

Issue Four

Non-Fiction

Ice Cream

By William Blomerth

The room was quiet and still, and I would have thought myself deaf if it hadn't been for the buzzing and whirring of the machines keeping my aunt alive. I hadn't even known rooms could be so dark until that night, and the only window in the room let in the deeper darkness of the night. The silence itself was remarkable, achieved by a room crowded with bodies. Heat radiated from the bodies and made the room stuffy and suffocating. Everyone in the room was waiting for death. My aunt was lying on the bed that was more hardware than cushion, and many people who loved her were standing and sitting in various parts of the room. The room was definitely too small to hold all of the love... or the sadness.

ALS, or Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, is a degenerative nerve disease that slowly and viciously kills its victims. My mother's side of the family carries the ALS gene, and Auntie Chi Chi had developed the disease. My mother had taken care of her for as long as we could at our house, but in the final weeks of her life, we knew she would have to stay in a nursing home. I watched as my aunt, the energetic sales rep glued to her cell phone, became a wisp of a human body that could barely say anything. I had seen her spirit leave her eyes. She was not ready to die; she was too young and loved life too much. Everyone in the darkness that night realized the same thing: the end was near.

While privately mourning, I remembered my first-hand experience with my aunt and her lack of basic motor skills. My mother and father were busy preparing a medication in the kitchen, which was serving as a pharmacy. My task was to feed my aunt ice cream. This was the same ice cream the rest of the family ate, no special medications or supplements, just a creamy vanilla. I put the ice cream in a bowl, a bowl that we had all used for years. I grabbed a spoon, not a special feeding tool for the sick, a spoon that I had used countless times before. I sat in front of her, perhaps the only ill relative of mine who hadn't been ready to die when it was time. Taking a spoonful of ice cream, I guided it towards her mouth. This was a mouth that could barely speak anything besides what must be described as a moan, let alone eat with much success. She opened her mouth and I inserted the spoon. I saw her molasses-like lips close around the spoon and I gently pulled back, as if I were feeding a baby. She had taken just a little off of the top. We went on like this, and we couldn't even get halfway through the dessert before the ice cream had melted.

I knew no young child in my parents' eyes would be charged with the duty of feeding the sick. My playroom had been long gone as well; my old toys were moved out and replaced with a bed and various medical accessories to keep first my grandmother (a victim of cigarettes) and then my aunt alive. I realized I was becoming a young adult. I was a twelve year old growing up alongside the diseases and sicknesses that had taken two family members in quick succession.

I struggled to keep the ice cream off of her face realizing what my aunt had to go through. She couldn't even have ice cream without getting it dribbled down her chin. Ice cream, a universal symbol of happiness and glee, was an arduous task for her to consume. I thought of the kind of happiness it must have brought her when she was my age and younger; images of little kids running around playfully after the ice cream truck ran through my mind. I thought of the joy ice cream had brought me in previous years. I thought of Maya, Chi Chi's daughter, who so enjoyed ice cream. My God, her daughter: How would she survive the years after her mother's death? How would she deal with a motherless house? What was being imprinted in her brain at this moment, watching her mother slowly die? What would be left in my mind after this was all over? Would it ever really be over? These thoughts made me sick as I stared at the melted ice cream, and when we were done, I pushed the bowl away as if I could distance myself from these feelings.

That night in the nursing home, amongst the silent darkness, I came to my epiphany. My aunt would die soon, but it was okay. She was going to enjoy the heaven that she believed in much more than this life. Her long-term suffering, pain, and embarrassment (terrible for her Japanese pride) would finally come to an end. She would fly higher than the superficial world of today, escape the chains of her diseased body, escape the nursing home she despised so much, say farewell to the crowd of loved ones in her room, fly past my inescapable feelings and be reunited with wherever the spirit of her parents went. I knew Maya would soon come to the same realization, and the love in the room would guide her to this eventually. Chi Chi would die with those she loved on Earth all around her, and she wouldn't have asked for more.

William Blomerth is a high school junior and Eagle Scout interested in English and the human mind. When not in school or on the track, he enjoys writing, playing music, and camping.

My Visit to Auschwitz

By Zoe Bunje

The first of February 2016 was just a normal day for billions of people around the world. For me it was the day where I had to face the death of more than a million innocent people. People who were tortured for their religion, their looks, their profession or simply their political orientation. It was the day where I had to face a part of the history of my country. Where I had to open my eyes for all the horrible things that had been done.

As a German these days it is not always easy. We have, fortunately, changed a lot since the days someone like Adolf Hitler was able to become Reich Chancellor of Germany. We have developed into a welcoming nation that is absolutely against racism and exclusion. Of course there are exceptions. Of course there is still a minority that represents racism in Germany. But the majority of people are wholly against racism, people who have learned from the past and who would and will do everything to never let something like the Holocaust happen again.

As a German you are confronted with your past very often. Most people know how to tell the difference between what has been and what is now, but some people still have prejudices. My English teacher once told me that when he was abroad twenty years ago some teenagers asked him if Hitler was still in power in Germany. A statement that makes me doubt all the development Germany has gone through, a statement that makes me doubt how I look at the world and in return how the world looks at a German girl like me.

We learn everything about our past in our history lessons at school. One part of learning about our past is the opportunity to visit Oswiecim, better known as Auschwitz. For one week we get to stay at a youth hostel in Auschwitz and visit the concentration camps Auschwitz 1 and Birkenau. We have the opportunity to talk to a person who survived the Concentration Camp. I decided to sign up for it.

A few months later, on February the first we arrived in Auschwitz. We unpacked, ate something, talked, and played table tennis, all the while, aware of what was still waiting for us on the following days.

We didn't know what to expect and the uncertainty was a heavy burden. Needless to say we talked about the visit beforehand. We had the chance to talk to our teachers about our fears and expectations. But it is completely different to talk about something than to actually see it with your own eyes.

The next day we visited Auschwitz 1. The sky was grey and cloudy. We followed our guide, listening. "On the basis of the partially preserved camp records and estimates, it has been established that there were approximately 232 thousand children and young people up to the age of 18 among the 1.3 million or more people deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp.

The fate of child and youth prisoners was no different in principle from that of adults. Just like adults, they suffered from hunger and cold, were used as laborers, and were punished, put to death, and used as subjects in criminal experiments by SS doctors. In the early period of the existence of the women's camp, children born there were put to death, regardless of their ethnicity, without being entered in the camp records."

Our guide told us facts that I had known before and facts that were new to me. But overall facts that were incredibly painful to know.

In between these old buildings, surrounded by people taking pictures it is really hard to believe that at this place humans were cruelly murdered, tortured to death and experimented on. Of course all over the concentration camps there are things that mark the death of these people: the gas chambers, the gallows, the photos of the dead. But one million is such a big figure. Try to imagine the death of one million people in your head, dying because of the irrational opinions of a few people. You won't be able to.

The understanding of the extent of the concentration camps came the next day. In contrast to Auschwitz 1, Birkenau (Auschwitz 2) is huge. The concentration camp Auschwitz 2 is 171 hectares and four gas chambers big. Built, only to kill human beings. Our teachers bought roses and we were allowed to lay them down wherever we wanted as a sign of remembrance. I laid my rose down at the ramp where they selected which victim shall live and which shall die. I remember that I wrote in my diary that day: "I left my rose where hope became a weapon."

At this ramp, they picked out the people that were to die immediately: The children, the elderly people, the people who were ill. They led them to the gas chambers, telling them that they would have the opportunity to take a shower and eat something warm afterwards-only to sneakily murder them in the gas chambers that looked similar to shower rooms.

They used their hope to kill them.

On our last day we visited Auschwitz 1 again, but this time without a guide. Going around in the concentration camp alone-or only accompanied by a friend-is something completely different than with a guide. I do see the importance of a guide, but without, you have the chance to stop at certain parts and take a closer look at everything. You have time to remember and pray for the victims.

Looking back at the journey I am glad that I signed up for it. I saw cruelty, I saw the foolishness of people, I saw horrible things. But this journey is something I will never forget and what happened is something that can never be forgotten. The only way that something like this can ever happen again is by forgetting this tragedy. By forgetting that all humans are the same and have to be treated in the same way. By giving someone the power who will use it for his own good and who doesn't care about the people that suffer on his rise to power.

We have to be aware of what happened; it does not define us and it never will. We are different people than those who were in charge of Auschwitz, but this is a part of our past that we have to learn from.

Until today I have not been able to cry. It's not a sign of my strength that I have not cried, because I wish I had. I am still processing and I am sure that eventually one day I will cry. Because no sane human being can see what happened in Auschwitz without having his heart broken a little bit.

Zoe Bunje is a seventeen-year-old-girl from Kassel, Germany. The German school system is not the same as the American school system, but she is currently in grade twelve which means that she is graduating this year. She has always loved to read and a few years ago started to write her own stories. Even though she mostly writes for herself she aspires to become a journalist one day.

Sources: <http://auschwitz.org/en/history/fate-of-children/children-born-in-auschwitz>

Stand Up

By Ella Carlinnia

People in Edisto are friendly. When one smiles and waves, the recipient will do the same back. How would I know at thirteen years old being friendly would trigger harassment? All I did was walk. Along the bike path, shadows danced upon my nose and forehead. I was embraced and protected by the tree tunnels over my head. I waved and the man waved back as I entered a clearing, and the sun poured through the empty spaces above me. Then he whistled, and began shouting things about my body to his friends on the porch, who parroted him; laughing at my discomfort and sharing their opinions on my appearance, which I wasn't aware I had asked for. I kept walking; looking down at my feet on the path and watching my hands quiver at my sides. With all their words I walked faster, and I felt smaller. I regret that I hadn't called back to them and yelled, "I am thirteen! I am not here for you!" I tried not to run, because it would show them it had gotten to me, but all chaos broke loose in my head. The tunnels above, that I had seconds before found beautiful, were now drowning me. My mind somehow couldn't figure out how to get out of the clearing.

The first time I got catcalled, I had just turned eleven. Downtown, I was walking by myself, though surrounded by careless strangers who bumped me to the edge of the sidewalk. Weeds popped through the cracks in concrete beneath my feet. Two guys pulled their car close to the sidewalk, made eye contact, whistled, and proceeded to blow me unwanted kisses. I was mortified, and even more so because it seemed like nobody in the sea of people around me cared. It was an everyday thing and no one objected, except me. I've had to "get used to" this harassment about every time I walk out in public, and it's completely ridiculous. I've learned if you get mad, it only makes it worse. Once when I glared at someone for whistling at me, he yelled "God baby, take a compliment." I have never, and will never, take harassment from strangers as a compliment. I don't care if a stranger likes or dislikes the way I look. I am not an object of entertainment or a midmorning confidence boost.

