



ISSUE ONE

Non-Fiction

For Daniel

By Raymond So

On March 3rd, 2012, I shared a greasy, pepperoni pizza with my friend. To this day, I still remember opening the white cardboard box, the comforting steam brushing across our faces and leaving behind a stripe of dew. I still remember the silky cheese stretching and stretching until it could no longer resist the pull of our hungry fingers. I still remember the loving chuckle my friend gave me. True friends we were. Six days later, he would be gone.

Most stories start off with a happy “once upon a time,” but this one’s no fairytale. Sure, I used to think that there was a “once upon a time.” I used to believe that Peter Pan was real, that Alice did go to Wonderland, that Hakuna Matata was really a thing, but once again, that was all once upon a time. I would soon learn that life is no fantasy, that life is far from a Disney movie, that there’s no such thing as a happy ending.

On March 4th, 2012, I helped my friend with his Biology homework. I still remember question #3 which asked about enzymes and their functions. I still remember the puddle of ruby eraser shavings collecting at the corner of his desk. I still remember my friend’s tirade about his “low” grade of 94%. Five days later, he would be gone.

Most stories avoid repetition by having a variety of expressions, but not this one because, sometimes, no matter how hard we try to move on, all the nightmares keep replaying and replaying and replaying until we lose sight of the present. Sometimes, we can never find enough words to express how we feel.

On March 5th, 2012, I went bowling with my friend. I still remember falling onto the alley as I prepared to release the eight-pound ball. I still remember the three blisters I had on each of the segments of my index finger. I still remember my friend’s seven consecutive strikes and my five consecutive gutter balls. I still remember how much he beat me: 130 – 20. Four days later, he would be gone.

Most stories have a clear order with an introduction, conflict, and resolution, but not this one because, sometimes, our lives lose structure. Sometimes, our lives cease to be stories and become a mess of ideas and tragedies. Sometimes, our lives are only conflicts, the resolution nowhere to be found.

On March 6th, 2012, I ate dinner at my friend’s house. I still remember the pungent Brussel sprouts sinking into my plate. I still remember the tender, juicy pork chop that I used to cover those Brussel sprouts. I still remember his hungry dog pawing at my knees as I fed him the Brussel sprouts. I still remember my friend eating four plates of food. Three days later, he would be gone.

Most stories are long, but not this one because, sometimes, our lives end without the finishing page. Sometimes, all that our memories have to offer ends up short one. Sometimes, the author just cannot go on.

On March 7th, 2012, I played basketball with my friend at the park. I still remember my friend making the shot all the way from the other side of the court. I still remember climbing on top of his back, using his plushy head for high-fives. I still remember the trail of sweat we left behind as we walked off the court. Two days later, he would be gone.

Most stories are descriptive and colorful, but not this one because, sometimes, all the adjectives and adverbs in the world cannot replace the sorrow of reality. Sometimes, life is a movie from the 50s, just black and white, and trying to paint over it creates a smudge, and trying to erase the smudge creates a bigger one.

On March 8th, 2012, I went to the movies with my friend. I still remember spilling the buttered popcorn onto the lady sitting in front of us. I still remember how my phone rang during the quietest part of the movie. I still remember how many times my friend left to use the bathroom: four. One day later, he would be gone.

Most stories are logical, but not this one because, sometimes, things in life just happen without any reason. And the more we try to create explanations, the more we find ourselves trapped in the limbo of questions and answers, the more we find ourselves longing for an explanation for our own explanation.

On March 9th, 2012, my friend ended his own life. I still remember the shivering phone call I received from his mother. I still remember running as fast as I could, a mere block becoming a marathon, the red and blue lights paving my way. I still remember begging the officers to let me see him. I still remember his mom trying to comfort me when it was really she who needed comforting. I still remember seeing the pill bottle lying in the corner of his room. I still remember myself screaming, punching the pavement to somehow change the laws of the world so that I could bring him back. I still remember calling his father to tell him what had happened because his mother could not find the courage to do so. I still remember the ten seconds of silence before his father started to accuse me of lying. I still remember wishing that I were lying. I still remember my life falling apart right before my eyes.

Most stories go unheard, but not this one because for far too long, the muffled screams of a tormented teenager have remained silent. For far too long, his prayers have gone unanswered. For far too long, families have distressed and mourned. For far too long, friendships have been stolen by an unexpected departure.

Maybe there were signs. Maybe I was blind. Maybe we were all too consumed with our own lives to notice.

...

What if he told me? What if he trusted me? What if he told me and I just didn't hear? What if he knew that I was there for him? What if I could have stopped him? What if . . . what if?

Every day, I ask these questions to myself. Every day, I lie to my parents and say that I'm okay. Every day, I run to the shower and cry and cry and cry. Every day, I find myself staring at a picture of him. Every day, I replay all the things we did together in his last week. Every day, I find myself trapped in the past.

Sometimes, we have to accept that one plus one can equal one but that one minus one always equals zero. Sometimes, we have to accept that life is no picnic, that no matter how hard we try to hide behind fantasy, reality always finds its way to surface. Sometimes, we have to understand that once Death swings his scythe, we can never turn back time no matter how many tears we shed, no matter how many times we bloody our fists from pounding the floor, no matter how much we loved him.

Sometimes, we just have to bury our guilt . . .

Sometimes, we just have to accept . . .

Sometimes, we just have to heal . . .

Sometimes, we just have to move on . . .

Sometimes . . . sometimes . . . just for Daniel . . .

Raymond So is a high school junior at Archbishop Mitty High School. Currently seventeen years old, he explores his passion for writing, earning awards from Scholastic and multiple publications in literary journals.

Letters

By Stephen Duncanson

Everyone at the bakery was afraid of cancer. Even Hovan, who despite his bachelor's degree, insisted cancer was a pharmaceutical company construct. Brendan had cancer already, and breathed in deep floury lungfuls knowing it couldn't get worse. He even laughed at the letters; he looked happiest whenever a new one came. Ten years or so ago, he had gone into surgery, and come out half a lung lighter. None of the doctors could make heads or tails of the tumor they had ripped out, and so began the journey of Brendan's lung. Sent from lab to lab, we would get letters, from all the different labs, always the same thing: results inconclusive, forwarding your bio sample to such and such research station or university. I think Brendan started a stamp collection. I think he was a little jealous too, of the lung fragment. It got to travel across the country; he had to work 108 hours a week, all the while still breathing death.

It was the flour, or the powdered sugar, or the asbestos that had once insulated and now scared the bakery workers. We tried not to think about it. We turned the radio on and let mindless songs wash over us. We talked about the past or the present, never the future. We told each other and ourselves that we were fine. The letters kept coming in.

Brendan's father died, cancer. It was he who had opened the bakery sixty years ago, and after sixty years, it had killed him. I was working when we got the call. I was washing dishes, Brendan was putting chocolate frosting on an eight-inch marble, and the phone rang. It took a minute for me to realize something was wrong. The radio was on, the sink was sloshing. I turned to see the eight-inch marble cake fly across the room and crash into the oven. I was speechless, motionless. Brendan ripped the radio's cable from its socket, it flat-lined. He left.

I was washing chocolate frosting off the oven when the mail came in. More medical mail, the tumor had reached California, I wondered how long he had left. In the silent bakery, I wondered how long I had too.

Stephen Duncanson is sixteen and enjoys mountain biking, metafiction, essays, drinking black coffee and listening to audiobooks. Stephen lives in Stratford CT, a post-industrial and brownfield-laden suburb in southern Connecticut.

Why I Write

By Emily Stack

I switched schools going into the sixth grade, and I was so quiet that my homeroom teacher used to ask me at the end of every day, in front of everyone, if I had talked to anyone. She used to yell at me for reading in class, even though she taught English, and she thought she was funny even though the jokes she told were three years too young for us. She wore cardigans that were too small, and her smile was thin and unpleasant. Her intrusion into my life was unwelcome, and every time she asked me this question, I would answer yes, even when it wasn't the case.

