicycle in the summer between the school years.

I remember we used to fight and fight on who would ride the bicycle into town to pick up groceries or packages or just ride around. One night in the summer a few years later, after a whole day of riding the bicycle down La Ferrieres, onto Grand Pre, across the La Cole, and finishing on Le Bourg, we laid down in the field behind to our house on La Ferrieres. We watched the sunset and gazed at the stars that took the place of the clouds in the sky. I, to this day, still remember the words Hugo said to me that night.

He said, 'I remember reading somewhere that when a star dies, two are created in its place. I think it was in one of Papa's books. Anyway, at first, I only looked at that saying literally. But now that I am a little bit older, I see what it means. It means that when someone we love dies or leaves us, good things happen or are created after. Like the time my pet toad Jeremy died. That same day, I aced my mathematics test and Mama made my favorite dinner, beef stew. Even though Jeremy died, good things still happened. I guess it's the universe's way of saying that everything is going to be alright. That things will get bet-

ter no matter what.'

"I tell you that story and saying today because even though Hugo has passed on, we have been blessed with this beautiful, autumn day and Gabrielle and I have been gifted with another child on the way after our miscarriage. But I disagree on one thing. I don't think these blessings are the universe's way of telling us that everything will be alright or things will get better. I believe it is Hugo's way of telling us that everything will get better and that he is with us every step of the way.

"To this day, our bicycle stands in the shed of our parents house. So, in honor of Hugo, I will ride the bicycle once more down La Ferrieres, onto Grand Pre, across the La Cole, and finish on Le Bourg tonight. And I hope that on my journey, Hugo will be right beside me that whole time to ride our bicycle once more, just like when we were children in the summer. Thank you."

Everyone in the church remained silent. Every eye was filled with tears including Jonas'.

After the service, Hugo's body was taken to the cemetery and buried under a green willow tree on the far side of the lot. Hugo had always wanted to be buried under a willow tree because they symbolized life, strength, growth and harmony, according to the books he had read.

After the burial, everyone was invited to the La Belle's house on La Ferrieres for dinner.

Once the day's events were concluded, Jonas made his way to the shed in the backyard of his parents' house and removed the old, rusted bicycle. Even though the bicycle had seen better days, it was still as sturdy as ever.

Jonas gazed at the side of the bicycle and ran his hands down the painted letters of his and Hugo's names on the metal. He led the machine down the driveway and

past the gates at the entrance.

Next, he stopped the bicycle in the middle of the La Ferrieres, positive that the traffic was done for the day. Jonas mounted and loosened his tie. He looked to his left and watched as the sun set under the horizon. To his right, stars began to form in the sky. Jonas took a deep breath and grabbed Hugo's medallions out from under his dress shirt.

"Alright, Hugo. One more run." Jonas whispered to himself as he held his brother's medallions firmly in his right hand.

He let go of the medallions. Then, Jonas pushed off the ground and the bicycle gathered speed. It still rode like a dream with only a few squeaks here and there. Jonas raced down La Ferrieres and onto Grand Pre. The cool autumn air swept through his hair and shirt. The medallions chimed an unusual but sweet song in the breeze. His heart returned to that of a child's and it raced in his chest. Jonas smiled and laughed as he came close to the bridge over the La Cole.

He heard the familiar rushes of the water become near and as he crossed the bridge, small droplets of water sprayed across Jonas' face from the river below. Finally, as the ride came to an end, Jonas slowly put pressure on the brakes and came to a stop at the end of Le Bourg.

Jonas dismounted the bicycle and stayed silent as his heart slowed. He then turned the bicycle around and began to walk the machine back up to his childhood home. When he returned to the home, it was completely dark outside and the lights in the home were dimmed.

Jonas brought the bicycle back into the shed and locked the door. He gazed up at the sky full of stars and saw in the distance one star, brighter than any other, hanging over the spot where the two boys had laid on that one summer night years back.

"Good run, Hugo. Good run." Jonas whispered and smiled.

Years passed by. Gabrielle gave birth to two beautiful twin boys named Franklin Nicholas and George Allan.