It's barbaric that young women all over the world have to deal with this—this is how it is, and we should just "take a compliment". People say men experience this type of sexism too, and for men it isn't recognized. In the most "polite" and "ladylike" way possible, I ask them to look around and stop kidding themselves! Ninety-six percent of women in the U.S have experienced catcalling or street harassment, whereas for men it's only thirteen percent. What people don't understand, is something as common as catcalling is directly related to something as serious as sexual assault, and they are both extremely offensive.

Frustrated, insulted, degraded, unsafe: these are the only words I can use to describe how this makes me feel. People belittle this problem by talking about it without truly educating themselves. It's an issue in itself that this isn't recognized. I personally think it's ludicrous and pitiful that these men have to tear women down in order to build themselves up. Nothing is going to shift unless you understand the anxiety and disrespect this makes

women feel; unless you stand up for the scared eleven year old getting harassed on the sidewalk, or better yet if you don't catcall her in the first place.

Ella Carlinnia is currently an eighth grade student at The Learning Community School in North Carolina. She is a young feminist who enjoys writing about social justice, and spends her time reading, dancing, and making things.

Geography

By Ethan Chua

Grandfather tells me about how he lost a ring finger in the jungles of Fujian where you could hear the bullets sailing through the tops of trees like firecrackers on New Year's.

When it happened he'd been holding a Type Zhongzheng rifle, Chinese make, a copy of a German Mauser down to the bolt action and before the jungle he had fired it twice. Once in a Kuomintang firing range surrounded by rice farmers whose ears pricked up at the sudden noise. Once by accident while filling his canteen in a nearby river when he heard the rustling of grass and thought Mao's guerrillas had made it past the NRA lines.

They called it Chiang Kai Shek's rifle after the general himself had gotten the exports from Germany and provided the guns to his best troops. But the first shipment of rifles hadn't been enough, so the troops also bought the rejects which the Wehrmacht refused to use. In camp, whenever an NRA man got a Type Zhongzheng, he was told to pray for luck every time he pulled the trigger. But in the deltas and rivers with the bullets sailing by no one had much time for prayer.

In the Fujian jungle, Grandfather loaded his Zhongzheng with copper jacket rounds and propped the gun on a rocky outcrop. He waited for the glint of sunlight that would give away the brim of a soldier's helmet. After fifteen minutes of waiting, Grandfather wiped off the sweat that had gathered on his brow, letting it drip onto the grass. Then Grandfather caught a glint of steel in the light and pressed his finger on the trigger to fire.

That was the third and last time Grandfather fired a rifle in his life. The Zhongzheng he'd received was of brittle make and collapsed with the combustion of the gunpowder in the barrel. Bits of the metal chassis cut into the bark of nearby banyan trees and one shard pierced Grandfather's ring finger and cut it at the bone, leaving it splayed on the jungle floor as if pointing its way to sanctuary. Grandfather swore in Fookien, cursing himself for forgetting to pray.

At this point in his story Grandfather stops to roll up the sleeve of his loose button-down polo and points out two red marks on the skin of his left arm. Two smaller shards of the rifle lodged themselves into the flesh there. The welts are like small valleys among the ridges of his wrinkles. Grandfather gestures at them as if to say that to this day he still remembers the heat of the jungle, still remembers the digging of metal shards against his skin.

After the medics sewed up his wounds and discharged him, Grandfather went home to Gulangyu Island and burned his poster of Chiang Kai Shek. He told me the name reminded him too much of the rifle that severed his finger and left it in the soil. While letting the ash coat the bottom of an iron barrel grandfather realized that it was no longer safe for him to stay, so he boarded a boat bound for the Philippines.

In previous stories Grandfather said he went to the Philippines because his uncle had set up a small business there shipping rattan to Indonesia. But today Grandfather says something different and tells me he was drawn somehow to the fractured archipelago. On humid monsoon days, he would unfurl maps of the world within the spare ship cabin and circle out the country in red marker. In his dreams instead of counting sheep he would count the bulbous and broken landmasses, trying to divine how many islands there were based on his recollections of the map. Sometimes his counts reached two hundred, though he could never get past that number before drifting off, leaving the bottom regions of Mindanao uncharted.

On the rattan ships of his uncle, Grandfather developed callouses on his remaining fingers. He drew rope to anchor and dragged coils of it across the steel flooring of the craft. Sometimes when the ship was ready to unmoor he would untie rattan cords from the harbor's posts, leaving rough patches on the undersides of his thumbs. Grandfather tells me that though his uncle was frugal and paid him little, he was able to see much of the world. The busy Jakarta ports with stone lions and many-armed goddesses on the prows of skiffs; coral scraping onto the hull in the shallow regions of Scarborough Shoal; the rough typhoon winds of Basilan, which almost grounded his craft. In each of these places Grandfather coiled and uncoiled lengths of rattan rope for trade, leaving small scratches on his fingertips and shedding flakes of his skin.

Once again Grandfather stops his story to unfurl his hands and asks me to run my small smooth fingers across his wrinkled ones. I avoid the stump of his ring finger on the right hand, then feel the callouses on his thumbs, like jutting promontories or islands so small they sink underneath the high tide. There are so many bumps and crags that each mark seems to carry the weight of its own unrecorded history. For some reason I imagine Grandfather again in the cabin of the Philippine-bound ship, this time tracing out the lines of his palm with red ink before sleeping.

Grandfather then gestures to his right calf, discolored with a large bruise. And his story continues forty years past the rattan ship to the suburbs of San Francisco where he stayed for a few months in a home for the aged. He kept busy there, acting as a bookkeeper and typing out the purchases of the directress.

Grandfather tells me that one humid afternoon he was walking to the local convenience store for groceries when he heard the loud horn of an approaching Cadillac. At the sound, he turned around with his walker in front of him as if to shield himself from the blow. It wasn't enough; the metal twisted with the impact of the car and the front bumper of the Cadillac bruised his right leg. The last things grandfather heard before passing out from the pain were the screeching of brakes and the crunch of metal.

In the hospital he fielded nightmares. All of them were punctuated by the sound of twisting metal and bone, though the landscape was always shifting – first Jakarta, then Fujian, and afterwards San Francisco. Always grandfather felt as if a part of him was being rent away by something beyond his control. Always the parts of him that were pulled away from his body still retained sensation. In his nightmares grandfather cried out as a steel-toed military boot crushed his ring finger in a Fujian jungle, as dry flakes of his skin sunk onto the spines of sea urchins clutching to Scarborough rocks. Grandfather tells me his dreams were what an archipelago must feel like when it is being born, torn by currents and tides into constituent islands.

For the last time Grandfather stops his story, mid-nightmare, leaving out the part where he wakes up. Perhaps it is because he is inviting me to fill in the rest of the tale with my own recollection – a rushed Delta airlines flight from Metro Manila to San Francisco; a child holding the hand of his father while staring at the IV drips injected into his grandfather's withered frame. I cannot be sure; instead I let my fingers feel, again, the ridges and contours of this discolored bruise, this landmass of dried blood, Grandfather's geographies spelled out for me in silent ritual.

Grandfather died five years ago on this day, and these words are the last things of him I remember. He did not say whether he wanted to be buried or cremated though I knew he would have loved neither. My father cremated him and placed his ashes in an urn; he placed the urn within a two cubic meter marble tomb; he embossed grandfather's name on the

marble in golden lettering. Like any child I did not want my grandfather to die. And when I saw him cancerous on the hospital bed breathing the last ragged breaths of his life, I wanted in vain to freeze his flesh into sculpture somehow, so as to never lose the features of his skin. Though I know Grandfather's ashes lie contained within the Sanctuarium urn, I do not imagine that to be his resting place. Instead I tell myself this: it takes roughly one month for new skin cells to reach the top layer of one's body, meaning that the skin I will wear one month from today will be completely new. But that does not mean the old skin is gone – it is gathered as dust on picture frames, television sets, library books, and typewriters, trillions of discarded geographies and islands lost to the high tide.

Grandfather's bones now make up the roots of banyan trees in Fujian which are only today beginning to sprout. His dust is spread across the Pacific Ocean leaving trails of trade routes from metro Manila to Jakarta where skiffs vending rattan cords once ran yearly expeditions. On a San Francisco freeway the front bumper of a Cadillac still holds a small part of Grandfather's salt lake bruises, smudged ever slightly by red paint.

Long ago grandfather dreamed of being born like seven thousand islands proceeding from the body of one. That is the image of him I carry now, five years down the line, as I press my palm against the gold-embossed letters of his tomb.

Ethan Chua is a Chinese-Filipino spoken word poet from the Philippines and a freshman studying at Stanford University, where he is part of the Stanford Spoken Word Collective. He has written poems about stars, short fiction involving bisexual vampires, and essays where his grandparents escape Communist soldiers in Fujian again and again. He's also the cofounder of Ampersand, an organization dedicated to giving the youth avenues to express themselves through art. Read his work at medium.com/@ezlc327.

All I Think About

By Jordette Cummings

In short, high school has ruined me. After middle school I felt as if the world and all its possibilities were at my fingertips. Ninth grade created a crack in my bubble of childlike wonder. The kind you see in cartoons. Small at first, advancing towards the feet of the main character who then falls off a cliff or in a hole. By tenth grade however, this bubble had shattered. It's hard to know whether or not the world had always been cruel, if people were dying while I was swaddled against my mother's chest, while the ribbons in my hair came undone, while I learned how to ride a bike. I'd like to think not. I'd like to think that before I turned fourteen life was as beautiful for everyone as it was for me.

Of course tenth grade mathematics annihilated me but most of my cynicism arises from the world around me, rather than my academics. Though I did learn that no matter how hard I want to pass math, no matter how hard we all studied the most efficient way to succeed was through a whisper and pleading eyes on the day of a test. When I go home I'm meant to have a reprieve from my high school woes. No, instead it seems like every day a new video of an innocent person being murdered in public. People who are five years older than me being shot on what was supposed to be a night out. Things are meant to be easier when you go off to college. But how can I ever go to a club or the movies when even now my chest get tight when a man in a hoodie walk inside of a dark theater?

Trayvon Martin died when I was twelve years old. Of course my family was furious, as was I. Because I knew what it meant to be innocent and black. But I did not yet know what it meant to be sixteen years old, as I am now. From my newly gained experience I can say that I still feel like a kid. And my mom still calls me her baby. Furthermore, I can say that one of my worst fears is that one day my mother will feel the way that Trayvon Martin's mother felt. Second only to death. I found out the verdict of the Trayvon Martin case in a diner. My greasy fingers were wrapped around a glass of Coke but my eyes were turned toward the TV in the corner of the corner of the room. How could he be innocent after he murdered a little boy? How could the murderers of kids like me, men like my brother, women like mom be... heroes?

The truth is, I'll never know what it feels like to not go to school because I'm a girl. As a matter of fact I was raised with the moral that a child's only job is to excel in school and respect their elders. Recently, I've watched a documentary called Girl Rising and I'm melodramatic enough to say that it changed my life. It made me ashamed to complain about math when in Nepal, little girls who were younger than me were being sold off as Kamlari slaves. But in all honesty I will continue to complain. I will complain because I don't think that anyone who has power truly cares about my education. I will complain because whenever we, the students try to fight back everyone who has a nice office goes silent because their hands are tied. I will complain because everyone gets to vote for my future instead of me...and they always pick wrong.