My quietness wasn't lonely. I had things that kept me busy and friends back home. I liked my silence and my ability to blend in unnoticed, and I had no desire to leave my place on the outskirts of attention. Yet my teacher's comments created an unnecessary self-consciousness that made me hotly tear up whenever someone asked me a question that I didn't know the answer to.

So in order to avoid these questions and the subsequent embarrassment, and despite my teacher's complaints and concerns, I read. I took out dozens of books from the library, and I would sit in the back of the class. Knees together, toes pointed to keep my lap flat, back hunched to see the print, I would melt away into the story of the day. I don't remember what kinds of books I read in sixth grade. All I remember is that I read them with a kind of desperation. I wanted to envelop myself in the pages. I would steal glances at paragraphs whenever the teacher lectured, and when we were given worksheets to complete, I scribbled through them and carried on with my book.

I wasn't a writer. I was a reader. I went through hundreds of books with all kinds of storylines and characters and thematic concerns, and most days, I didn't talk to anyone. I explored sunken ships and fell in love and walked along deserted highways with people I met at bus stops. I had my first job at a boutique store, whispered with my best friends, and acted strong when confronted with the things that scared me. Like dark places and tight corners and people I didn't know if I could trust. I witnessed more things than most, and I did it all without having a single conversation.

As I read through the library, the stories got more similar. The character's voices blurred together and I started rechecking out books, forgetting that I already knew their endings. I got plots confused and scenery mixed up, and it began to feel more like a chore and less like an escape. I read and read and read, and then I got tired of reading.

It was no longer enough for me. I felt claustrophobic, surrounded by the pages that I had buried myself in. I felt bored. I felt boring. I wanted to be like the characters I read about, with their cool, strong voices, and I wanted to be able to talk without crying or stuttering or searching for words that were strewn around the inaccessible parts of my head.

So I started to pretend that my voice was purposeful, like some author had edited out the ramblings and hesitations. I would pretend that I wasn't shy. I would pretend that I had something to say and that that something was imperative to all the plots of all the characters around me. Like the dialogues I had read with fervor, I began to speak concisely and deliberately. And with the voices of

thousands of characters and authors alongside me, I put my books down and sacrificed my reading time in order to be present in my own story.

~

I didn't start writing until college, until it became clear that my story was going to once again be filled with silence. My quietness was swallowing me up as I made this big change, moving states and schools, even though I had worked so hard throughout middle and high school to get rid of my nagging shyness.

It returned as I was confronted with unfamiliarity.

I entered my dorm, and was overwhelmed when girls started asking me questions. I knew the answers, but I couldn't seem to grasp them as they swam around my head. I didn't cry, but as I was pushed into groups of people, I couldn't contribute. When I would finally think of something to say, I would hesitate with my thought for just one second too long, and the moment would pass. My comment would become delayed and out-of-place, so I never made it.

It didn't take me too long to figure out that I only talk when I'm accustomed to the situations that I am in. I seem to only find my voice when I know the voices around me and when I'm able to assess how my speech fits in.

So at college, I fell into silence.

I couldn't turn to books, because this time, I was aware of my tendency to be content with reading and not participating. I knew that if I let myself curl up in corners and hunch over in chairs, I would fall into book after book, never once emerging to talk to anyone. And I knew that if I did that, I would get bored of the books and myself, quicker than it had happened the last time.

So I turned to writing. I started off with journal entries that transcribed my day and my feelings. I took a brief detour with poems before I realized that my scattered voice was not going to be lyrical. Next, I wrote detailed descriptions of the new situations that I was in. At this point, writing became my way of assessing my surroundings and putting myself into stories before I had to assert myself by talking. I was able to organize my thoughts and strengthen my voice by myself, with as many stutterings along the way as necessary.

I recorded my voice and searched through it until I found the parts I liked. I practiced my speech and kept hold of the character that I had created for myself from the sixth grade onwards.

And on paper, my distinct personality began to come through. Unlike reading in the sixth grade, writing was a way to participate in my own story without overwhelming myself with the loudness of it all. My comments are never delayed. There's no pressure to be memorable. I can take my time becoming comfortable in new situations, and I can explore my own train of thought without the stare of people who I don't yet understand. I can put my story down on paper before I have to act it out.

Emily is a sophomore at the University of Michigan, where she is studying Economics, Mathematics, and Writing. Originally from Boston, she roots for all New England teams and hopes to work in the sport business industry.

Poetry

Fifteen Months

By Kate Bishop

What a beautiful thing
it was to have loved
the light in you.
It was a kaleidoscopic
tempest: crystalline fragments
of shattered glass
breaking against the hardwood floor
in a crescendo of
iridescence.
The remnants
of opals left to
glimmer unassumingly
on top of clovers in the
early morning are nothing more
than its distorted reflection
in a river during the rain.

If there was ever
an equivalent
to watching you wilt,
it is the incessant
torture
of your cold hands seizing
everything I want to say
and rearranging my words
into your name.

I'm only here because
you preferred oblivion.
My throat hasn't stopped hurting
for fifteen months,
six letters scratching it raw
whenever I even
think of them.

Kate Bishop is currently a freshman at The University of Michigan, originally from Leland, MI. She has a passion for art in all its forms, especially poetry, photography, and the acoustic guitar.

Friday, Shere Khan's Melody

By Nikita Bastin

When the beast of Seconee jungle wakes, he is convinced that his day will be as musical as the ripples of Wainganga River by the wood. But by afternoon, he hears only skeletons of cotton trees clatter to the ground, and the cold whistle of the water and its winds disturb him. So he lays supine on the silvery-white rocks, his lips as lifeless as the rotten banana leaves, his eyes as dull as the backs of the inky beetles. He watches the glassy reflection of the sun and remembers the canary yellow fire that chased him on Monday. The day started well: he pounced on the spiny legs of an elk, feasted on its meat, red as a cocoa pod, dragged his long nails through the wildflowers, and listened to the Bandar monkeys trembling at his voice. But then Mowgli reduced the king of the jungle to a loud, loud scream that was lost in translation. Today, he is the haunted. The jungle is blind with music, it drowns, stumbles through the finite air. Shere Khan listens in a stupor, the ghosts of the thrums are too much with him. How does Baloo live in harmony with the vultures, the water buffalo, the golden jackals? Does he ever want to tear through the eucalyptus and stalk the deer, fat and pink and sweet in places? It would be only natural. Shere Khan wants someone to bring him

the angelfish gliding through the river, he will not hunt today.
Sometimes, the splashes of the smallest hearts flying away pierce
the stitches of his careful grin. He thinks maybe he'll yank out
the ferns and their ferine light from his arch, the golden face
adorning the curve once again commanding the heady vines.
Maybe Kaa will emerge with his wide, too wide green eyes.
He sees a figure with a pale mouth far off in the fog,
hears its stunted breaths, hushed and tuneless.
But no voice, no warmth, no thrum, no song will stir him.
He can do without the fear, the jungle can do without a king, worn
in his own pain and the pain of those around him.
He rises for six short seconds and moves to lay beside the black rocks.
Now, he will not be disturbed.

Nikita Bastin is a junior at Saint Francis High School who enjoys editing for her school's newspaper and literary magazine, blogging, and tutoring in her community. She is a recipient of a Silver Key in the Scholastic Writing Awards. You can find her at nikitabastin.com.

Timber

By Emily Dorffer

The wooden corpse of the ancient oak
lay sprawled across the sunlight dappled clearing.
Its exposed roots clung to clods of soil that crumbled away
as armies of termites marched through the rotting wood.

After decades spent sheltering squirrels and cradling bird nests
with its leaf-laden boughs spread wide in welcome
the tree's barren fingers stretched parallel to the ground
to console the flowers surrounding its grave.