A year later, a little girl named Lillian Rose came into the family's world. But in time, Jonas' parents passed and he inherited their small, quaint house in Saint Jean De Cole. The couple raised the children in Jonas' childhood home.

At times, it pained Jonas to walk past his and Hugo's old room in which Franklin and George now shared. Memories of late night horror stories, days pretending they were pirates or knights, and early morning pranks flooded Jonas' mind.

Almost everyday, just at sunset, Jonas would go and visit Hugo's tombstone, sometimes alone, other times with one of his children or his wife. They would sit in silence under the willow tree.

When the Second World War came around, Franklin and George were sent off to fight while Lillian was given a job in a factory just outside of town to help make artillery for the military.

Luckily, the boys came back unharmed after the war was complete. Soon enough, the two boys married lovely women. Franklin married a preacher's daughter named Annabel and George married a military officer's daughter named Willa. The boys moved out of the small house on La Ferrieres and went on with their lives.

A few months later, Lillian decided to travel to America to receive an education she could not receive at home. While in America, Lillian met a Southern gentleman named Parker and fell in love with him. After Lillian finished her studies, the two married and gave birth to a little girl in which they named Emma.

Countless seasons passed as Jonas and Gabrielle spent their days

growing old at the small house in Saint Jean De Cole. The children visited with their children to the house and nothing made the couple happier. And every once in awhile, Jonas would take out the old, rusting bicycle and take it for a ride. The bicycle never failed under his aging body.

When Gabrielle turned seventy years old, she became sick. Jonas spent days and nights by her side, praying that she would get well soon. However, nothing happened. Nothing changed.

On July 12, 1964, Gabrielle Anne Emile La Belle passed away. She was buried in her hometown of Bordeaux, France. Franklin, George, Lillian, their spouses, and their children attended the service. They tried to comfort their father but his heart was too broken. A few days after the service, the family left the city and Jonas went back to the house all alone.

That evening, Jonas, at seventy-two years old, took out the bicycle and rode it down La Ferrieres, onto Grand Pre, across the La Cole, and finished on Le Bourg once more. And that night, at exactly midnight, Jonas Christopher La Belle took his final breath. Jonas' children, their spouses, and the grandchildren arrived in Saint Jean De Cole. The afternoon of the next week, Franklin, George, and Lillian buried their father next to his brother under the willow tree.

That night, right before the twins and Lillian went to bed in the small house with their spouses and children, they made their way to the crippling shed, removed the old bicycle, and walked it down to the green willow. They rested the bicycle against the trunk of the tree and made their way back home.

To this day, the bicycle still rests upon the trunk and at the bottom of the bicycle, every spring, two flowers blossom, one blue and one green.

# Never Quite Enough

Callie Gonsalves  
SALEM, NH

I hadn't spoken a single word to my mother in over eight months. Not that I needed to. Mara had never been the nurturing type; even when I was a baby, she'd been more likely to be found nursing a beer bottle than a baby bottle. But, deep down inside, I still hoped that she would one day come to her senses and regret throwing me away. Regret all the choices she made that benefited her directly rather than her only daughter. Regret that she had never loved me.

When I was a child, I used to dream about a perfect couple that were my real parents. They'd somehow gotten separated from me at the hospital where I was born, and I had ended up with my mother. They had spent every day since that horrible incident trying to find me, and when they finally did, they would be so relieved with me for forgiving them. They would take me away, and I would never have to see or think about my mother again. In effort to help my real parents locate me, one day at the grocery store I told the checkout girl that Mara wasn't actually my mother. She called the police and, upon their arrival, my mother yelled at me until I cried. When I tried explaining about my real parents to the police officers, Mara was livid.

"I don't know where all these ideas come from, but I am her mother. I have her birth certificate right at home, if you need to see it."

They didn't need to. During the car ride home, she told me that I was damn lucky to even have a mother, that she wouldn't be around forever. I said I hoped that day would come sooner rather than later.

They found her suicide note scribbled on a crumpled up napkin from Dunkin Donuts like an afterthought, the ink from the Sharpie bleeding through onto

her dashboard. "Tell her I'm sorry," it read, "but sooner is here."