If I am ever to have children I have to make things better for them. And for myself too. It's so important for me to change something. Right now in Shakespeare class we are reading Macbeth. In it Shakespeare says, "All our pasts have lighted fools The way to dusty death". Which means that the hate and absurdity that was regurgitated to us by our parents, grandparents and so on is just what I called it...absurd. When we die we return to dust anyway. In my opinion, it is the responsibility of all of us to leave the world better than we found it. This is exactly what I plan to do. One way or another. I think I would like to be a humanitarian. Usually I change my career goal every month. I think this one will stick.

Jordette Cummings is a Jamaican born junior at Hillcrest High School in Queens, New York. As much as she loves writing, she much prefers to immerse herself in stories that are not her own. As they contain dialogue, which she has yet to master.

Her three true loves are fiction (film and television included), memes, and debating. She prides herself on having strong opinions and loves defending them. She tries her best to inspire political action amongst her peers without coming off as the pretentious know-it-all that she is.

Skin Deep

By Chaeyeon Kim

The chilly, mist-filled, early morning breeze swept past my open window as the car slinked along the curved road. The grinding sound of gravel against the tires and the faint hum of the engine echoed in the silent countryside. Over the horizon, a faint light shone atop a distant mountain, beginning to bleach the edges of the dark night. Small houses made out of clay bricks and tiles clustered around the edge of a river; smoke lazily drifting out of their chimneys before dissipating into the sky. I lay sprawled in the backseat, tugging at the platinum blond hair of my favorite Barbie doll. I puffed up my cheeks and leaned forward, tapping my father's shoulder. "How much longer until we reach the docks, Dad?"

"We're almost there," answered the authoritative voice behind the steering wheel. "It should come up three minutes after we pass the lepers' compound."

I peered out the window towards the side of the road. There, partially hidden by a jagged rock ledge, stood a solitary building. In the nineteenth century, when leprosy was fairly common in Korea, people separated those with the disease into compounds out of fear of contamination and out of disgust at the sight of their disfigured bodies. The compound seemed to loom over the village, the pale blue morning light glimmering off the stark aluminum walls. A thin line of smoke wafted out from a crude chimney slapped onto the roof.

"Do people still live there? I asked. My father nodded. "Why wouldn't they want to come out after all these years?"

My father stared at the road ahead, twiddling his thumbs around the steering wheel. "Some people would rather live in isolation than integrate back into the same society that rejected them."

The road rolled past the compound and merged into a four-lane highway. I shifted around in my seat hoping to catch another glimpse of the building, but it had become obscured by the rock ledge as the village shrunk into the distance.

"Don't be too upset about them," my father added.

A slender hand hung over the side of the operating table, an IV stuck into its wrist. Suddenly the hand clenched, veins straining against the pale white skin. I craned my neck and stood on my tiptoes to try to get a better view, but the row of nurses standing beside the table towered blocked my view.

“15cc more,” my father commanded, and clear liquid trickled down the tube into the patient’s arm. The hand relaxed, falling back onto the table.

My father, clothed in mint-green scrubs and black tennis shoes, hunched over his patient. With a clean “snip,” he sighed and flexed his back. He gestured towards the attending nurse, and triumphantly set down a bloody surgical scissor on the metal plate. Plucking a towel from the side cart, he wiped down the patient and observed his handiwork.

“Come,” he gestured towards me.

The patient’s bloated face stuck out from a green surgical sheet, stitch marks running along the eyelids and on the side of the nose.

“She got a blepharoplasty and a rhinoplasty. I made incisions on the corners of her eyes to make them open wider.”

I nodded silently, carefully examining the changes to the patient’s face. The stitching across her skin seemed as intricate as the embroidery on my grandmother’s blankets, the evenly spaced thread contributing to some grand design.

“Ms. Cho,” My father smiled exasperatedly, “you mean to say you want a second rhinoplasty?”

The middle-aged woman sat across from my dad in the consulting room, hands firmly pressed against the table. I sat next to my father with my hands respectfully folded across my lap. She inspected her stitches in the mirror before pulling a crumpled sheet from a magazine and smoothing it down across the table. She directed my father’s eyes to the airbrushed model smiling up from the cover. “I want a pointier chin and wider-set eyes. And-” she took out another magazine clipping, “I want my nose bridge modeled after hers.”

I stifled a snort and quickly glanced up at the woman. She had clearly struggled to yank up what gravity had weighed down, resulting in a permanent maniacal, almost fiend-like expression on her face.

“We’ve already put in a silicone insert-,” my father pleaded.

She impatiently tapped the picture. "I want my nose to be exactly the same as hers."

My father opened his mouth, then closed it. "Very well, Ms. Cho." Without a second thought, he took a notepad from his side drawer, scribbling down the details of her request and attaching the worn magazine image. My eyes widened and my foot instinctively nudged my father under the table. His eyes flicked to the side, instantly silencing me. I lowered my gaze and he continued scribbling.

I sat on the edge of the subway bench, absentmindedly picking at the frayed ends of my jumper as the subway car came to a jolting halt and announced Seo-dong station. Only two stops till my grandmother's house. My casual beach ensemble stood out amongst the businessmen and Korean students entering and exiting the train. Unlike me and my classmates back in New Jersey, they still had a month before summer vacation started. I looked up at the young woman across from me as she scrolled through her phone. Rhinoplasty, double eyelid procedure, I assessed. Further down the row, a woman flipped her hair to the side. Rhinoplasty, jaw reduction, and columella augmentation. Another dabbed on powder from a small compact. Double eyelid surgery and an epicanthoplasty. They were everywhere: a dozen double-eyelid surgeries, ten rhinoplasties, three brow bone reductions, three jaw reductions, and a cheekbone augmentation.

My eyes fell on a girl wearing a pleated skirt and a collared shirt quietly seated next to a heavily made-up woman in stilettos. I recognized her uniform from a high school near my hometown. She sat with her hands folded in her lap. Once in awhile she'd nervously lick her lips, exposing a row of wire-framed teeth. The student turned her head and timidly peered up at the woman beside her: a woman with long, silky black hair, a chin augmentation, and bright red lips set in a haughty pout.

One woman flicked her gaze toward the student, then did a double take. Her brows crumpled with annoyance, and her lips curled into a sneer. The student quickly lowered her eyes, slumping down in her seat as an embarrassed blush bloomed across her chubby cheeks. I looked down at my stubby toes that peered out from my cheap flip flops; they were baked to an earthy brown by the sun and sand from Hae-Un-Dae's beach was still caked under my nails. I adjusted the spandex band of my training bra, still unaccustomed to its sweaty constriction, and diverted my gaze to the student as she sat with both feet planted while mine still dangled in the air.

When will she first go under the knife? Will she become that woman that so easily dismissed her?

Will I become that woman?

Sensing my stare, the student looked up. My mouth curled upwards, attempting a grin. My gesture was not reciprocated. Her gaze flickered down to my shoes, then up to my tangled, still-damp hair. She quickly turned her head away from me. The train plunged into a tunnel and the harsh fluorescent lights drew sharp shadows across my features. In the window, I could not recognize the foreign girl who stared back at me. I frantically searched my face looking for some similarity to the other subway passengers, but there were none. Tanned, unkept, different, alien.

The subway came to a rumbling halt. The student quickly stood up, glanced at me once more and shuffled out. The doors hissed closed, and I sat in the almost-empty car, my feet still dangling.

I pushed up the plastic window shade as the double-decker plane leapt into the sky and peered down at Seoul's buildings becoming specks. In thirteen hours I would be home. Soon, all I could see below me was white. Wispy clouds streaked past the window and soon my childhood home disappeared from view. My younger brother squirmed in the seat next to me. "How much longer?" he whined, pushing his coloring book to the side. I had asked the same question at his age. I thought of the lonely leper compound looming underneath the mist; smoke curling out of its jagged chimney. The smoke dissipated into the sky, and became one with the clouds. Had I isolated myself from my society or had my society isolated me? I looked out at the blanket of clouds, the orange yolk of the sun beginning to settle into its pillow folds. Or was just I headed for a new horizon? Soon, from the ground in Korea, the plane had become a solitary dot floating in the sky as I steadily drifted back home.

Chaeyeon (Annika) Kim is a high school junior from New Jersey. Originally from South Korea, Chaeyeon explores the concept of identity in her writing. She also enjoys binge-watching Orange Is the New Black, eating breakfast for dinner and playing with her cat, Butterfly.

Five Years Old

By Brittany Kang

“Come here. You said you weren’t Chinese, correct?” A stout, middle-aged woman said in a commanding voice. At the bold age of five, I was proud of my origins; it was known by everyone in my grade that I was not “another Chinese kid” and that I was the only “Korean.” Just the week before, I had figured out where the peninsula was located in Asia on my older brother’s globe and had admired the land’s vivid fuchsia color on the circular map. A piece of my heart felt like it was home, despite that I had never stepped foot in the country.

I nodded my head vigorously, trying to suppress my excitement. Why would a teacher call me over? Was it for a special treat? Had she somehow bought some Korean candy or snack? I had introduced many of my friends to Korean foods before; they had always raved about it whenever we had play dates at my house. The thought of a treat filled me with joy. She motioned me to stand beside her, where she was holding a food wrapper of some sort. “Can you read this?” I tried to ignore the pang of disappointment, before looking at the shiny blue plastic. It appeared to be from some assortment of cookies.

“This isn’t Korean,” I said defiantly, staring at the loopiness of the characters. “I think it looks Japanese.” The woman looked puzzled at my words as if I had uttered some gibberish to her. She was one of the after school program teachers who looked after children whose parents were too busy to come as soon as classes were over, although I had yet to talk to her. She seemed aloof most of the time, and not interested in whatever games we children had.

“But isn’t it the same?” I frowned at her question, furrowing my brows. I could not bring myself to meet her gaze, and steadied my eyes on the blue wrapper. A flash of light from the fading sun distracted me, and I shook my head slowly, sneaking a peek at the woman’s wristwatch. It was almost time for my mother to pick me up from the after school care. I did not want to stay here anymore. I could hear my friends, their shrill voices behind me somewhere on the playground in a vicious game of tag. A part of me longed to join them, but a larger part of me wanted to vanish under the woman’s scrutinizing gaze.

“We aren’t the same. Japan is an island. Korea isn’t!” The woman shrugged, and I felt a flare of anger at her obvious disinterest. It was worse than the children who always assumed I was Chinese—at least they would acknowledge South Korea as a country after I spoke. “You can just ask my mom when she comes.” It seemed almost like a desperate way for me to prove myself, by dragging my mother into such an issue. The woman nodded, her gaze unfocused on me. She lost whatever scrap of care she had for me the moment I made my uselessness to her evident. At age five I would not have known that there are hopeless cases

to walk away from, but I was too stubborn to leave, my feet glued to that spot on the asphalt. I watched children run by, their shrieking laughter begging me to join. I did not.