The tree could no longer feel the worms beneath it
as they tunneled through the dirt
nor could it groan as colonies of termites
bored through its flesh, devouring all in their wake.

The oak's trunk served as a coffin
for the decomposing layers of cellulose
within its suit of bark; its inner rings
married its rotting cadaver to the earth.

The oak's acorn born offspring continued to thrive
as they dug deeper into the compost on the forest floor,
unaware of the banquet's newest addition
of their fallen father, now fertilizer.

Emily Dorffer is a current sophomore at Johns Hopkins University. She has previously had a short story published in *Breath & Shadow*.

At the Cedar Lee Theater

By Annie Ertle

How important and how conscious and how good we feel
When we crowd into the small independent theater and we settle next
To groups of diverse strangers in head scarves with NPR tote bags
And we watch the documentary that details
The horror of Women That Are Not Us.

We gasp and we cluck at the appropriate moments.
We “thank God that doesn’t happen here”
And we wonder what we can do to help
In between fistfuls of popcorn that leave our hands greasy,
Our tongues thirsting for the Diet Coke they paraded around in the ads.

We fantasize about fundraisers and we hash tag the tweets and for
The next twenty-four hours we lie in bed staring at the ceiling,
Prophesizing about what would have happened if that had been us,
Not them, and we feel guilty until the weight of our down comforters
Hug us to sleep and we are calm and we are safe and we are okay.

Then the details of our lives overtake us and oh god the grocery
List is so long and the laundry piles up and the assignments are
Coming due and the house is a mess and when did life get so hard?

I remember there are two types of people in this world, and I’m lucky
Because I get to be the spectator and not the subject,
The person who pays the \$10.50 admission, a temporary redemption.

The women documented in the movie stood up to the Taliban
And I was too afraid to ask the people sitting beside me in the neat row
If they could just scoot so I could slip by and get a head start
On living this normal life that I, for whatever reason, have won.

The advertising posters begin to peel and are torn down until
Next week, when new movies are released and new injustices recounted.

Annie Ertle is a junior at John Carroll University. She is studying Communications and English.

More Than a Wave

By Jenna Kurtzweil

Blue is the color of music.

The cool feel of ivory keys and the nimbleness of practiced fingers as they dance across guitar strings.

The perfect fluidity of a drummer who feels rather than hears the light, tinny whisper of wood on metal and whose limbs exist independently in harmony, moving separately as one.

Blue is the color of
a jazz musician

who sways to and fro like waves in a lazy ocean or
stubborn boughs of tall trees that playful gusts of wind persuade to dance.

Blue is the color of
contentment;

sitting inside on a rainy day and hearing the irregular beating of water on the roof coupled with
muffled

slaps of feet on wet pavement far below.

Blue is the color of parting words and forgotten covenants-
the color of makeup that cascades down the faces of the broken.

Blue is the color that fills up empty spaces
and conceives the purest form of mystery.

Blue is depth, possibility, relief.

When the clock strikes midnight, the world becomes a deep blue, and everything is completely still.

Blue is the Witching Hour

laced with power

when fantasy becomes commonplace and the world is left to the imagination of the dreamers, who
alter

it on the whims of their fancy and orchestrate it to the symphonies of the mind's eye.

Blue is the color of the ones who exist where they shouldn't and live in the brief moments between
today and tomorrow.

Along with her responsibilities as a student, Jenna is always looking for new opportunities to
experience life through travel, literature, music, and all forms of storytelling.

Tracklete

By Remardo Wilson

Sprinting, hurdling, and jumping is all I know. When it comes down to it there's no time to think just do it and believe. There is no room for doubt only room for winning. Don't be too cocky there's always someone better but that's a good thing. Without competition there would be no way or reason to improve. So when you lose, improving is what you will do. When you're on the line bow your head and breathe slowly, don't be too anxious just relax and listen. When the gun goes off you drive out as hard as you can and slowly raise your body. You feed off the crowd's energy. Based off their reaction you know when someone is gaining on you. So you reach deep down inside and find that last burst of energy. You speed up and not only extend your lead you achieve your personal best. You can't jump over hurdles you run over them. Always lean forward and bring your legs as close to your stomach as possible and whip your leg back down digging in to the ground. Don't think or worry about falling but if you do get back up and finish the race. You walk away from the white line measuring your steps to prepare a close to perfect take off. You sprint towards the pit and leap off one leg swinging your arms forward pushing yourself further. You land in the sand with your legs in front of you. They measure your leap and it's the furthest you've jumped yet. Winning is the best feeling but losing benefits you more. It's all a part of being a tracklete.

Remardo E. Wilson Jr. is a young student-athlete from the far South Side of Chicago who graduated from Simeon Career Academy and participated in boys Track & Field. After graduating his senior year Remardo then participated in the 2015 USATF Junior Olympics, and has a goal to participate in the USA Olympics one day.

Lucid Dreamer

By Jacob Lindell

Spiral bound secrets,
words drenched in ink;
black and white mementos,
wash over me while I think.

Eyes moving rapidly,
on the hunt for inspiration;
painstakingly irritated,
overcome by exasperation.

A mosaic of memory,
eyes grow heavy, body unwinds;
as I dip into my dreamland,
you won't believe the things I find.

Miles of imagination,
past memories left behind;
so I pick up my pen and paper,
and write whatever comes to mind.

Jacob Lindell is an eighteen-year-old aspiring artist, whose greatest creation is who he's yet to become; still a work in progress.

Subway

By Natalia Ratner

Subway

Subway: Lily Ferudi

Sitting in a subway,

surrounded by many people: different colors, different clothes,
but never have I felt so alone,

I dare to look,

only to see the tops of heads,

everyone is hiding,

behind newspapers, behind books,

even sleeping to avoid looking or being seen,

I think to myself;

When did eyes become something to fear?

Natalia is an eighth grader from New Jersey. She enjoys fashion, Math, Science, and dancing.

Fiction

Paralysis

By Deborah Rocheleau

As she tumbles down the jagged mountainside, I see her bend in extraordinary ways. A rent arm here, a dislocated clavicle there. I look down at the path where moments before she had stood beside me, then at the willowy pine that stops her fall. It shudders on impact, scattering snow from its quills in a circle around the trunk and over her body.

She doesn't move.

"Claudia!" I hop over the railing, feet sliding on the snowy incline. I take my precious time in choosing my steps, though the darkening sky presses upon every moment. Hurry, don't hurry. Hurry.

I slide down beside her, using a nearby tree for support.

"Claudia, what happened?"

She is curled fetal around the trunk, one arm stretched out, a snow angel's broken wing. Her gloves were torn off in the fall. The fresh sprinkled snow lays white over that below, like blood over old scars. When I touch her swelling face, a scraped eyelid lifts.

"Stop yelling," she says. "I've got a splitting headache."

It strikes me in the silence that follows that she used "splitting" for my benefit, a verbal tic plucked straight from an Austen novel. Humor by juxtaposition. It strikes me, also, that she hasn't moved anything below her collarbone.

"Wriggle your toes," I say.

"Adam." She gives me a look, the one she uses on her freshmen students in her lectures on logic. I liked to sit in the back sometimes and watch the students squirm, reveling in the knowledge I would never face her professorial gaze.

Perhaps I spoke too soon.

"Wriggle your fingers." I stroke her hand, probing the frozen bones.

"I can't." She is quiet a moment, motionless. Though really, who knows what kind of exertion is going on under the surface? She could be dancing a jig in her mind, or ramming my nose in, everything registering on the synaptic level. But paralysis has found a way to silence her as my arguments never could.

"Adam, I have class on Monday."

“Don’t move.” I press her fingers between my palms, hold them avalanche-still. “Don’t try to move. Moving will just hurt you more.”