At first, they thought the accident had been just that — an unfortunate mistake, a crash. But between the note and the amount of alcohol in her blood, we all knew it was intentional.

She'd drunk two bottles of her newest obsession, some sort of vodka, or maybe she'd moved on to whiskey by then. Regardless, it was enough to convince her to hold her foot down on the gas and not stop until she had successfully swerved off the road and wrapped her car around a tree. She was dead on impact, the EMTs said. Nothing they could do. These kinds of things were no one's fault, really. I knew that was a lie.

But my mother had just died, so I was in no place to confront this police officer. Instead, I nodded, ever the compliant one. How could I not be, growing up as I did? With a mother like mine, there wasn't much of a choice.

Immature, irresponsible, and plagued with a tendency to flee from the slightest hint of boredom. Opposed to being chained down and unwilling to grow up. The last thing Mara Byrne had ever wanted was a baby.

She was one of many deluded, starstruck people who were determined to live a life of importance. Mara left her parents the night of her eighteenth birthday, a simple "Good-bye, I love you. I'll be sure to call" scribbled on a spare piece of paper from the family's junk drawer. She was determined to be a model (most models are between 5'8" and 5'11"; at barely 5'4" she had no chance), or a singer (her lungs were filled with cigarette ash that erupted out of her each time her mouth opened, and even her humming sounded like an old car engine struggling up a hill), or an actress (her best performance was when she was telling one of her many boyfriends that she never loved him, never needed him, was glad to see him go). Eventually, my mother realized that she wouldn't survive on her own without a steady income, so, until she could become the next big model/singer/actress,

she settled on working at a desolate bar called "Sadie's" that was frequented by men looking to escape their wives and women willing to turn tricks for spare change. It was here, at this charming Southern-California establishment, that Mara met my father.

He was thirty-eight to her nineteen, recently divorced, and more than willing to leave a large tip for work well done — in short, he was all she had ever dreamed of. Their relationship moved in that swift, albeit sleepy, way that California has, and soon enough, I was conceived. My father wanted me even less than my mother, and he left as soon as he could: no note, no good-bye. Mara would never admit it, but she was just a toy to him, an easy way to pass the time. But, still, I was the one who made him leave, and she never forgave me for that.

She'd been expecting a son and had settled on the name "Corey" after her father. I guess she hoped that naming me after her father, a man who had been married for twenty-seven years, as opposed to my father, a man who had divorced his wife and left his girlfriend and unborn child, would give me a fighting chance to be a good person. But her plan backfired; I left, too, didn't I? Anyway, ever the inconvenience, I was born a girl. Since my mother was already expecting a Corey, she figured the easiest thing to do would be replacing the "-ey" with an "-ie" and having a Corie.

I suppose my mother tried to love me for the first few months, but having a newborn interfered with her work, and there was no more rich man to rely on. Our money dwindled until she could afford only a one-way ticket to Williams, Arizona. To her parents.

Though she denied it to her grave, we all know that she'd had every intention of leaving me there.

Williams served as the place of broken dreams to Mara. She'd left there hoping to become someone, that coveted and elusive someone: loved by many, envied by all. But she remained as she

had departed, off the map and irrelevant. On top of her lack in title, she now had a plus-one; I was, and remain to be, the obvious mark of a girl who's gone and gotten herself "in trouble."

I was only months old when we arrived in Arizona, so the story of our temporary stay in Williams has been pieced together fragment by fragment by my mother's extremely biased memory.

According to Mara, they wanted nothing to do with her (conveniently, she did say "her," not "us." Either they had no problem with taking me in and raising me, or she forgot I was even there, eager to take on the role of victim as a solo. Both are possible, but my money's on the latter). They allowed us to stay in Mara's childhood bedroom, and they took on the responsibility of raising a baby, hoping to get it right this time around. Mara fell quickly into old habits, nights that should have been spent working or taking care of me spent instead with men just passing through, looking for something to pass the time until they could return to their real lives.

I grew a little older each day, and by the time I turned four my grandparents had lost their patience with Mara. I hadn't yet come down for breakfast, but had taken the liberty of dressing all by myself; pink tutu falling down my bony hips, white lace socks staining with each step I took, and long, blonde hair still a tangled mess from sleeping. I knelt by the crack under my door and listened the best that I could. I remember that I was worried, that I could hear Mara crying, screaming.