By the time my mother came to pick me up, I was still standing beside the woman, my determination to prove her wrong overwhelming. She was fiddling with her phone, not sparing me a single look. My mother's warm eyes were wide in anxiety as she saw me standing there, and I could see the panic on her face. She was worried I had caused trouble, and the teacher was reprimanding me for my behavior. I waved at her brightly, my pigtails flickering from side to side at my enthusiasm, before I pointed at the discarded blue plastic on the ground, picking it up to show off the label.

"Is this Korean? It isn't Hangul, right?" I pestered as my mother looked over the blue wrapper. The woman put her phone away, diverting her attention back to the wrapper. She stared at my mother, ignoring the glee on my face as my mother shook her head. I resisted the urge to stick my tongue out, while the woman quirked her lips slightly, a hint of a frown revealing itself on her face.

"This is Japanese. I'm sorry I cannot help you." My mother spoke in her gentle voice. The woman forced out a chuckle, and it was obvious she could not simply state that they were "the same" as she had before. My mother gripped my tiny hand in her own before bidding the woman farewell. I did not wave goodbye.

Brittany is a high school junior from northern New Jersey. Interested in psychology, Brittany explores the concept of character development in her writing. She also enjoys drawing, playing with her dog Angel, and baking goods to share with friends and family.

Poetry

Winter's Cold Touch

By Talia Botelho

It is December

The frigid wind cuts my cheeks

Sadness creeps up behind me like a lion stalking its prey

It's January

The snow is pressed against the door

I do not want to leave the house anyway

Because the sadness has caught up to me

It's February

Then it's March

Months pass like clockwork

The sadness has morphed from a small pest to a horrific monster

The cold seems to be endless

However one late March day

The grass seems greener

I noticed a tulip poking its head through the dirt

The sun is warm on my skin

The air smells of summer and ice cream and the beach

It is April

And I am happy

Talia Botelho is seventeen years old and loves writing and reading. She also dances and plays the flute in her free time.

Cloud

By Alena Zhang

after Stone by Charles Simic

Looking from the earth, the cloud is humdrum:
the weathermen know how to answer it.
But within, it must be electric and stirring
because Lake Erie pulls on it full weight,
because the oaks lust for a touch, a drink;
the cloud floats, swift, battle-ready
to heaven's alcove
where the redwoods come to brush on it
and whisper.
I see sparks bolt and branch
when two clouds converge.

But a zephyr often waits

over there – just behind that hill
to blow out the cotton-ball candle

flames, burning fervent yet

ever so brief.

Go above a cloud

that would be my way.

Life of a Second Thought

By Mehar Haleem

I was never meant to exist; the carnival of grotesque, which I am.

And yet I contaminate the contents of my host, adjusting my bulges into her white framed skull.

She sits there now.

Pregnant. With fears.

I've always known how to make an entry.

I'll crouch in, shrouded as a logical deduction.

A mathematical certainty.

But beneath the pathetic veil of it all, a mere byproduct of my host's suspicions; a mental manifestation of her insecurities.

Some days we get along, and some days we act like strangers, while she plays hopscotch with her gut feelings.

That's all the relationship I've ever had; a parasitic existence.

Always the runner up.

The two in a world of ones.

A leftover, scavenging for the spotlight.

The aftermath of her calculations.

Silently seeing how comfortable she becomes with the temporary.

How answers are most valued at the time of their respective questions. And how I'm needed only when those answers can't make it.

I can hear the colours she's seeing. Obnoxious reds with screaming oranges.

I've seen contentment, and it bored me.

But before I start the chaos, I must honour the peace.

It's only polite .

Mehar Haleem is a seventeen year old student who writes for the editorial board of her school . She has previously won several creative writing competitions and her works have been published / are going to be published in the forthcoming issues of Alexandria Quarterly, The Noisy Island,Sprout and Inklette. She currently lives in New Delhi , India.

In The Next Few Months

By Georgia Eugenides

One month from now I'll
be rushing towards the lake at 5am and riding
in cars with windows rolled down and falling in love
(and consequentially waking up alone.) After the sun
crawls behind the mountaintops like an old woman reaching for death, I'll be sitting in the
parking lot across from the alpenglow and mourning the past the same way that
butterflies secretly mourn for their cocoons.

Two months from now you'll
be sitting at your desk and studying the Punic Wars;
the detailed battle plans distract you from the fact that your cellphone doesn't light up with
my name anymore. After
you've picked a side, (Carthage or Rome,) you'll lie on your back and convince yourself that
knowledge is more meaningful than love.

Can you picture me when you close your eyes?
Or do my features blur with those belonging to every girl you've ever kissed goodnight?

Three months from now I'll
be working at my first job and sneaking into
cheap concerts on weeknights and worrying
that I'll never live up to my parents' expectations. After my mother falls asleep on the couch,
I'll sit with a notebook in my lap—thankng you for the heartbreak—
because I wasn't able to write about our relationship
until you crushed it under the toe of your
yellow Doc Martins.

Four months from now you'll
be living out your dreams and
chasing after girls with azul irises and spitting the meaning of life out on the bathroom floor
like the seeds of a bitter fruit.

I have dark eyes, dark hair, and freckles scattered across the bridge of my nose.

Five months from now I'll
be searching for you on the pages of novels
assigned in English class and wondering what it would
feel like to be the most powerful wave on the electromagnetic spectrum. After realizing that
life is not a mathematical equation, I'll understand why
I allowed you to watch me undress in the mid-morning glow,
but pulled your hands back violently
as they reached for my poems.

Georgia Eugenides is an eighteen year old poet who grew up in Berlin, Germany; Chicago, IL and Princeton, NJ. Her first poem was published when she was nine years old. After spending the previous summer interning at The Paris Review, she decided to submit some of her own work to various publications.

The Cambridge Girl

By Alex Walsh

On sleepless nights, I take to envying
the Cambridge girl: the embodiment,
with her short, metropolitan hair,
striped blazers and scuffed shoes,
of all things literary
which I am not.

She has already made her peace
with the language that soothes me
but cannot sate me, buried
her shameful roots in Austen and
Keats while mine rear lustily
through each letter I write,
for I cannot twist my words
until my will has nothing more to say.

She and her studies flaunt
their joy like a ring,
her as happy in her books
as they are to have discovered
a new mistress, a rising talent
come to lift them from obscurity;
but I do not trust so openly

what I read or what I leave
in my wake, its power too great
to reckon with or claim as my own.

Alex Walsh studies Math and Literary Arts at Brown University. Her work has previously appeared in Coldnoon, Eunoia Review, Journal of Humanistic Mathematics, and Catalyst, among others.

Elegy for the Fourth Wisdom Tooth that Never Grew In

By Joseph Felkers

I

Here, this is the dentist chair. Not quite operating
table, not quite lazy boy. Here is where IV
drips honey into dreamless sleeps & where the surgeon
will teach you how to pronounce maxillofacial. I have not reached

II

the age of wisdom, but that does not mean I don't deserve
procedure. I will swallow whole all my anxieties and digest
them into nerve & bone & REM. I'm a good boy

III

& if you say addict I'll probably cry. I'm a good
boy & I know how to swallow gauze like a man.

IV

Here, this is the straw that you may not sip
from. Dry sockets only come for boys who stain
their teeth with coffee & cigarettes & soup. I'm a timer

V

set for the hour that I can take just one more Vicodin.

Joseph Felkers is a junior at Catholic Central High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His work appears or is forthcoming in SOFTBLOW, decomP magazinE, Rust + Moth, and Superstition Review among others. He is a genre editor for Polyphony H.S., a reader and past-mentee with The Adroit Journal, and an ice cream connoisseur at his local parlor.

Impostor Syndrome

By Anastasia Nicholas

i am living the wrought iron fence american dream.

when i stroll through the neighborhood, i wave to everyone i see,

even the dog-walkers who sneak in from the main road.

i have acquiesced to the habit of asking questions

without really caring about the answer, and

i used to pick worms off the sidewalk the morning after rain

hoping to feel something, but i didn't, so i stopped, and

the greatest bone-crushing blow to my prospects

is that i was not enthralled by a talent as exacting as mathematics,

or science; what is the formula for creating beautiful art—i don't know—

and what has creation ever done for me?

my yard ends precisely where yours begins.

i used to pick dandelions and bring them to my mother

and when i went back outside, she threw them away;

i always thought that it was devastating, but it turns out that

it happens to everyone. it's a hardship we all share:

the privileged tragedy of our day.

i type a careful combination of thirty-six words about myself;

it's a foolish dance, and i am ashamed.

it all seems like a pseudointellectual lie, but

twelve years plus one of schooling has taught me

the importance of clinging to Martian formulas.

in the Well-Developed Youth Program, we read a story

about an alien race that came to earth to tell us

our numerical system was all wrong. since then,

i've privately held the belief that it's true.

my grief counselor told me about a girl who used to dance

in front of her window at night, and i couldn't stop thinking

about the supermarket, with the live lobsters in the glass tank.

i used to pick my favorites and want to take them all home

but now i spare them a wistful glance, careful not to tap the glass.

Anastasia Nicholas is an eighteen-year-old journalism student. She has been published in Assonance, Canvas, Glass Kite Anthology, and Inkwell, and her poetry has received statewide awards. Samuel Taylor Coleridge is her celebrity crush.

Sea Salt

By Umang Kalra

I became the shore, jagged,
tired scraps of soil spun into
heaps of sand, crumbling
forms, cracked and aching,
waiting for the next wave
of the ocean's suffocating
embrace – dry land trembles
for the taste of liquid salvation,
every sigh enveloped in
forgetting, every minute spent
naked in the sun's sordid
heat, spent drowning the sting
of the salty sea in the tide
of welcome ecstasy: I became
the helpless seaside, glaring
open, an endless tapestry of
hollow spaces, barren, waiting
to be filled with the sputtering
waves that seek to swallow me,
all wrapped up in words, lonely
syllables that would have

plainly spelled your crooked
name, if only I'd had eyes
with which to see

Umang Kalra is an eighteen-year-old museum enthusiast, obsessive reader, procrastinator, airport lover, art nerd, and travel addict. She is currently pursuing an undergraduate degree in History from Trinity College, Dublin.

Fiction

Postcard Truths

By Lauren Otolski

It's sunset when dance class finally lets out, and the fingerprints and small children's nose-smudges painting the strip mall doors catch the colors and create a network of pink and orange trails. The tangerine sun, round and bright as a stoplight, dips its bottom edge behind the silhouettes of pines beyond the highway. While the orange glow paves a warm new layer over the road, I feel the smooth brush of dusk on my skin. Just out of touch, but waiting.