I don’t tell her it could be worse. I don’t say, as I increasingly fear, she may never move again. What was that she called it? Jumping to conclusions.

Besides, who am I to say she won’t recover? What do I know of anatomy, medicine, mountain climbing, power of will?

The angles of her limbs appall me.

Her fingers tense around my hand when I reach for my pocket, the muscles constricting in confused knots as they strain over their injuries.

“I think I need to call somebody,” I say, taking my phone out.

“You think?”

I ignore her, glancing at my phone. No bars. Of course. You chose the most remote mountain in the U.S. for your vacation, ergo... “Listen. I’m going to have to climb back up to the path to make the call.”

I pat her hand, but she doesn’t let go.

“How long?” she asks, though not casually. As if her life depends on it. I remember finding her last week—only last week?—after her talk with the dean. He’d talked with me too, all but begged me to take her away for a weekend, a month, a semester. When I’d asked what was wrong, he’d brushed it away, though he’d explained in no uncertain terms she was “in danger of losing her position.” Stronger wills than mine might have pressed further. I had a different strong will to deal with.

I entered her office, feeling the part of a trespasser. She lay buried behind a white Everest of papers, red hair unraveling from her neat bun. She’d glanced up when I opened the door, her face like a photo whose development is interrupted by a shred of light. Premature. Stunted. Half-formed.

The air was supposed to do her good.

I let go of her hand, turned my back on her.

“Hurry,” she calls as I pick my way up the delicate slope. Instead, I choose each step more carefully, not wanting to join her in her fate. Hurry, don’t hurry. Hurry. Don’t.

The sunlight is fading by the time I return down the mountain, shadows slipping underfoot. I blunder around in the darkness, sure and yet not so sure I am coming down the same mountain. There are ways to tell which way is north, what time of day it is. There is moss, growing on one side or the other of a tree, the sun off-center of its apex. But how does one, when confronted by wilderness, locate an injured lover?

“Claudia?” I yell. No answer. She could at least answer, let me know where she is. Even a paralytic could do that.

There is the tree, crooked against the sunset. I don’t need her help after all. There is her face, cheek down in the snow, her arm (and every other part of her) unmoved.

“Claudia.” Underneath my hand, she stirs, eyelids fluttering open.

“Did you call them?”

“Yes. You’re still alright.” My words don’t curve at the end as they ought to, to form a question. Perhaps because I know the answer. She’s worsening; even I feel certain saying that, her eyebrows bulging. Lips blue, and not just from the cold.

“Adam, how did I fall?”

I stoop down, trying to peel some of the frozen hair off her face.

“You don’t remember?”

“I remember standing on the edge. Looking for something.”

We’d come here for a couple’s retreat. I’d planned it, knowing how much she hated spontaneous trips. She’d told me so on several occasions. And each time I’d plucked her from her lecture stool, thrown her over my shoulder and carried her off anyway. She needed to get out of that office, away from the school email.

She’d outwitted even me, though, with this mountain escapade. Dragged me out in the swirling snow that ought to be ambience, not experience. We packed for a spa, not a hike out in air so frostbitten it hallucinated the Milky Way. On a clear night, you could see Venus. We hadn’t come all this way to see stars, though.

“What were you looking for?” I ask.

“I—I don’t remember.” She manages to pull her hand from under her. Touching it to her head, she feels for the first time the gash, too frozen now to bleed. “Why aren’t they here, Adam?”

The medic on the phone had said forty minutes. It’s been fifty-two.

“We’re pretty high up,” I say. “There’s not a building in sight. It could be hours.”

“There’s a cabin over there.”

“What? Where?”

She tries to point toward the darkening east. Needle quill trees point out from the ashen landscape, stitching the patchy horizon back to the sky.

“It’s there, somewhere. I saw it.”

I nod my head, give her my most convincing believer face. If she says there's a cabin, there is one. Let the logicians figure that one out.

"It hurts." Her face lies half smashed against the snow, half taut with pain. Unbalanced, like a stroke victim's. "What am I supposed to do for hours?"

"Try singing." I say.

"Adam..."

Though I can't see her face through the dark, nor feel it move below my hand, I know she's glaring. We have an unspoken code. Not body language, exactly. Someone looking from the outside might think nothing had happened. It's a look over steamed coffee, eye contact during a lecture. I'd glance at her, make her pause in her lecturing. By the end she'd be glowing, even if nobody else noticed. So much of a person seems paralyzed, until you know them.

"You have a pretty voice," I say. I hear nothing, feel nothing, and that nothing tells me so much. We haven't had a moment like this in months, and sitting here, I think, perhaps this is good for us, freezing our extremities off, too numb to let words or movement get in the way of what we have to say. I know by her silence she feels it, too.

Or maybe that's just paralysis.

I hear something: a sob, a sniff, a leaky bagpipe. Bending down, I almost miss her trying, trying to sing with what air she has.

"Just hear those sleigh bells ring-a-ling, ting-ting-tingling too." She grows louder, more confident. "Come on it's lovely weather for a sleigh ride together with you. Giddy-up, giddy-up, giddy-up let's go. Hmm, Hmm, Hmm." She hums out the rest. She couldn't keep a song in her head if her life depended on it. I shiver with the morbid thought that, in this instance, it just might.

"Adam," I hear the exhaustion in her voice. "Do you love me?"

"Of course I do."

"Then why did you let me fall?"

"What?" I laugh. She's always had a twisted sense of humor. Half her students come out of her lectures appalled, the other half ready to report her to the dean. It's happened more than once. She can always reason her way out, though. Come up with an excuse. She knows the ethical codes, backward and forward. Knows the fault lines. Knows the weak points.

Maybe that was my first hint of something off.

"You let me step up on the rail," she says. "You let me lean forward."

"I tried to stop you."

“You didn’t even help me.”

“I tried to steady you. I put my hand on your back.”

“And pushed.” The words hang, muffled by snow. Then, she laughs, delayed like she’s missed her own punch line. “Oh, what am I saying? I must’ve hit my head harder than I thought.”

I stare at her, shivering in the harsh wind like a needle on the verge of falling from the tree. I’d read the public announcement poster in the lodge, the ones about the dangers of mountain climbing. People could lose themselves up here, mental processes deteriorating till they don’t even know they’re dying. So how come I feel like I’m seeing her clearly for the first time?

There is no cabin. There isn’t even a logician here. Just a scared college professor and her bendable mind. And the man who can do nothing to help her.

“Adam?” She reaches for my face, pawing my chin. “It’s so cold.”

“Take my jacket.” I take it off and fling it over her. The wind creeps up my back, stinging like shackles where it touches my exposed skin, my wrists, my neck.

“But now you’ll be cold,” she says.

“You wanted my jacket.” I slam my frozen knuckles against the ground, and they bleed. “So there. Now you have it. What more do you want from me?”

“I want this to be over,” she cries. “It was never this cold before.” She lets out a little chuckle, dislocated, like her hip. “I used to want to live here, in the cabin. It was so fun on vacation in the summer. I guess I thought it would always be that way. But now, it’s just so cold. It’s too cold.”

I reach for my pocket self-consciously, feeling for the ring, then remember Claudia has my jacket. Fear paralyzes me—no other word will suffice—until I see her eyes close, hear her breathing settle. I relax; wait until she slumps against the snow, face no longer twitching, eyes no longer roaming side to side with dreams. When she is motionless, I reach my hand into the propped open pocket, careful not to disturb her. I feel the ring in my fingers, but as I pull out my hand, it slips and falls. I bend down, stomping my hands full force into the snow, though my skin’s already numb with cold. I can’t risk missing it, must find it, come frostbite and all else that follows.

It is gone.

Her breathing grows labored again, seeming loud against the muffled air. I put a hand on her side, but she doesn’t move.

“Claudia,” I whisper. “Claudia.”

“It’s cold,” she murmurs, and freezes.