"How can you be so selfish? Corie's still just a baby, we have nowhere to go" she said.

Somewhere, a door slammed. I didn't know it yet, but my grandfather, the original Corey, had just stormed out and into the backyard. He was demolishing the swingset he had built for Mara so long ago, the same one that I loved now.

"Selfish? We're the selfish ones? You don't give a damn about that kid, you never have. She can stay

here, it's you who has to leave."

"And what, abandon my daughter?"

"She's no more your daughter than you are mine. You don't love her. Just go, run off again. Leave her like you left us."

My mother was left speechless. Of course, everything my grandmother said was true. Mara had never cared about me, and she was the most selfish person I had ever met. The only reason I had been included in the conversation was Mara's desperate hope at invoking sympathy. As soon as the possibility that I stay and she leave presented itself, she knew she would have to take me just to spite them.

Mara pushed past my grandmother and started storming down the hallway toward my bedroom (by this point, I had completely inhabited her old room. For the few nights that she spent home, Mara had taken to sleeping in the basement. "More privacy," she said). I had enough common sense to jump onto my bed, pretend I hadn't heard. She opened my door with enough force to crack the plaster where it hit the wall. She didn't even look at me, instead began yanking drawers and closet doors open, throwing my things into a pile at the center of the room.

"Mommy, what are you doing?"

"Let's go, Corie. Get packing."

"But I don't want to leave."

She finally looked at me. She grabbed either side of my face and forced my eyes to hers.

"Pack your things. Now."

She stormed out of the room, left me crying in bed. My grandmother came in, tried to comfort me, promised that I wasn't going anywhere. They wouldn't let her take me away. She promised me.

Mara came back, the suitcase and duffel bag she was carrying knocking into the furniture, breaking picture frames and vases. Ruining their home. She saw the untouched pile of stuff on the floor and, rolling her eyes,

continued her rampage toward the kitchen. She grabbed a set of car keys and brought her stuff outside. I was safe. I thought I was safe.

My cries of terror and sadness over the whole situation covered the slam of the screen door at the front of the house, covered her footsteps. We only noticed her once she began to pack my things into a bag.

"Mara, honey, please calm down and take a minute to think about this, okay? We love having Corie here, she can stay here as long as you need her to, there's no real reason to take her wi-

"Come on, Corrie."

I was begging, pleading with her to let me stay, shrieking "no" over and over until her only thought was to make me stop. Mara wrenched me out of my grandmother's arms and onto my feet where I promptly collapsed. My pathetic little bag, stuffed with mis-matched socks, clothes long outgrown, and broken crayons took up one of her hands. The other tangled itself in my hair with a vice grip and began dragging me away from the only safety I had ever known. I could faintly hear my grandmother yelling "Corie," but whether that was for me or my grandfather, I'll never know.

We spent the day driving, not even stopping to rest for the night. Mara just wanted to get as far away from Williams as possible as quickly as possible. I was crumpled up in the backseat, clutching a little stuffed lion that had been gifted to me on my birthday two years prior. It was the only toy I had managed to grab in my mother's desperate escape.

Happy birthday to me.

We moved to the land of "Excelsior," to Broadway and opportunity, to the noises that never cease and the city that never sleeps. Surely, Mara could make it there.

Unfortunately for her, New York was much of the same. She'd be gone most nights, unwilling to find a job until we could no longer afford rent. The only difference, apart from the loca-



tion, was that I was now alone. I think we stayed there until I was nine, then on to Chicago until I was twelve. She drifted from place to place, city to city, dragging me along with her like a prisoner. There were times when she would be gone for days and I, ashamedly, hoped that she would stay gone. She would sometimes drink for days on end, starting one morning when she felt a little depressed and not stopping until something, or, more often, someone, came along to make her feel a little better for a while. There were days when everything got too much for her and she would snap and hit me, or haul me up and down hallways, flights of stairs, even pavement by my hair (when I was eleven I decided this had gone on for too long and, with a pair of safety-scissors I stolen from one of my classrooms, hacked away at my hair until it barely reached my neck. Not even that stopped her).