I'm half-tempted to drop my purse in the studio so I don't have to stand here with it awkwardly shifting my center of gravity. I could toss it in my backpack, of course, but what's the point of bringing what I don't need? I'm standing here, bathed in the final light of summer, and I'd like to think I won't need things like purses or high heels when fall's first rays emerge on the other side of tonight. Because by tonight, I'll be riding in a bus with streetlights flashing by my tired eyes, heading towards California and my sister.

Or maybe I won't. I feel pinpricks across my arms and down my neck: the feel of half-tangible strings pulling me towards home, towards California, and everywhere in between. But the bus station is just across town, and Addie's latest postcard and the seventy dollars she sent are jabbing corners through my jean pocket. ('This should be half of the money you need to get a bus', she wrote. 'So you're technically halfway here. Miss you, signed Addie.') I want to hear her laugh infused in the words again, instead of having to siphon it from my memories and inject it myself. I want her to pull me into the store where she buys all of her postcards, and go through bulk crates of shaped erasers like we used to do at the general store when we were younger. I want to be able to stand solid at the fringe of the surf, eyes closed, knowing that Addie or her girlfriend, Kenna, will laugh and jerk me back if the water makes a rush for my shoes.

And yet...

Mom thinks I caught a ride home with some dance 'friends', although I don't think she fully realizes that our relationship is more 'taxi-driver-and-awkward-rider' than anything else. Nor does she realize that the people I told her were driving me have been up at their cabin for the past week. I have an hour before the maybe-my-bus to California pulls into the dusty station though, so I can only hope she won't notice I'm not home before I'm gone.

I'm not too worried. I shoulder my sister's old backpack and watch the strong orange light emphasize the topography of my skin as I start down the street.

II.

I made up a story for my younger brother, Toby, when he asked me what happened to Addie. At that point, no one knew, but I kept imagining the last time I saw her at her desk, haloed slightly by the lamp. I kept layering meaning over the image — I still do — because maybe she was drafting letters to us that never got left behind, or scouring a bus route map to see which stop she should meet Kenna at, or digging her painted nails into the soft tabletop as she debated bringing Toby or me with. But until her first postcard came for me, she had vanished. So the story I created, technically, was just as true as any other at the time.

I told Toby how Addie slipped out the front door in the middle of the night, and how soft dawn grayness mingled with her frayed braid as she biked down the highway. I related how general-store-Kat said she stopped by at five in the morning, which was true, and that Kat told me Addie bought a handful of limp peach and fuchsia balloons, which was possibly not true.

Toby coiled his comforter around his arms. “And then what?”

I wasn’t sure if there really was a maze-like mass of water pipes crossing the back, outside wall of the convenience store, and I resolved to never look. But I said our sister clambered up them with the balloon skins wedged in her backpack straps, and when she reached the top, she filled them with the sky. They bulged, straining for the dawn — “Because they were the same color, the balloons thought they were part of it,” I explained — and Addie held on. She dashed across the flat rooftop and threw herself into the sky, her fingers tangling balloon ribbons and clouds. The balloons’ swollen stomachs lifted her up above the dimming streetlights, above the awakening town, above us.

And just like that, I pulled truth out of maybe-fact for my younger brother. I wonder who will do that again, when I’m gone.

III.

I know what Addie really did bring though, besides the list of things Kat said she’d bought. I name them in my head as I continue down the sidewalk. Her backpack, of course, the backpacking one she’d proudly purchased from a garage sale before Mom said she could definitely not go out into the wild by herself. She probably stuffed clothes inside in the way she always did, by shoving them so that they sprung out like patchwork flowers when the bag opened, and she took the stuffed animal pig I gave her when I was six. And for whatever reason, she swiped Dad’s half-pack of cigarettes from where they’d been stagnating on the washing machine for two years, as if she thought they’d seep nicotine courage into her skin. But what’s the use in muddling Toby’s truth with another?

IV.

I told Addie she should tell Mom. She scowled and muttered something under her breath, but I missed it over the roar of the school bus's engine.

"She won't get it," she said, louder.

"At least try," I urged, but I could tell Addie was already envisioning Mom shoving her towards the door, shouting. Or worse, turning away in passive-aggressive disappointment, where the situation was officially 'okay' but really wasn't. I guess Addie would rather run than face the unknown.

But then again, how am I any different? How many times have I told Mom an altered truth about what I'm doing, because I can't help but think of the possibilities of how she could react? My lack of friends, for instance. The hours of creeping through the reedy wetlands behind the elementary school, collecting duckweed on my sneakers as I pursued frogs, replaced with made-up gatherings at the dance seniors' houses. I've created separate lives for every person around me, separate stories that, to everyone else, are pretty much truths.

Addie did the same thing, to an extent.

"It's a brave idea, to leave," she asserted in one of her postcards, after I wrote about the time I went to a party and spent the whole time sitting awkwardly in the corner, hidden in the glare of the color-changing lights. "You don't have to tell anyone about not really having all those friends you said you did, and deal with Mom's disappointment and whatnot. You can just appear somewhere else and be who you want to be."

I wish she would send letters rather than postcards sometimes, so that she could slip a photograph in the envelope and show me who she really wanted to be, and who she claims she is now. My only clues are her words, assuming she's not writing me more false truths, and the marks that appear on the postcards: smudges in the corners and coffee rings overlaying the shiny pictures. When I rub my fingers over the slightly-raised circles, a chill darts down my arms. My sister never drank coffee; the warm, bitter scent always calls to mind rushed commuter adults and makes me wonder what I will find in California, if anything.

There's a playground across the road from the bus station, a remnant of the now-defunct day care. The equipment is painted green, and the now-purplish light is tinting it a navy shade while the metal's joints catch the last glints of sunlight. Addie, Mom, and I used to come here to pick up Toby.

Does Toby have a multi-truth life yet, or is he too young? He's peering over the edge of childhood, ready to dip into middle school, and I know it will be too late when he finally enters. He'll learn how to turn lies into truth, just like Addie and I did.

I watch a thin dribble of golden light slide down the swing set pole as the sun finally disappears behind the optometrist building. The clock on the corner, with its face protected behind yellowed plastic, shows eight-twenty. I have ten minutes before the bus comes, so I slowly start across the street. It's quiet now, almost eerily so; the crickets have stopped chirping as summer seeps out of the air, the highway's noise has quieted to a drone, and the usually-present families around the clump of restaurants have been replaced by a single cashier reclining on a bench outside the pizzeria. Somehow, I thought that my mind at least, would be crowded with emotions and jostling thoughts, but it too, is quiet. Everything seems to revolve around Addie, Toby, and me.

Will Toby make up truths? Will he know that I, too, climbed aboard a bus when I got tired of my life, or will he say that I chased after the sister with the balloons, inflating my own as I ran? I tell myself that I shouldn't be thinking about him, that this is about me now, but I can't help but wonder what this will lead to. Will sneaking across the country become almost a rite of passage, a tradition? Will my brother leave Mom behind, wondering what she did wrong?

What did she do wrong? I try to pinpoint a specific event, but all I can unearth is a writhing sense of discomfort. It wasn't a single happening; it was dozens, hundreds of little ones that slowly, slowly stilled my chattering mouth when she was around. And then, after Addie left, it was as if my sister had left a ghostly hand behind. Every time a flock of thoughts lighted around me when Mom and I were together, I'd open my mouth to share them, and my Addie's arm would shoo them back into the sky. Back into my own mind.

That's why I need to go. I need to get back to Addie, so we can let them free again.

VI.

The man behind the ticket counter doesn't say anything as I walk into the bus station. There's a family with a little boy perusing pamphlets in the corner, luggage-less, but the handful of other people who look like they're actually traveling are mostly scattered across the stiff-backed benches.

Why do I want to suddenly look up and see Toby, watching me over one of the armrests?

Addie's postcards stick their corners through my pocket and prick my side. "Come on," they urge, in my sister's voice from three years ago. "Get that ticket already."

I want to tell myself that I'm hesitating because of fear, but I can't. I'm not scared; not while I have pictures of far-off cities and the Pacific Ocean stacked in my pocket like a pile of tiny windows. I'm more scared of staying here, sinking into false versions of myself, and yet I can't move.

Toby. Mom.

No one looks at me as I merge my sneakers with the red-orange tiling. I imagine Mom realizing that I'm missing tonight. Will she panic, like she did with Addie? Or will she somehow know where I've gone, and why?

Not why, though. I don't think she'll ever know why.

I hear the purring of a bus in my ears, even though the station is quiet. It's a phantom, really: a memory of Addie's bus, a prediction of mine. Maybe a forethought of Toby's when he decides that this is how to be brave, and tries to shed the non-truth layers of himself he's built up. It's rumbling past, but I can't see if I'm among the faces behind the tinted glass.

Maybe that doesn't need to happen, but what about Addie? Maybe she'll send me her phone number one of these days. Or maybe she'll disappear again. But either way, she has Kenna. She has me, and Mom, whether she thinks she does or not.

But I could still go...

The windows are near-perfect mirrors now, on account of the darkness outside. But when I study my reflection, which is as illusion-like as I feel, a spark winks from beyond. It's the streetlamps flickering to life, but when I blink at the closest one, more emerge like stars at dusk. The lights outside Toby's school glint through the trees. The purple strands outlining the ice cream shop, where our family used to go together, are barely visible from their spot far down the street. And far after, even though I can't see them now, are the lamps on either side of my house's doorway. A glow will be emanating through the windows from the kitchen, where Mom and Toby will be waiting for me over bowls of cooling spaghetti.

I can fold false truths so seamlessly around people. I can give people a lens through which to see me. But I can also push back through the bus station door, I can follow the sparks, I can feel dusk disintegrating around me...

I can pull back the worlds I've constructed for people, wipe away the falsities, and build everything back together again.

Lauren Otolski is a senior at Minnetonka High School. In addition to writing, she enjoys exploring parks, volunteering at a local farm, and playing clarinet in her school's marching band.

Waning Moon

By Vanit Shah

I close my eyes and pray with every single fiber in my body, cold sheens of sweat running down my face, frantic gasps of air escaping raggedly from the corners of my mouth, the persistent drumming of a frantic heartbeat echoing its tormented cadence through my ears. Please, not this time. I pray to you, oh Lord Almighty, not this time! I desperately clutch my aching head with both hands, trying to numb the flaring bursts of terror pulsing their way through my body. My guilt-stricken soul refuses to find solace in the name of God. I swear I'll do anything, please, not this time, PLEASE!

The desolate trees swayed menacingly in the harsh winter wind as a young woman sprinted her way through the barren forest. Her breathing was heavy, the stitch in the side of her chest burning every step she took. A little boy, no older than five, was in her arms. The pain was almost unendurable, but yet she ran, through the grizzly storm with flecks of snow stinging at her bare face and hands. She gritted her teeth and shook off her pain. She had to stay strong for her child. Safety and refuge was close. All she had to do was keep up her pace a little while longer. She smiled at her sleeping son.