“Claudia!” The wind rises, a flutter-flutter like a sickly heartbeat. The trees to either side of us bow low, and a dark spot challenges the moon. A helicopter’s floodlights trail us as it soars overhead, stays locked on our location as the aircraft lands on the path further up.

“Too late,” I rock back, wiping the melting snow from my forehead. Of course they’ve come now. Just my luck. Of course they’ve come just after the critical moment has passed.

A paramedic comes down the slope, rushing toward Claudia.

“You’re too late,” I intercept him. He shoves me out of the way with his medical pack, casts me aside like some rancid tumor residue. I charge after him, but another medic catches my arm, leads me up to the helicopter.

They give me a blanket, take my temperature, like I’m the one on the verge of a breakdown. Stop wasting your time, man. She’s the paralytic.

Hurry, don’t hurry. Hurry.

Claudia follows shortly, carried in on a stretcher. I try in vain to decipher the medical jargon the paramedics swap before the helicopter takes off. I can hear nothing after.

We rise off the mountainside, wind from the rotors and mountain air blasting my face. Looking out the open door, think I spy a cabin for one second in the shifting evergreens. Just a tiny thing, humble and hiding. I lean out of the copter, trying to get another look, but the paramedic snaps me back. No use, anyway. My chance of seeing it again is as slim as finding a ring in a mountain of snow.

Deborah Rocheleau is an English major, Chinese minor, and all-around language fanatic. Her writing has been published by Tin House, 100 Word Story, Flights, and the Boston Literary Magazine, among others.

Bad Dream

By Patrick McDonald

Setting:

Sandman's cramped and messy office

Characters:

Dave

Sandman

Scene fades in with SANDMAN in his office. SANDMAN is clicking furiously on a video/dream editing software, while admiring his many Oscar dream awards sitting on the ledge above. DAVE enters room by throwing the door open. SANDMAN quickly turns around.

Dave: Hey, Sandman! Can you explain what the hell just happen?

Sandman: Oh! Morning, Dave! You're up.. (looks at watch) rather early.

Dave: Oh? So you're surprised?

Sandman: Well, yes. I thought the dream I produced last night for you was awfully interesting. Rather abstract too. I spend a lot of time on it in post-dream production.

Dave: It was awful! Worse than a nightmare! What the hell man?! Why did you haunt me with that garbage?

SANDMAN pulls out a huge list titled "Dream schedule."

Sandman: I'm confused here, Dave. Last night was supposed to be an adventurous narrative, along with a teeny bit of romance and gore. You're not scheduled to have a nightmare until..

SANDMAN points at list and shows DAVE. DAVE looks closer at the date.

Sandman: Next Wednesday! That should be one to keep you up all night! Involves a lot of clowns. I really put a lot of time in the camera angles and mo-

Dave: It doesn't matter what the dream was about! People don't really remember dreams when they wake up, you know.

Sandman: It sure is a tough job in the dream film department...

Dave: It's that girl, Sandman! Why the hell is she in every single dream?

Sandman: Oh? The girl named Isabelle? She was barely in it. Just a small cameo.

Dave: It doesn't matter what she did, she was still in it! And she's been in practically every dream I've had for a month.

Sandman: Well sometimes you have to put in things to appeal to the audience.

Dave: I'm your only audience! And I'm telling you now I hate it!

Sandman: Not according to your subconscious. That guy is requesting her in every production. Especially last month.

Dave: Well, can you cut it out? You know subconscious always comes up with the stupidest ideas.

Sandman: Say... What's your deal with this person in particular?

Dave: Nothing! She's just out of place. It's stupid.

Sandman: Last night's dream production was about a giraffe teaching trigonometry to an amoeba. She did nothing but stand in the back of the classroom and was in the dream for about four seconds. I'm calling bullshit on this one, Dave. Something is up with her.

Dave: She's just a problem and nothing more.

Sandman: Spit it out, Dave. Or I'll boost up the amount of nightmares you'll have next week so that you'll become an insomniac.

DAVE wanders around room for a bit and avoids eye contact with SANDMAN, and SANDMAN leans forward.

Dave: She was my girlfriend.

Sandman: You have a girlfriend?! Why didn't you tell me? No wonder that's all your subconscious wanted. I've never made so many romantic dreams in my life, and why the hell is she just a cameo?! She should be starring in them wi-

Dave: Was my girlfriend, Sandman. I'm using past tense. And don't make a big deal out of it.

Sandman: What happened? I want to hear your story of heartbreak and woe. It's for inspirational purposes.

Dave: Sandman...

Sandman: Was it a bad break up? One with harsh words? The rivalry of two old lovers?

Dave: Sandman...

Sandman: Did she move away? Get drafted for "the war"? Did the separation and lack of letters in the mail break your heart? Was it because she lost her arms?

Dave: Sandman...

Sandman: Did you two have a fight? Not perhaps with words, but with violence? Boxing? Karate? The violent, action-packed dreams always turn out to be more popular than the artsy and serious dreams.

Dave: Sandman! It's not that big of a deal! This is so tacky! Just get rid of her in my dreams, dammit!

Sandman: So it was a bad break up... Okay...

SANDMAN writes in notebook "The Bad Breakup" and begins to write a script of a brand new dream.

Dave: No! No. No. No... It... Wasn't at all as a matter of fact.

Sandman: Then none of this adds up, bud.

Dave: It's... not that important to know.

Sandman: Then she'll be in every single dream, and she won't have arms and be an expert at kick boxing. Boom. We got a screenplay.

Dave: Fine, fine, fine, dammit! I'll tell you! But can you promise me that you'll take her out of my dreams? For good?

Sandman: Tell me your narrative story built by overwhelmed emotions and sadness..

Dave: Okay, so I met her at a bookstore, and we talked about our favorite novels, movies, and other things just out of that small interaction. We started as strangers, then friends, then best friends, and soon we were... A couple.

SANDMAN is writing in notebook while DAVE is turned away. As soon as DAVE turns to SANDMAN, SANDMAN hides notebook behind and smiles.

Dave: Everything was going great, you know? Seemed like we were flawless together. Then one day, she just told me she was no longer interested in me. No no, she told me she was "bored". But she then came up and said she wasn't in the right place in her mind for any relationship with anyone. I felt bad, but not as bad as when I saw her with a brand new guy slung around her a five days later.

Sandman: That's rough, buddy.

Dave: I mean, I don't really care about it anymore. Just want to forget that she existed. That's why I'm pissed she's still in my dreams. She doesn't have to be doing anything, she just has to be there. Just her being there makes it tougher to forget.

Sandman: Well. If that's your true request from me, I will make sure she doesn't appear in your dreams again. Thanks for letting me know, Dave.

Dave: Thanks, Mr. Sandman. It was making things tougher, but also creeping the shit out of me that she was still haunting my life.

Sandman: Creepy?

Dave: Yeah. You know. Kind of weird how she's still a weird part of my life when she left. It's uncomfortable.

Sandman: Interesting.

Dave: What?

Sandman: Oh! Nothing, Dave. Don't worry a bit. I'll take her out and ignore your subconscious. She won't bother you anymore.

Dave: Thanks! Talk to you later!

DAVE walks out of room, and SANDMAN turns back to his desk. SANDMAN begins to giggle, and scribble furiously in his notebook.

Sandman: Change in the script. Instead of clowns in Wednesday's nightmare, it's going to be a clown Isabelle! He's never going to see this coming, and it's going to scare the skin off of him! This is my best idea yet!

Fade out

Patrick is a normal kid who enjoys camping, boxing, cooking, making videos, and all types of humor.

We Laughed For Some Reason

By Nisha Klein

It is me and Maria and Susan. Susan's mother called last night and my mother answered, and then, in the morning, I got in the car and was dropped off at Susan's house, and then driven into the city.