Around the time we left New York, my grandparents stopped contacting me altogether. I realized that the only person I could depend on to get me away from my mother was myself. So, I did. The night of my eighteenth birthday I took a duffel bag that I found in my mother's room and forcefully filled it with the few belongings I managed to acquire. Some clothes, a toothbrush, my stuffed lion from a lifetime ago, and all the money I had saved up from working when Mara was out on her "errands" that lasted for days, even weeks, on end; the years spent babysitting, waitressing, and administering movie tickets to people who, during the day, avoided me like the plague, finally paid off. I had saved close to thirty-two thousand dollars, concealed in an envelope that had a perpetual home in the bulky, inconspicuous sleeve of a winter jacket of mine. Thirty-two thousand dollars for myself, hidden from Mara's greed. Enough to pay for a car and the gas money to Arizona.

I was going to go back to my grandparents, back to my home. I had already applied and got accepted to Coconino Community College. Tuition was affordable. Even if it weren't, escaping my mother was priceless.

Of course, things never work out the way we plan. I did escape Mara; she didn't know where I had gone or why, and she now had no way to contact me. I did start going to college, the thirty mile commute more than worth this final uprooting of my life. And my grandmother did welcome me back; Corey had died six years earlier. Regardless, she was happy to have me stay with her. And for a few months, everything was fine. Until my grandmother started to get sick.

Lung cancer. It was terminal. Within two months, she had died.

I was left alone to make funeral arrangements, meaning I was the one tasked with the choice of inviting Mara or not. I didn't think that she knew about her father's passing, let alone her mother's. And, despite all the pain she had caused me, I knew I would have wanted to know if she died. So I sent a letter, hoping she had stayed at our previous address, or at least that the new tenants would forward her mail. There was no reply.

The day of the funeral was blistering, and I could feel myself melting in my black dress. The funeral conductor and I were the only ones there. The day was silent, not even a wind to interrupt the service. And then, Mara.

She came charging into the cemetery, yellow dress, red lips, bare feet. She was clearly under the influence of something, shrieking and toppling over, crying for her mother. A thirty-eight year old trying, and failing, to disguise herself as eighteen. She was pitiful and repulsive, breathtaking and unsightly.

I know I said that I hadn't spoken to her in over eight months, and to that day, it was true. But at the funeral, I just couldn't refrain.

"Leave," I said, walking over to her, trying to save both her and my image.

"I don't think so," she slurred, holding up a crumpled piece of paper, "I got invited. Personally. Personally invited to the party."

"Mara, leave. Now."

She stared at me, equal parts amused and confused.

"Mara? That's new."

"I don't want you here, I've never wanted you here. And you sure as hell wouldn't have been invited if I'd known that you would act like this," I said. I tried snatching the invitation out of her hands, but she held it out of my reach. A child, still, incapable of learning from her mistakes. Incapable of caring about anyone but herself.

"Is that meant to hurt me?"

"Leave."

"I don't think so, little one. You know, I can't understand why you've always hated me when I've done nothing but love you."

"You are selfish, and pathetic and-"

"Well it takes one to know one, doesn't it?" She was walking away, leaving again. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

She stopped, turned, retraced her steps until her breath invaded mine, making the stench of alcohol impossible to ignore.

"You and I," she whispered. "We're just the same."

I stared at her. Mara started to move away.

"No we're not," I called, causing her to look back at me. "If I were anything like you, I'd kill myself."

"Right," she said, walking away. She was nodding her head, already a million miles away.

I know I shouldn't have said it. I know I should've stopped her from getting in the car. But, just like when I was a child, a part of me was hoping she wouldn't return.

And she didn't.

# Annie Dillard's "A Writer In The World" and Trusting my Own Voice

Anna Osborne

RICHMOND, VA

I have tried to type something on Google Docs at least five times. Each time it's deleted by that lovely voice in my head: "That's shit, Anna. Complete shit." So bad that I will be dethroned from being the "Queen of the personal essay". But, I'm here still, writing. Not just for the deadline, but for Annie Dillard's "A Writer in the World", which I've just finished reading for a third time. This time, out loud with a blue pen, underlining, starring, writing, scratching out, and underlining again.