A waning moon slowly emerges from behind the parting storm clouds. The omnipresent darkness that inhabits my room is gently cut apart by silvery tendrils of light, casting shadows upon the walls, the ceiling, the floor, the entire room. For a heart-stopping moment, everything is silent. I look up, my face shining with tears, my cheeks bearing the marks of desperate, clawing hands. My ragged breathing has all but ceased, my frantic heart, pounding so laboriously just a few moments back, has ceased to beat. Everything is still. Everything is eerily still. And then, he comes for me.

The young woman barely slowed her pace as she eyed an icy bridge spanning a deep chasm several hundred yards ahead. But her pursuer was gaining on her, a cloaked giant of a man armed with a spear, his cruel eyes blazing. The woman slowed her pace and stepped on the bridge nervously. It held her weight, but swung dangerously. She made it halfway before she collapsed to her knees, the fatigue getting the better of her, her frostbitten limbs unable to carry on any longer. Her child was jolted awake by the fall, and desperately shook her, screaming for her to get up and unable to understand why she was kneeling so forlornly in the middle of a bridge. "Mama. Mama. Please Mama, get up!"

The shadows are moving rapidly towards each other. The darkness writhes and contorts in unconcealed hatred, fusing into itself, giving birth to a monster that seeks vengeance for a crime long buried in the deepest chambers of mind, for a sin that has scarred my soul beyond repair. It will deliver my punishment every single night, night after night. It will never forgive. It will never let me forget. My eyes are wide open in terror, unable to take my eyes off the swirling apparition of darkness who staggers towards me, determined to possess. Its arm rises, towards my convulsing body. No. No. NOOOOO!

The young woman opened her eyes. "My son," she whispered hoarsely. "Keep running away from here. Cross the bridge and you will see a steep hill that you have to climb. Reach the top and you will find people who will help you. Go now". The boy refused to leave his mother. "No Mama. Come with me, please!" he cries. The mother's eyes brimmed with tears at the sight of her child trying to tug her along. But there was no time to lose. The man was getting closer by the minute, the sneer on his face visible. The woman wrapped her arms around her son, holding in the flood of tears that threatened to break lose any moment. "No matter what happens, remember that I will always love you," she said lovingly.

I am immobilized in fear as the dark spectre takes a fluid form, swirling slowly around me, spinning faster by the second. A cold wind whips my hair. A long, drawn out scream issues from my mouth. A chorus of disembodied voices begin their hoarse chant, the words thrown by the gale. Coward. Weakling, whispers one. You can never escape your burden, sneers another. But perhaps the most chilling voice, that of a young boy's. The voice I dread hearing every night, a voice of pain and misery I cannot comfort, for which I will never get a chance for redemption. Why didn't you help? Why? WHY?

The mother pulled away gently and caressed the cheek of her young son. She smiled warmly, rose to her feet and turned to meet the man who had begun to stride purposefully across the bridge. The boy turned and ran as fast as he could, tears streaming down his face, his inner conscience screaming at him to stop, to go back, to help. He didn't hear the screech of metal as his mother drew a short knife from a metal holster, nor did he hear the shatter of ice as she plunged the blade into the bridge. Cracks formed in the ice at an alarming speed, spreading outward from the point of impact. Any minute now, it would be over.

The darkness slows its pace, solidifying once again into a dark apparition sitting at the edge of my bed. Gazing right at me. I know what is coming. The image that is eternally branded behind my eyes, an image that refuses to part from the dreaded chambers of my inner mind. Time slows as the monster slowly reaches up and grabs the hood covering its head, slowly drawing it back to throw the sunken visage of my deepest enemy into the silvery light. As always, my eyes refuse to close. All I can do is gape at the face of the being I sentenced to misery on that fateful day...that fateful day...

The cracks had spread throughout the entire icy walkway within seconds. The man, startled into inaction by the mother's actions, halted several feet away from her, too scared to take a single step for fear of unbalancing the bridge further. The woman sighed contentedly and envisioned the warm glow of the short, blissful time she spent with her son. She closed her eyes for the last time. On the other side of the bridge, the boy had halted at the foot of the hill, panting heavily. He didn't turn around as the bridge collapsed, sending shards of snow-white ice tumbling gracefully into the fathomless void below.

They say that one's greatest opponent is the manifestation of all the negative qualities that he possesses. The evil within one's soul that must be fought in a gruelling battle, day after day. You killed us that day, screeches the apparition in my mind. We lost everything we had, reduced us to the broken husk of a human being you are now! Tears fall down my face as I look at the tormented face of a young boy no older than five, burning with the grief of

losing his mother, a manifestation of the good entombed deep within me, qualities that don't have a chance of resurfacing. Qualities I lost after losing mother...

I suddenly bolt from my bed, running towards the window with the cries of the spectre fresh in my ears. You forgot what she told us! You neglected to remember how she lived, and chose solitude. Running away WON'T SOLVE YOUR PROBL – "The apparition never finished his sentence for I had yanked the curtains over the windows with all my might. The moonlight dissipated, and I was left standing by myself in a dark room, shaking with grief. I don't know how long I stood there, but when I finally moved, I crawled into bed, determined to find refuge in a few hours of undisturbed sleep.

Outside the window, a waning moon twinkles innocently from behind the refuge of several misty storm clouds, making its eternal voyage across the heavens, night after night, for everyone to admire...or fear.

Vanit Shah is a student at Turner Fenton Secondary School in Ontario. He enjoys spending his free time writing creative fiction, performing as a lead trumpeter for his school jazz band, and arguing in general with his two younger siblings. His love for writing has earned him recognition with the Poetry Institute of Canada on several occasions, although his true ambitions rest in inspiring others to make the world a better place, one small action at a time.

The Girl in Yellow

By Suzy Shin

The girl in yellow, she stood motionless on top of a hill. She pressed two phones so tightly over her ears that she could no longer hear the birds chirping above her.

She had climbed almost an hour through the woods to get to there. The sun flooded through the trees, the birds adeptly maneuvered themselves between the branches, and wildflowers sprouted in every nook and cranny that wasn't taken up by other life. The forest was alive, awake unlike her town where the people drowned under the dark, oppressive air no matter what season. She could hear the River rushing downstream, hurrying towards some unknown destination.

The view of the village was quite peaceful, as if the turmoil across the sea of pine did not exist. The grass seemed greener and the sky seemed bluer today. Embracing the sun and the wind and the nature, the girl in yellow dialed two numbers. Both rang for what seemed like an eternity, but finally, a woman picked up one line and promptly a man picked up the other. In unison, both said, "Hello?"

"I'm going to do it today. I wanted to call to say goodbye," the girl responded.

"Don't forget what I told you," the man replied.

The girl whispered, "Mom? Dad? I know -"

The woman interrupted her, "Stay safe."

She couldn't tell if they could hear each other, but the tone of their stern, tense voices told her that they could. She had heard this tone only once before. It was the day her father left to cross the River only a few months before. He was safe now.

The sudden crunching of boots against the fallen branches in the near distance caught her attention. She quickly muttered "goodbye" into the phone in her right hand and hurled it into a pile of leaves where the trees and the clearing met. The remaining phone, filled with the deep heavy breathing that only a mother understands, remained close.

"Mother, when you arrive, I will make us food-" just as she began speaking, she spotted a military man emerge from the woods. The medallions on his crisp, seaweed green uniform reflected in the sun, and his shiny black combat boots glistened despite the permanent scratches from long ago. The girl fell silent, just as she had rehearsed with her mother. She had prepared herself to answer the man coming towards her. She hoped her mother understood her silence.

"What are you doing there, Miss?" His forehead crinkled and his eyes squinted from the sun despite the brim of his military patrol cap. It was the military man's job to watch them. This

run-in was not uncommon. If they stepped beyond the surveillance spectrum, it was the military men's duty to follow them.

She paused for a moment, remembering her answer. "I'm speaking to my mother who is coming home today from an overnight trip to buy spices. I cannot transmit calls from where I live, so I must hike up here to call her."

"Why don't you use your landline phone?"

"The landline phone we have only calls people in our town. This phone was lent to me by my neighbor to call my mother at my grandmother's house."

Grabbing her by the arm, he stated forcefully, "You are breaking—" but she continued to innocently stare into his eyes, never losing eye contact to ensure her authenticity.

He squinted his eyes once more, seeing honesty more than deception, before releasing her arm with a heavy sigh. He spoke in a hush to warn her, "Curfew cannot be missed."

"Don't worry, I won't forget. It's still late morning. I will have ample time." She smiled to reassure him.

The man disappeared back into the woods with no other words. He did not ask for the phone. He did not ask anything more than what seemed apparent to him: a girl calling her worried mother who was away. He would never know that her "missing" father was on a phone hidden in the brush.

Once he was a hundred feet into the forest, she murmured to her mother.

"Do not worry. Dad will get you out too." Her mother answered with silence. Closing the phone, she began to walk south, towards the River.

The sun broke through the layers of foliage as the girl cautiously trekked down the hill, looking over her shoulder every so often. In her arms she carried a handful of leaves, covering the traces of her footsteps as she went on. She could hear the River's rumbling nearby. He roared, like an unfed lion, waiting for his next meal.

Within an hour, she arrived at his feet. He greeted her with a rapid flow that led to unknown places. In her yellow coat, she sorely stood out in the midst of the browns and juniper greens surrounding her. Slowly, she inched towards the mud where the River kissed the Earth. Once more, she swung her head back, squinted her eyes, and searched vigorously for any signs of the military man. But all she heard was the whistling of the wind.

Her eyes still lingering on the great height of the pines, the chilled water encompassed her. The icy springtime water crept up her legs as she marched into the River. As she moved deeper and deeper, the water stuck onto her body with the same strong force that she had used when she refused to let go of her father's hand before he had crossed the River. Waist

deep, eyes closed, the adrenaline pulsed through her body as her heart leapt through her chest and her forehead wrinkled, as the River grew stronger and angrier as it swirled around her. Her clothing became heavier, water filling her pockets as if the River was trying to drag her down into an endless pit of darkness. She grew tense; frightened that she may have to swim. It was a skill she knew she would need, but it was neglected in her childhood days when drills and marches consumed her adolescent afternoons.

By the time she was shoulder deep, she was only a third of the way across. Her tiptoes struggled to touch the ground and with her chin raised, she saw the blazing red and orange sky above her dissipate into pink. Panic flooded her mind as she realized she had no choice but to swim. His current constantly nudged her balance every few seconds. Lifting her feet, she began to kick and flail her arms. But they failed her. The deeper she sank, the faster the air began to leave her chest. The River rushed up through her nostrils, slowly filling her throat and her burning lungs with water. He pulled her harder and harder as she tried to get away. The River did not wait for her. He had no mercy. He kept pulling at her feet, refusing to let go. Eventually, she had no choice but to give in.