We are skipping down the street, and it is sunny and bright and crowded, but we don't mind. Susan's mother said to meet her in front of the store on the corner, so we are marching there, so she won't get worried like last time. And Susan grasps my arm tightly so I won't get lost, because I get lost a lot, and Maria strays behind us, but close enough that we can feel her. And Susan is pointing in windows, shouting I want that, and that, and that, and that, and that. But we all know it is only a wish, because we know Susan's mother can't afford that. And so we keep walking. And I see things—clothes, toys—that I want, but I don't want to say anything because I know that my mother can't afford them either. And then my stomach knots up and I feel awkward and weird, embarrassed that I can't have more, though none of us has enough money and Maria is wearing her shoes from last fall again.

And by then our ice cream is gone and we are kids, only nine years old, and free in a big city, alone but not at all scared, and we want to just cheer and dash away, but we are trying to be big kids, to be older, like Susan's older sister. And Maria taps my shoulder. What are you thinking about? ... Oh, nothing. I'm just tired.... You're not sleeping again?... No.

It's then that we see him, and we stop where we are. Crouching on the curb, dressed in rips, and hugging the top flap of a cardboard box. He stumbles towards us, his hands cupped, eyes empty, pockets empty. Do you have any money?

Susan shakes her head. No. Sorry.

Please, the man begs. I've got a family. Please. Anything.

No. We don't have anything. I'm sorry.

Please, I have two children. Please, we haven't eaten in three days. Please. Please.

He's big but small, crumpled and curled up. I clutch Maria's arm, and he's so close, so close he can hear the blood pounding in my ears, my head screaming, telling me to run away. I bet he can hear all that. And my heart is pounding, pounding, pounding, and the man is so broken, so ruined, shattered like a pane of glass. And his gaze shifts to meet mine, and I can see it in his eyes, that despair and grief, and I'm sure he can see fear in mine, so I just look back at my shoes, my ripped and ugly shoes, the ones I cried about, a couple weeks ago, screaming that I wanted new ones. The ones I slammed the bathroom door about, and screamed I hate you at my mother because she wouldn't take me shopping. And I can hear it in his voice when he asks again, asks if we have anything, anything at all, and his desperation makes me tremble.

Susan shakes her head, I'm really sorry, but we really don't have anything. When she says this, his shoulders drop, arms fall to his side, and his head drops, drops down, almost touching his chest. And we all want to give him something, but we have nothing, so we keep walking, quickly though, as if

being chased, chased by our guilt, perhaps, I think to myself, but I don't really, and then we are sprinting as fast as we can and a woman shouts, Look where you're going! —as we knock into her, and her bags take wing, bursting into the air like pigeons let loose from a cage, and then back to Earth as slowly as paper, yet they land so noisily. And I wince, and she cries because we broke a plate or something. Look out! —a man warns as we come racing around, inches from the street, but we don't stop, we don't want to think about what we left behind, watching us scuttling away, and knowing why. We don't want to turn around and, even from a distance, we'll be able to recognize that man, stretched out on the corner, waiting for someone to have a heart. We don't want to look behind us and once again behold that cardboard sign, the one that's asking for help, the one that's ignored, the way we ignored it. We don't want to glance back and see cardboard sign, watching us with sad eyes, calling us, pleading, please come back and help, kneeling alone on the curb. But we know he and his sign are there, we can picture it in our heads. That's why we don't stop running, until we see Susan's mother. Holding shopping bags and putting away her wallet. Us, gasping for air.

What's the hurry? She giggles.

Susan and Maria and me, we all look at each other, and then, for some reason, we laugh. We burst out and we can't stop. Loud, in your face cachinnation that scares the poor dove sitting on the railing, the kind that used to wake me up in the middle of the night when my parents were watching comedies and would keep me awake long into the night. The day and the image in our heads of the man and his sign slowly crumble around us, and the janitor sweeps it up and throws it away and we can't remember why we were so upset, why we were rushing so. For some reason, we laugh.

Nisha Klein is currently a sophomore in high school. Her first publication, *Sticks and Stones*, appeared in the July 2013 issue of *Stone Soup*. Her short story, *We Laughed for Some Reason*, was written while Klein was in eighth grade.

Pelage

By Emma Camp

Violet was nearly thirteen when her mother committed suicide. They found her dead in the bedroom of the old, empty house, gone before the paramedics even arrived. Her mother had never liked that house, the way it ached and whined under her feet, as if her weight was one step from breaking it. She hated the way cold wind whistled through its bones when the windows weren't shut tight enough, how the white paint of the brick was cracked and crumbling, something her father had sworn he'd fix, but never did. He bought the thing right after they got married, a wedding gift her mother had tried her best not to hate.

"It's a nice neighborhood, Kathrine," she imagines her father saying, slamming the door of the car just a little too hard behind him. "And you like old houses, don't you?"

"Yeah, but it's falling to pieces," her mother might have responded as she twisted the diamond on her finger, and tried not to sound like an ungrateful child. Her father might remark that it was his money that they were spending, and his job that they were moving for, keeping her silent. She might have touched her belly then, almost absentmindedly, feeling the child stirring inside, and reminding her why she married him.

The funeral was louder than Violet expected. Relatives whom she had never met flocked around her, chirping how much she had grown, and how old she had become. Aunts buried her in their perfume soaked shoulders and pinched baby fat, grasping their cold, claw like hands in hers. Their sympathy seemed to suffocate Violet, crushing her with pity, their heads shaking in disapproving sadness: poor thing, they said, to grow up with a mother who killed herself. Their small, beady eyes bored through her like awls. By the time they had finally buried her, Violet almost felt like she was choking under the weight of the people around her: all crying, all looking at her with insuperable pity. Her father's face was set and solid. His hands firmly gripped Violet at her shoulders as they lowered her mother into the ground. It was a closed casket, cold and white, adorned with artificially pale lilies. Violet felt out of her own body, like it was someone else's mother being buried, and someone else's father grappling them so tight they couldn't breathe. Like it was someone else being pinned down by grief and whispers.

Her mother always wanted a garden. Her father would never let her, claiming that she knew nothing about plants, and that it was too expensive anyway. She settled for windowsill pots instead, filling ceramic planters with forget-me-nots and sprigs of basil. She doted on them constantly, carefully watering the soil and pruning tender foliage until the flora flourished delicate and green. Soon, more plants followed, filling the house and porch with enough vegetation to meet her mother's ambitions.

Violet remembers the sticky summer days she spent with her, standing over the sink, transplanting supermarket seedlings into brightly painted terra cotta pots. Her mother would press Violet's hands into the wet soil, teaching her how to handle the mass of dirt and roots, her voice gentle and patient with Violet's untrained fingers.

"See, when you pull it out of there, you have to be careful not to lose too much dirt," she said, pulling a shrub of mint from its soggy carton.

“Okay, so how to I hold it?” Violet asked, taking a heavy plant from the countertop.

“Here, don’t grab it by the stem, or you’ll tear the leaves,” her mother said, placing her gloved palms at the base of the container. “Now get it from the edges.” Violet eased the mint from its casing, stringy white roots holding the heap of black soil in place. She pushed it into a planter, awkwardly compressing the soil.

“That looks great, sweetheart,” her mother said, peeling off her gardening gloves. “Soon enough, I bet you’ll be doing this all on your own.”

“Thanks, mom,” Violet said, warming under the praise. Her mother smiled and squeezed her shoulder.

“Alright, help me clean this up. You know how your father feels about all this dirt getting everywhere.”

Violet sat on the porch when the relatives had finally gone, the soft whine of the too-old swing groaning in her ears. She was sore from crying: her chest tight, her eyes red, her lips cracked and nearly bleeding. Inside, her father did the dishes from the casserole the neighbors brought, the yellow light from the kitchen painting warm shadows onto her thighs. She looked out at the street, mostly deserted at night except for the drone of an occasional car. The streetlamps did not work, and Violet thought they looked like skeletons, tall and sinewy against the empty road, casting black and blue shadows like bruises.