Annie Dillard is not one to shy away from anything. She writes freely about weasels, frogs, sharks, and shouting "Swedish meatballs!" at cows. She writes, and writes, and writes. There's no doubt that she's smart. But she scared me. She'd reel me in, leading me to underline quotes, annotate, and then have me lost again on the next page. I was susceptible to writing her off as "too much" or "too smart" for me. I'm not a Dillard thinker. I don't ponder frog guts the right way, if at all. I'm not mindful or transcendental. I literally sit with my head against pillows and walls, pleading with myself, "why, why, why?" about something I said 2 years ago, or what I will say in the future. I look up definitions of words at least three times to be sure I am right, sickened by the twisting of my stomach that I'm doing this in the first place. I cry when I scratch my mother's car not only because I scratched it, but that it will reaffirm my friends' supposed opinion that I am a stupid, white, privileged WASP. It is such a task for me to get up from my desk and close my eyes for six minutes, to bring myself into the present. To stop thinking that this person will hate me if they knew how pathetic I was.

Then, I read "A Writer in the World" and underlined eight ideas on the first page, starring, starring, starring. I thought, on the first page, "There it is. There's the epiphany. What I've been thinking for so long, unraveled." Finally, something we truly, definitively agree on. She writes: "Why do you never find anything written about that idiosyncratic thought you ad-

vert to, about your fascination with something no one else understands? Because it is up to you. There is something you find interesting, for a reason hard to explain because you have never written it on any page, there you begin" (Dillard 105).

Dillard says exactly what still draws me to writing. It's the power of the individual perspective and what it can bring. For years of my life, I have been afraid to acknowledge what I think and feel. I'd be spit out from the depths of a deep monster, threatening to kill me with thoughts of slashing myself in the shower, rage so deep I wanted to throw people at walls, searching online frantically for medicine so I would stop hyperventilating, only to collapse on my bed and read Vogue for hours. I was spit out on the shores of spring, shaking, angry, losing 14 pounds in 4 months to get my life "on track" from the chocolate peanut butter binges of winter. I was so afraid of my mind and its power I told no one the full story, until I collapsed crying in front of a jigsaw puzzle and a therapist was called. I had sheets and sheets of paper with my "idiosyncratic thoughts", the ideas "hard to explain", the lies of my brain, the obsessions I thought were "wrong" that I never showed this therapist. I could handle it myself. I stopped seeing her after four sessions. But I was wrong. I could not handle it myself sophomore year. I tried to cure myself by reading the words of others who had been in pain like mine. It worked, sometimes. But there was still that sinking realization that none of these people were me. I began to doubt myself more and more. I told myself I didn't have an illness.

Instead, I was defective. It took months before I could tell anyone I had a problem. I was terrified to ask for help face-to-face, so I sent an email to my guidance counselor. I wrote down those "idiosyncratic" thoughts, thoughts I told myself "no one else" understands, thoughts I had "never written before on any page" that I had showed to anyone. I got an email back with the address of a therapist. There, I began. I kept seeing this therapist. I kept seeing her when I fell deeper down junior year into a mental health crisis. Before I knew what was happening I withdrew like mad. I splashed water on my face between classes to lessen the stinging pink of my cheeks. I walked down the hallway with invisible hands around my throat and a

knot in my stomach, yellow-blond hair a blanket in front of my eyes.

But here's what was different: I was mad, awkward as hell, neurotic as hell, but I wrote like mad. I exploded into journals, notes, sometimes four times a day. I did what Dillard says to do: "Write as if you were dying. At the same time, assume you write for an audience solely consisting of terminal patients...What could you say to a dying person that would not enrage by its triviality?" (Dillard 106). These illnesses told me I would die before I even tried to die. I was breaking apart on the inside. The lack of sleep, the thoughts, the people, the expectations. It was life, but I was a "terminal patient" - sick, crippling, entirely unfit to face the world like a normal person. I was often "enraged" at myself and the people around me. My disorders, my illnesses, were nothing but "triviality". I was denied medicine the first time I asked. The reasons I gave were dismissed by "Every teenage girl has problems with their body", "Binge eating is much better than being on drugs", "You're very successful."