He engulfed her, pulling her to the bottom. She felt the muddy floor against her shoes and she bent her knees, pushing herself off of the bottom. She returned to the surface for a moment. Several more times, she bent her legs and propelled towards the surface, her body tensing and burning each push upward. She had only moved a few feet from where she had been completely submerged, but she was already tired. Again, she kicked off the bottom and she began to kick. This time, she arched her back and kicked at forward angle. She moved her hands apart and together, propelling her body forward.

Apart. Together. Apart. Together. He pushed her downstream with even more force, but she kept going. She could feel a pounding through her whole entire body as she kicked harder. Apart. Together. Apart. Together. She was almost there.

She could see the shore on the other side. Its singing birds and croaking frogs shattered her concentration and she lost control of her body. She was ready to sink again, but, to her surprise, her foot hit earth and she stood there. One last time, she looked back as the dusk quickly turned to night. One last time, she glanced at the forest, the village, the River that kept her hostage, even when she had done nothing wrong. She turned forward, staring straight at the land that supposedly promised her freedom.

As she left him, she felt the weight of the River across her shivering shoulders. He hung heavy in her pockets. But she kept walking straight into the forest.

Night soon fell and without light, without warmth, it was only a matter of time before she would become food for a bear or freeze. She kept going, remembering what her father had said about a nearby town. She kept walking until she spotted a pile of branches in the distance. It was small, just long enough to fit her whole body and just wide enough to fit for her small stature. The branches strategically met at the top, making a triangle with the ground. Someone who had escaped must have created the shelter not long before her.

On all fours, she crawled inside and laid atop the soft leaves as she saw the night sky reveal its flashing stars. She always thought that they were fairies in the night sky, looking after her when she was afraid. This seemed especially true as she shivered. She thought the sky would look different across the River, but it was still the same.

Her body could not stop shaking and the girl rose to look for branches to start a fire. Her father had taught her how to build one years ago, long before he had purchased a gas stove, and although she had not made one in two years, she still remembered fiercely rolling a piece of branch between her palms, its tip against a wooden plank and some tinder.

With the scavenging done, she sat down beside her shelter and began rolling. Faster and faster, the sticks twirled between her small hands and soon enough, sweat formed in her palms. Though she didn't find tinder, some dry leaves did the trick. Testing for warmth, she put her hands against a flatter piece of wood. Sure enough, it was gaining heat. Soon, the girl was basking in the glimmering warmth. Although it was small, she tended to it with fierce attention and care, as if she was looking after a child. The fire turned to glowing embers and the night sky became darker. Lying down, she planned her morning, starting with finding the trail that her father had explained would be only an hour walk from the River. Maybe she would run towards the path. Maybe that would get her there faster.

At the bottom of the path there would be a town. Maybe there would be people walking by. Maybe her father would be waiting for her and she would run up to him and take comfort in his embrace. Then, as the embers died, she fell asleep despite the cold, hoping to wake up to the sunrise.

Yoon Soo (Suzy) Shin is a senior at The Hotchkiss School in Lakeville, CT. She enjoys reading shorts stories and essays by David Sedaris, Nella Larsen, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Edwidge Danticat and likes exploring themes such as love, transnational identities, and the cross section where these two themes meet. In her spare time, she likes watching Parks and Recreation, going hiking with her dad, and playing Cards Against Humanity with her friends.

The Most Dangerous Endeavor of a Nail Artist

By Emily Pineo

Times like this, I wish someone I knew shared my interests. I long for an ally during this impossible mission. If only my dog had opposable thumbs, I could teach him to do this for me. I must endeavor, all alone, to the terrifyingly difficult task of painting my nails with my non-dominant hand.

I'm right-handed, in a world designed for right-handed people. Yet, the world of nail painting doesn't allow the same level of ease that cutting with a pair of scissors does. My left hand's nails have been polished perfectly, with no flooded cuticles, and no stringy topcoat.

Now I must face my fears; now I must travel to new heights in my painting expertise. I must paint my right hand's nails. That may not sound very scary, but when that nail polish bottle is staring directly into your eyes and the brush is taunting you with its ability to drip into your cuticles, you find out what kind of woman you are.

I lower the brush into the bottle, scrape off one side of the brush, leaving the perfect amount of polish on the bristles. Carefully I brush across the middle of my pointer finger's nail. I go back in for a perfect second stroke across the left side. Then, just as I'm admiring my excellent control over the bright-red, cuticle-staining nail polish, my third and final stroke ends in tragedy.

The brush goes just a little too close to the cuticle, and that's all it needs. The brush and cuticle make contact. The floodgates open up into the rest of the cuticle, promising to remain red until I whip out the evil, devilish, skin-drying acetone.

And that's why only perfect people can use bright-red nail polish.

Emily Pineo is a high school sophomore. She enjoys painting her nails, studying law, and dancing. Emily is also eternally frustrated by her attempts to comprehend the Spanish language.

iPocalypse

By Noah Darfus

This is the story of Spe Ultima. You will only hear this once, before your music resumes. The choice to listen is up to you. Choose wisely.

“Warning: Battery low. Charge device as soon as possible. Repeat: Begin charging device.”

The announcement jolted me awake. I felt like I had been daydreaming, but the feeling was stronger than just that. I felt like I was waking up from a coma. But something was... different. Things seemed quieter than usual. Like something was missing....

“My music!” I looked down at my iPhone and realized that nothing was playing on it.

That was very unusual for this day and age, ever since the passing of the United Nation’s Jam Session Act of 2110. That was six years ago. Since that time, all iPhones were programmed to play music non-stop. It sounded like a weird law at the time, but nobody had argued with it, because everyone basically had their headphones in non-stop anyway. Their reasoning behind the law was that if everyone was always listening to encouraging music, everyone would always be in a good mood. This means no more wars, not even a bickering match. The thing is, it had worked. I hadn’t heard anyone yell in ages... in fact, I hadn’t heard anyone at all.

“Begin charging device as soon as possible. Begin charging device.”

I looked up from my phone. I was sitting in my living room. That’s funny; the last thing I remembered was putting my headphones in this morning as soon as I woke up. I looked at the clock. It now read 8:00 PM.

Where had the day gone? I literally remembered none of it. I couldn’t have told you if I had spent the day in school, or if it went by while I was pulling off a bank heist. Not that I would do something like that...

“Charge device now!”

I ripped out my headphones. A searing pain jolted through my head, like I was pulling my brain out through my ears. I looked down at my headphones just in time to see something like tentacles slither into them. I rubbed my eyes and looked again. The tentacles were gone. How strange a day this was turning out to be. Or, ending as. I still don’t know where the day went...

“FINAL WARNING: BEGIN CHARGING DEVICE NOW!”

The announcement blared through my phone's speaker. With it, the soothing sounds of music. My brain became a little foggy, and I suddenly had the urge to charge my phone, so I could continue listening to my music. I reached for my phone...

"NO!" I grabbed my phone and hurled it out an open window. With a thud, I heard my phone hit the ground, and the music stopped. Almost immediately, my head cleared up, and I could think again.

"Honey? Are you okay down there?" My mom came down the stairs, headphones in and music playing. She saw me standing by the window, and quickly looked me up and down. Before I had a chance to say anything, she suddenly asked, "Where are your headphones?"

"Um, uh well... my phone... and charging... and something about a final warning..." I was stuttering hard.

"Ok, don't worry honey, there's an extra upstairs, I can just go grab it, so you can keep listening to your—"

"NO! I mean no, Mom. I don't want to listen to music anymore."

"Honey, you have to. The law says so. Go upstairs and put in your headphones, or I will have to call the cops on you. And we don't want that, now do we sweetie?"

"Mom, you don't understand. There's something wrong with the music. It was fogging up my mind. I couldn't think, and as soon as I threw my phone out the window, and the music stopped..."

"You threw your phone out the window? That's it." She put her phone up to her ear, and said "Hello? *usiCore*? I'm calling to report my son for destroying his phone and refusing to listen to music... Yes, he is acting aggressive... Yes, I've tried to get him to the backup..."

She turned around for a second. I used the chance to sprint out the back door. As soon as I got outside, I screeched to a halt. Everything was... different. But there was no time for that now. I could hear the sirens of the *usiCore* in the distance. I had to run. I took off, cutting through backyards, jumping over fences, avoiding dogs, complete with Mutt-Phones™ (Revision of the Jam Session Act in 2112 included designs for headphones that animals could use, so that they wouldn't feel left out), and basically just running for my life.

Once I was out of earshot of the sirens, I stopped to catch my breath. I looked around some more, and realized what was wrong. Everything was grayish, and everything just looked uglier and polluted. It had never looked this way before, at least not that I had noticed. Everything had always looked beautiful, with blue skies, beautiful nature, with flowers, and bunnies and rainbows, like it was a kid's coloring book or something. Now, I realized it was all fake. I had a suspicion that it had something to do with the headphones.

I looked around to try to figure out just where I was. I was in a suburb, probably somewhere near my house, but nothing looked familiar. I was behind someone's house, but there was a fence keeping the people inside from seeing. For whatever reason, I highly doubted that it mattered whether there was a fence or not, because more than likely, the people living inside probably never looked outside. In fact, it was probably safe to sneak a peek through one of their windows, and see just what was going on.

I sneaked around the fence, and pulled myself up to one of their windows, but only enough that I could see through. What I saw made my stomach drop.

There was a family sitting on the couch, watching the TV. They all had their headphones in, which wasn't unusual, but I noticed that they all acted completely brain dead. They just stared straight ahead at the TV screen. I adjusted myself so I could see what they were looking at, and it made my stomach drop even more.

The news was on, and on it was a reporter, with a big fat unflattering picture of me staring over his shoulder.

I couldn't hear what he was saying, but the words "Unentertained and Aggressive" were flashing across the screen. Great. That meant that everyone knew that I had smashed my phone, and they knew to look out for me. This made things a lot harder. But, I had an idea...

I waited until it was completely dark outside, then I retraced my steps until I reached my house. I needed some supplies, but it was going to be difficult not to be caught. As long as my mom didn't hear me, I would be okay.

My room was on the second floor, so I climbed up a gutter, and walked along the roof. When I got to where my room would be, I lowered myself down carefully to my window, and as quietly as I could, I climbed through my window. I had to move fast, or I would definitely get caught. I grabbed a book bag, stuffed some clothes in it, along with a hat, and my favorite watch. That's all I needed from my room, and I was about to climb back out the window when I suddenly realized what I really needed was in the garage. I stealthily went down the stairs, and into our garage. I grabbed screwdrivers, pliers, and some other tools. I had an idea on how not to get caught.

I went back up to my room and out the window, across the roof, and down the gutter again. It would have been a lot easier if I could have used the back door, but that would have set off an alarm that would have woken my mother up in an instant, and it would be game over for me. I quietly searched my backyard until I found my phone, ear buds included. Luckily, it wouldn't turn on, which is exactly what I wanted. I threw it in my bag, and took off.