The air was heavy with leftover heat from the day, and Violet wished she had changed. She was stuck in tight pantyhose and a ladylike dress, too-small Mary Janes crushing her feet. Without thinking, she kicked off the pinched black shoes and watched as they clattered to the splintered floor. She sighed, a great weight shifting and releasing from her chest. She hadn’t been able to breathe in days, not with the constant motion of mourning and the tightness of loss. Her father had barely spoken to her since her mother’s death, keeping himself locked away at work, coming home only to retreat back to his bedroom and lock the door tightly behind him. He was a bowed man, hunched over from years of deskwork, and bent permanently from crunching numbers and looming deadlines.

Violet flicked a blade of grass from her knee and watched as it floated to the floorboards. The slice of lawn clipping too light for its own good, managing to transcend gravity for a few feeble seconds before trembling back to the ground. She couldn’t remember how her mother’s voice sounded anymore, what was once so constant, now gone with the slightest slip of memory. The realization hit Violet deep in her chest, and for a brief second, she was unable to think. The loss was so tangible, so real that it felt almost sacrilegious. All of the times her mother had sung to her after concrete-skinned knees, all of the stories told during the transplantation of a blossom, all of the promises whispered after childhood nightmares were now silent and empty. Her mother was fading even from memory and Violet was scared by how easily she was forgetting.

A breeze picked up, sending shivers down her bare arms. She stood up to go inside, but suddenly remembered the two terra cotta pots of mint her mother had planted on the wooden porch, somehow missed by her father’s raid, and tacitly hidden under the wicker coffee table to keep relatives from trampling. As she pulled them up, heavy and dense with dirt, she was surprised to find them still green and full, rather than shriveled after the days without water or sun. Violet pinched off

a leaf, putting it in her mouth as her mother had taught her so many years before, the faint sting of mint settling on her tongue. She went back inside, rocking her bare heels on the threshold, the door closing like a whisper behind her.

She stepped into the yellow linoleum kitchen, the faucet still running from the dishes her father washed. Violet turned the cracked porcelain knob. The water trickled down to a quiet drip. Her father had started doing the dishes by himself, his big fingers working away at grime leftover from frozen dinners or scrubbing at the stained rings leftover in coffee cups, always up to his forearms in suds because he used too much dish soap. He was nowhere to be seen, now locked away in some corner of his office, not wanting to look at her.

Violet was always told that she looked like her mother. Aunts would cluck their tongues and pat her cheeks at family reunions, declaring that she had her mother's eyes, her mother's nose, her mother's hands. They'd beam at the woman as she held Violet at her side as if she might fly away and told her how lucky she was to have a beautiful girl like her. Violet's father would always interject at moments like this, putting a hand around his wife's waist to remark how they were both lucky to have a beautiful girl like her. The women would chuckle and press dollar bills or hard candies into Violet's palm, saying how they were sure he spoiled her rotten. Her father would laugh then, a forced smile awkwardly crossing his lips, and look to his wife, who said nothing.

The next morning, Violet began to notice the feathers. They were small and brown, cresting her forehead and stomach with down. She found them in an unexpected brush of her hair in the morning, in her finger's grazing while she put on a shirt. They alarmed her, and in the hope that she could quietly rid herself of the plumage, she rummaged through a bathroom drawer to find a pair of tweezers. She took the little grey instrument between her inexperienced fingers, and plucked slowly in front of her bedroom mirror. The pinpoint feathers pulled without blood, instead leaving raw red bumps behind. She winced with each rip, but didn't stop until there was a small pile of the quills in her lap. Violet let out a shuddering breath, touching her pinked skin lightly. She stood up, her shirt rippling back down her abdomen, the cotton brushing up against the stinging wound. She went downstairs to the kitchen, the white Sunday-morning light filtering through the windows. Her father was gone, leaving a hastily written note on the refrigerator:

Had to go into work this morning—I'll be back around three or four. Scrambled eggs in the fridge if you want them. Make sure to clean your room. Call if you need anything.

-Dad

Violet opened the trembling refrigerator, and stood in front of it for a long time, letting the wave of cold roll over her. She closed her eyes to the fluorescent glow, the near-constant hum of the electrical appliance droning in her ears. Eventually she found the plate of eggs, the sulfuric yellow knobs resting cold inside. She didn't bother heating them up. She sat on the swollen living room couch and ate silently. From across the room, the door to her parents' bedroom caught her eye. It was slightly ajar, unlocked for the first time in weeks. Violet thought of the unspoken rule that prevented her from entering, but her father was gone, and he would never know that she had invaded.

Violet opened the door softly. Inside, the room was dark, and from it wafted a deep, animalistic stench. She flicked on the lights and stepped inside. The carpet was thick with dust and dirt. Plastic bins of withered feathers lay on the floor, some were covered in rusty blood, others seeming to be ripped out in troves. The smell was overwhelming, something base and primal bringing tears to

Violet's eyes. Instruments ranging from nimble tweezers to clamp like pliers rested on the bedside table, a layer of grime covering them. She picked up the biggest pair of pliers, the thick, rubber-coated handle molding into her palm. Its jaw was coated in torn fragments of down, now old and paper-thin with age, layers of grime that once rested between the feathers caked onto the metal. Violet began to feel bile rise hot and raw in her throat, the acid burning in the back of her mouth. She dropped the pliers, the steel digging into the carpet with a sickening thud. Dazed, she stumbled out of the room, shocked and gasping for air. Her throat tightened, the skin on her stomach and forehead burned.

A few weeks before her death, Violet's mother stopped tending to the plants. She began shutting herself in her bedroom and only emerging at night. Despite Violet's best efforts to care for them, the plants eventually withered without her mother's careful hands. One afternoon her father ran through the house with a heavy black trash bag, dumping the contents of the planters inside.

"Dad, what are you doing?" Violet asked, horrified as she walked in the kitchen to see him shaking out a vase containing a once-beautiful calla lily. "You can't throw those away."

"If she's not going to take care of them, I don't see why I should have to deal with all the mess they make," he replied, slamming the empty vessel on the kitchen table.

"But those are Mom's," Violet said, her voice fading as her father grabbed yet another plant from the windowsill.

"Take it up with your mother, why don't you," her father said as he flung another blossom inside, the bag straining against the weight. "See what she'll do about it."

That night, her father heaved home later than expected, pressed down with an insurmountable weight. Violet had spent the day locked in the bathroom, spending hours examining her body for new growth, trying to predict when the feathers would come in next. She pinched skin and combed through limbs, trying to feel the spines on their ascent through the epidermis. The smell of her mother's room would not leave her. It seemed sunken into her, tattooed onto her cells. When she heard the tremor of the garage and the whine of his car, Violet stopped, giving one last scour over her arms before going downstairs to meet him. He already had his laptop out, the dull, digital glow lighting his tired face.

"Hey Dad," Violet said, walking into the kitchen. Her father looked up from his work,

"Hey. Sorry I got in so late. The meeting ran long," he said, shuffling through a folder swollen with yellowed papers. "Did you eat dinner?" Violet watched as a wilted feather slipped out of the folder and sank to the floor.

"I haven't eaten yet," Violet said, quietly. Her stomach turned. "I was going to fix some of that leftover lasagna Mrs. Phelps brought over."

"Good, good," her father responded, distracted. "Hey, could you make me some of that too? Remind me to thank her for it. It was nice of her."

Violet took one the ceramic dishes out of the refrigerator, stuffed with neighbor's condolence dinners, all in various stages of being eaten. Her hands trembled as she forked squares of it onto plates and put them in the microwave.

"Hey, I know you've been through a lot lately," her father said as she waited by the trembling appliance. "I just want you to know that you can still tell me anything, okay? You can talk to me about anything you're feeling right now."