So, I wrote a 50 page book. About a girl like me, binge eating, depressed, and suicidal, with a massive personality crush/obsession on her teacher she sometimes thinks hates her. The majority of that book is exaggerated, but her thought patterns are not. They came from me. I actually wrote consistently, 500 words per day, but it was harder than I thought it would be. Writing isn't like breathing when it's a 50-page story about some of your deepest pain.

Annie Dillard agrees. "The most demanding part of living a lifetime as an artist is the strict discipline of forcing oneself to work steadfastly along the nerve of one's own most intimate sensitivity" (Dillard 106). I was given the opportunity to write a 50 page "novel" about anything I wanted. If I was going to write about a girl in this insane situation with a brain like mine, I had better do it right. I could hardly believe I was doing what I was doing, writing a story with a teacher I actually had a personality crush on. I blushed as I wrote my "own most intimate sensitivity". The binge scenes were hard to write. I had to comb through years of my past. I placed my head back to ninth grade, when I had no idea how to talk to my parents and spent hours

alone in my room.

But I did what I needed to do. I “forced myself” to finish this book with a “strict discipline”. I wrote about those violent thoughts that threatened me like a time bomb, about the teacher who wouldn’t leave my head, about the past that haunted me daily and threatened to consume me. It was, in some ways, cathartic. I was also able to see what would happen to a girl if she kept everything to herself. She would explode.

I reached my boiling point several times in the winter. I was put on medication and immediately taken off as soon as I had specific plans to commit suicide. They didn’t go away when the Lexapro was out of my system. My parents received endless phone calls from guidance counselors, therapists, and psychiatrists. I sometimes had days where I was positive it would be my last. I heard my own screams, saw my own blood.

But my illnesses affected my ability to communicate. I would be so embarrassed and scared about how people would react that I would wait to tell them weeks, or even months later, long after the specific urge was gone. I also doubted myself constantly, speaking mostly in ambivalence. I wasn’t even sure if I wanted to get better. My parents had no clue what to do with me. They thought any kind of hospitalization would disrupt my schooling. I was often desperate to go. I could barely concentrate in class, and I often had late notes from frequent shut-aways in the guidance counselor’s office. I missed school and called hotlines. My wrists felt “funny” all the time, as if they were bursting out of their skin, reminding me to slash them.

But I made it. After all of that, I’m here. I’m here for a number of reasons: I took my medicine every day, without fail. I did everything to get 8, or at least 7, hours of sleep. I dropped out of ITGS HL. I listened to music. I had supportive friends. I told myself I deserved life. I looked in the mirror and told my depression, “You’re lying.” I also talked about it. I did what Annie Dillard says to do: “Push it. Examine all things intensely and relentlessly...Do not leave it, do not course over it as if it were understood, but instead follow it down until you see it in the mystery of its own specificity and strength” (Dillard 144). I expressed my

emotions: from gratitude, to anger, to sadness, to shame, over months of therapy. I knew there were so many things, after what had happened, that weren’t “understood”. After six years of suffering and a grand explosion, I was finally on a path to true recovery. My illnesses were finally being treated as they deserved to be treated. It was hard. It’s still hard. I had moments where I felt everything and nothing at once, screaming in my car until my lungs were sore the next day. I was allowed to scream. I was allowed to cry. But I did not give up.

Reality became easier to bear. It’s a mystery, and I am often confused, but as I analyzed, as I talked, as I processed the specificity of the situations, I began to see my strength, and the strength of these situations in my life.

When I was in this pain I used to hate those sayings about needing the rain to make the rainbow. I don’t want anyone to suffer the pain that I did. But people do. And without it, I would be a very different person. I wouldn’t be as aware of myself, my emotions, and their consequences. I wouldn’t have the drive that I do to share my story and show others there is hope. But, I’m still me, and me is afraid. Afraid of what I’ve done, what will happen, etc. I’m afraid to reveal things, do things, fearing the thoughts of others. I was afraid to write this paper, but I wrote it. I was afraid to tell people I was sick, but I did it. I’m afraid to tell others my story, but I will do it. Annie Dillard also describes this importance of the human voice: “The impulse to keep to yourself what you’ve learned is not only shameful; it is destructive. Anything you do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to you. You open your safe and find ashes” (Dillard 115).