I ran, once again escaping from being caught (or so I hoped), but in a different direction this time. I was headed for a nearby woods that I knew about. There, I had a hideout that I hadn't been to in a long time. The treehouse.

I had built it back in elementary school, before the Jam Session Act was created, and people actually went outside. I used to go there to read, or think, or basically just escape from the world. Now I was headed back for the same reasons, except this time it was a little more serious.

Once I got there, I threw my stuff down on the floor. My bag broke the old boards and fell through until it hit the ground. I heard a sickening crunch, and I almost cried when I realized my watch was in there.

I climbed down and grabbed my bag again, then started to climb back up, but a lot more cautiously this time. I didn't have time to make repairs yet, so I had to be careful not to break anything else. I set my bag down carefully this time, then opened it up to see what was still intact.

I pulled out my watch first, and was relieved to see that it had been spared. I reached for the phone next, and saw that the cracks were all the same as before, from when I'd thrown it out the window. That left the earbuds. Perfect.

I pulled them out to see that they had fallen apart, but what I found inside was sickening. It looked like a little balled up tentacle where the wires should be. That's what I had seen earlier when I ripped my headphones out. That must be why I couldn't remember anything past putting my earbuds in, because this thing somehow messes with my head. And that's what caused the massive headache...this thing getting ripped out of my brain!

It all made so much sense now. That's why the government would pass a law as stupid as the Jam Session Act! So they could control everyone through the power of music! How had nobody figured this out yet? I mean, everyone takes out their headphones each night so they can charge their phone (there's no headphone jack anymore, so you can only charge your phone or listen to music; not both at once), so how could nobody notice?

Wait; when my phone started playing music through the speaker, I immediately wanted to do what it told me! That means that all music has some kind of mind control ability! Then why the headphones? Maybe to strengthen the bond?

All this was hurting my head, and it was getting hard to think. It didn't help that I was exhausted from all this running. I needed to sleep.

I took some of the extra clothes out of my bag and used them as a pillow. I lay down and closed my eyes. A faint lullaby in the distance helped lure me into a sleep... I could figure this all out tomorrow. First, sleep...

I jolted awake to the sound of a car door closing. I shot up and saw red and blue everywhere. I jumped down from my treehouse and started to run. The usiCore had found me.

I started running for my life, weaving through the trees, away from the sirens and the red and blue lights. I looked back for a second and ran straight into a tree. I fell to the ground, and with a foggy head, heard footsteps closing in on me. I felt two giant arms grab me and lift me to my feet. Two enormous usiCore officers had caught me, and were taking me back to their police cars. As I was being dragged towards the police car, I saw a cameraman on the scene, and I had an idea. I kicked the officers as hard as I could, and they let go in their surprise. I sprinted towards the cameraman, but was grabbed before I got there. In a last desperate attempt, I screamed at the top of my lungs a final warning to all the world. Then one of the officers hit me in the head with his baton, and everything went black.

Your music will now resume.

Mrs. Ultima suddenly had the urge to go downstairs and watch the news. Never one to ignore an urge, she walked down the stairs with her earbuds in and turned on the TV. On the channel was live footage of the criminal kid she had heard about. It looked like they had caught him. She turned up the volume to hear what was being said. As it got to the clip of the teenager being dragged away, the voice of the reporter stopped, and the sound of the teenager's voice cut through the music coming from her headphones and went straight to her heart.

"Beware the headphones! Beware the iPocalypse!"

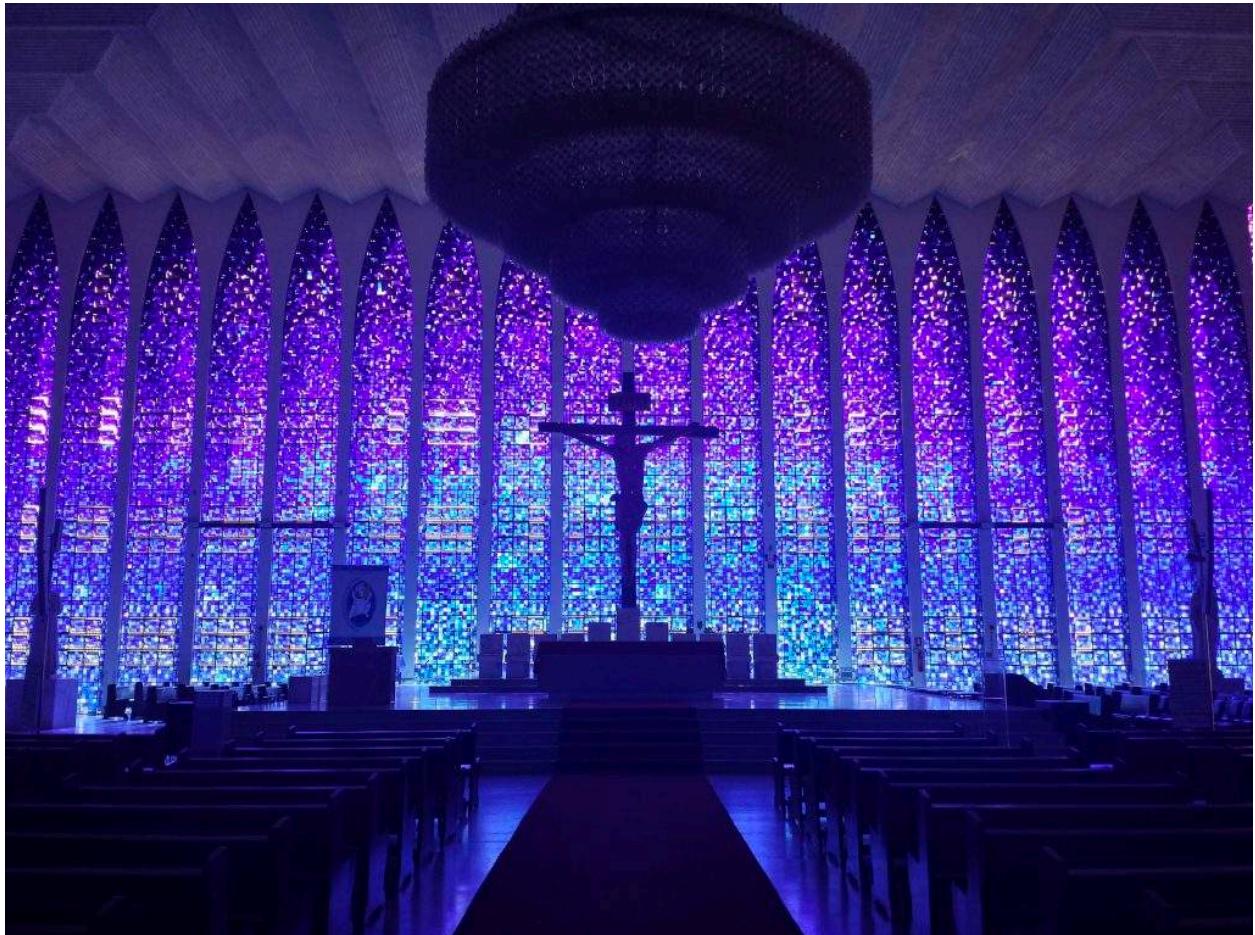
Mrs. Ultima was so startled that she dropped her phone. Her head cleared as the music stopped, and in total despair, she said "MY SON!!!"

Noah Darfus is a sophomore at Canal Winchester High School. Noah's English teacher gave his class a writing assignment, then challenged them to make it good enough to be published. Noah took it literally.

Art

Dom Bosco

By Helen He



Dom Bosco Sanctuary, Brasilia
Dom Bosco Sanctuary, Brasilia (photo credit: Helen He)



Dom Bosco
Dom Bosco (Adobe Photoshop)

I love expressing my passion for creativity. I've always had a wild imagination and a knack for doodling when I was young, but didn't realize the full potential of talent until I was introduced to the world of digital art. You can draw anything, and there's something fascinating about taking a figment of imagination, or a snapshot from an ordinary life, and turning that into a beautiful piece of art on a computer. Drawing makes me happy, and I want to share that same happiness in every piece of illustration I create. My inspiration for my art comes from everyday moments in the real world, because even the smallest things in life are magical. I like to keep my illustrations simple yet deep at the same time. Adobe Photoshop is my medium, as it helps me pick the right colors and lighting to make my art look its best.

Helen He is a doodlebug currently residing in Austin, TX. She began digital illustrations last year, and has no plans on stopping anytime soon. Her inspiration for art comes from all the little moments that make up daily life, whether it be grocery shopping or family vacations. When she's not noodling away on her Wacom tablet, she can be found surfing the Internet or cram building robots for the high school robotics team.

Tree of Life

By Betsy Jenner



Tree of Life

This oil painting was painted on a rainy day in my otherwise scalding hometown, Vellore. Almost all of my oil paints had dried up and the only colors that seemed to have not fully turned solid in the many months I had left them to collect dust were vermillion red, yellow

ochre, sap green, cobalt blue and a little bit of brown. I was immensely bored and fortunately in the mood to paint so I got creative with the last piece of chart paper left in my house. What started out as a few meaningless strokes finally ended up as a colorful painting of a tree suffused with ecological and philosophical meanings. I leave you to make the best sense of it.

Betsy is a seventeen-year-old from south India. She is tall, lanky and obsessive. Her writing and art have been published or are forthcoming in magazines like Polyphony H.S, The Tishman Review, Inklette, Page & Spine, The missing slate and Moledro, among others.

Three Apples, Cello

By Alexandra Bowman



Three Apples



Cello

I am a contemporary realist. I create artwork because I enjoy the fascinating and exhilarating process of translating what I see into something that provides a new way for the viewer to experience a subject; there is something especially satisfying about trying to interpret the artistic genius inherent in the existing world. I often experiment with seemingly ordinary subjects in order to surprise the viewer with a new perspective. I might focus on color, light, the curve of a form, the emotional power of an expression, or on capturing the essence of an object through line.

In my piece entitled Three Apples, I aim to emphasize the intensity of the apples' brilliant crimson hues through a quasi-surreal approach to color; my hope is that the viewer will pause and experience color as an extended sensation. Personal experience as a cellist inspired my work entitled Cello. This painting celebrates the graceful material form of the instrument itself as well as the cello's unique sound – its rich resonance and mellow tones. In addition to being published on TeenInk.com, Cello was recently a Grades 10-12 winner in the national "Celebrating Art" Fall 2016 contest, and will be published in a national anthology for student work at the end of 2016.

Blue Skies Over Tibet

By Megan Guo



Blue Skies Over Tibet



Megan Guo is a senior at Hangzhou No.2 High School in China. She was born in the United States and moved to China with her family at a young age. As Director of the Digital Video Club and a class reporter for the student body, she is passionate about using photography and videography to record memories for the future. Whether at her school's annual Sports Competition or travelling around China, it is rare to find her without a camera in hand.