"Okay," Violet said, shifting where she stood. "Thanks."

Over days, more and more feathers began to appear, this time thicker on her arms and legs. Violet began to wrap them in elastic bandages, compressing the new plumage underneath. She took to spending more time alone, and being more active at night. Her father hardly noticed, too wrapped in the cadence of work and habit and grief, keeping himself hidden from his daughter out of instinct.

One morning, the sky just beginning to pink with sunlight, Violet sat on the front steps of the porch, the brick cold and damp on her bare feet. A blue plastic watering can sat next to her, bulbous with water and begging to be emptied. She meant to water the mint, as the black dirt had gone dry in the sun. Violet pushed herself up from the steps, taking the overfilled watering can in her hands, the unnatural bulk sinking knots into her knuckles. She poured into the pots, unable to control the liquid rushing out so fast. It overflowed, ribboning like silk down the side of the terra cotta, puddling at her downy feet. Violet watched the water run, setting the can down onto the floorboards, rubbing her spent fingers as it fell away, slipping through cracks and settling into the fissures in the brick.

Violet wasn't sure how much longer she could hide before her father would begin to tear out the plumage that now coated her body. Violet looked out at the sky, and felt the quiet white breeze settling on her face. She pushed herself up from the brick and began to walk.

She found herself along the holiday streets of her lily- white neighborhood, blending in with the flock of middle school kids as they trudged towards street corner bus stops, awaiting a day of gym sweat and algebra. She passed houses so neat and clipped that they could be gingerbread, and walked her bare feet over slabs of sidewalk that dared not crack. Her feathers were uncontrollable now. Her wings would come in soon, pelage that could not be plucked without blood or bound without breaking. Violet ran a hand under her jacket sleeve, feeling quills as they pricked behind bandages. She came to a fork in the street, now narrowed and childless, where she could no longer see her impassive and miserable house looming behind her. Violet thought to turn back, she thought to recede to the place where her father would soon be waking, would soon find her gone. She shook away the doubt in her stomach and moved on, letting the roads become an unfamiliar blur around her; determined not to fade out but to fly away for a thousand years.

Emma Camp is a sophomore Shakespeare nerd in the Alabama School of Fine Arts Creative Writing department, whose work has been featured in Canvas, Cadence, and Girlspring as well as being the recipient of honorable mentions in the Nancy Thorp Poetry Contest and the Gannon University High School Poetry Contest. She is an avid intersectional feminist whose ultimate life goal is to direct a production of Romeo and Juliet performed entirely by cats.

Art

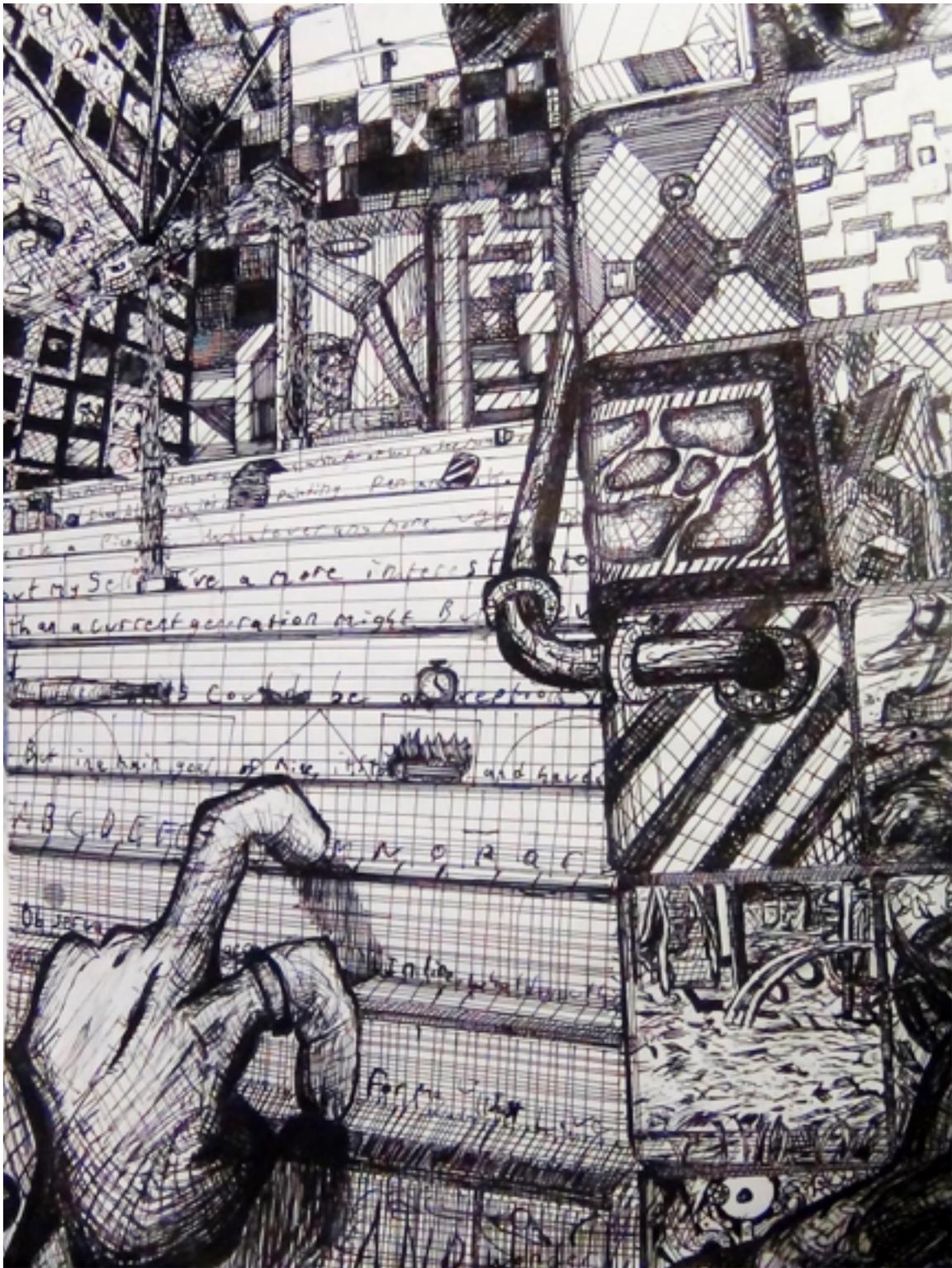
December/ Staircase

By Daniel Marquez



December

The photo's title is "December". The photo was taken in North Saint Paul, MN and is a picture of townhouses where I used to live. I enjoy the warmth the image brings, giving a comfort similar to drinking hot chocolate before a fireplace. I wanted to capture this feeling and bring it home with a sepia tone.



Staircase

The drawing is titled "The Staircase". As an abstract piece, my mind found a metaphor of the dizzying aspects the climb of life revolves around and bring it into an eerie and distracting sense. This is based off of a corner of my high school's staircase, with some images based on childhood

ideologies, things, and memories. One tile has a playground in it. Another is a carpet I used to hop about as though the gray blobs were stones in a river. The writing on the staircase depicts my train of thought, which often trails and wanders without my consent. This foreign place may be deemed unfriendly to newcomers. Taking a step back and realizing the details as individuals brings light to the fog of mysteriousness. Painted with pen and ink on paper.

Daniel Marquez is a philosophical student at North Saint Paul Senior High School in Saint Paul, Minnesota who has a knack for creativity no matter the medium. From writing, to art, to baking, he strives to accomplish a wholehearted life.

Perspective

By Geetanjali Purohit



Untitled



Untitled

Geetanjali Purohit is a fourteen-year-old fun loving girl who loves trying new things. She is a cheerful person who always spreads smiles and she loves photography, poetry, art, and an endless list of other things.