For years, I concealed what I “learned” out of shame. Whether it was the distorted perceptions my brain created, my ideas about life, or an answer to a question, I hid them out of fear of rejection and inadequacy. But because of my battles with mental illness and the pain they caused, I now realize how “destructive” it is to keep things hidden. It not only exacerbates symptoms, but it becomes harder and harder to become healthy again. I’ve undergone depression without support and did everything a distorted, cracked mind can do to become healthy again. But I had a really difficult time

because I spent months in such a state of isolation. I was not enthused by anything that formerly interested me, and every word that came out of my mouth came from a foreigner, an apparition. I “opened the safe” of who I was, and just found “ashes”, fragments of a person, of who I was, or who I was supposed to be. I’m learning, through my own writing, the writing of others, the passage of time, and that old, nagging, vicious voice in my head that I’ve learned to dull, the “That’s complete shit Anna” voice, to trust my own. The true voice. The one that got me help, the one that tells me to forgive myself and others, and the one that tells me life is a gift everyone deserves. Annie Dillard’s *A Writer in the World* was not there for me in the past. But it is there for me as a blueprint for the present and the future. In all of her essays, Dillard begs the reader to pay attention to what she’s learned. Not only that, but to pay attention because life matters. And so does the individual perspective and voice. All we have in life is ourselves. Each person deserves to see how important their voice is.



## The Single to the Dozen

Badriah Moussa  
POTTSTOWN, PA

A Bouquet of roses,  
can be

Admired from

Near,  
and

Admired from

Afar.

Without a single,  
No bouquet would be there.

But not a word of Praise  
is there  
given to a single.

For a dozen,  
Outshines the one

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Susquehanna University's **Writers Institute** provides students with the opportunity to receive nationally-recognized undergraduate training in all forms of creative writing through its **Creative Writing Major**. Students work closely in fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction with faculty who are the widely-published authors. Small workshops and one-on-one instruction are enriched by the following programs:

**The Visiting Writers Series:** Six writers visit campus each year (One of them for a week-long residency). Recent visitors have included, Kazim Ali, Honor Moore, Eula Biss, Lydia Davis, Nick Flynn, Lia Purpura, George Saunders, and Lauren Slater.

**The Susquehanna Review, Essay, and RiverCraft:** Three distinct magazines are edited and produced by students—a national

magazine featuring work from undergraduate writers from across the country, a nonfiction magazine, and a magazine of fiction and poetry from Susquehanna student writers.

**Endowed Writing Prizes and Scholarships:** Writing scholarships of \$5,000 per year are available to incoming Creative Writing majors based on the quality of their writing portfolios. Prizes of as much as \$1000 are awarded to students chosen each year on the basis of work published in our student magazines and in senior portfolios.

**Internships:** Susquehanna's Creative Writing Majors have had recent internships with national magazines, advertising agencies, professional writing organizations, nonprofit foundations, newspapers, public relations firms, radio stations, churches, businesses, and schools.

**Graduate Programs:** Creative Writing majors have received fellowships or assistantships to such outstanding graduate writing programs as Iowa, Columbia, Johns Hopkins, Indiana, Washington, Arizona, Massachusetts, Pittsburgh, Houston, Boston University, Ohio State, UNC - Greensboro, George Mason, Rutgers, and The New School.

The **Publishing and Editing major**, our partner program at the university, teaches students technological and practical job skills for working in print and digital media. Students are able to showcase what they learned by working on one of our four magazines.

If you would like to know more about any of the programs for high school students or receive information about the **Creative Writing major at Susquehanna**, see our website [www.susqu.edu/writers](http://www.susqu.edu/writers) or contact Dr. Glen Retief, Director, by e-mail at [retief@susqu.edu](mailto:retief@susqu.edu) or by telephone at 570-372-4035.