



Cover photo by LJ Wolff Roy's Peak Wanaka, New Zealand

Issue 8

Poetry

January Night By Hannah Gold

I remember the weight.

I remember asking myself—

“Have you ever felt

This much on top of you?”

On your thighs on your shoulders—

Pushing your knees apart?

Have you ever screamed so internally?

I remember the sounds.

His tongue on my neck beating

My throat was shaking.

Hits 96 moaning in the background,

My choking echoing in the bass.

Screams would be preferable.

I remember before.

The drunkenness the smell of weed

And the car horn outside.

The weight and the thighs—

Sounds my neck him beating.

I remember his hand and the fear.

I remember the shaking the blood.

But I could not tell you what happened.

Hannah Gold lives and writes in Chattanooga, Tennessee. She hopes to attend Boston University next fall and study Russian Literature.

Wind Vignette By Taylor Fang

There's a small tear on the photograph in my hands,

my knuckles the only shapes not tinged

yellow with age: the color of sunlight. My body trying

to step through the film— clouds in the picture,

swallowing. My grandmother, my mother

tells me: black hair against the shining lake spray,

dress in the wind, weeping willow leaves

brushed across the sky like ink. Standing alone,

looking away from the camera, away from my eyes

trying to peel something out of the fragile paper.

Look at me, I want to tell her,

look at the girl who visited your grave while clouds

rolled their bellies across the wet green fields.

The girl who thought in that silence

she could find our roots. In any silence.

But there is none here, only my grainy searching.

Only you, grandmother, so far away

from the girl in this picture. Almost as far as I am

from you, because you died when I was small

and I can only look, trying to hear your voice:

wind rippling the lost reeds. Brushing against your dress,

fluttering, transient.

I think I could be the wind. Grazing against

your cheek, grandmother. The world is silent

just around your face.

Taylor Fang lives in Utah. Her poetry has been published in Glass: A Journal of Poetry, Sprout Magazine, HerCulture, and others, as well as recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. She also enjoys journalism, piano, and tennis.

To Tullula By Heather Jensen

in the carnage across the road

lives a pod of film.

7.99 from the pharmacy, across

from the laundromat,

and i have left it

in carcasses

and skeletons

of foliage.

the travelers who live

behind the thicket of cactus

tell me of subway tile and redwood elevators

but soil takes my tongue

where the highway cuts through my mouth,

and the cicadas leave their skin outside

my bedroom window, where

the moon is

the cold end of an eraser.

opportunity has its own wheels and i either

make my own

or catch on

quick.

Heather Laurel Jensen attends Red Mountain High School in Mesa, Arizona. She is co-president of her Scholastic Art and Writing Awards affiliate, where she has been awarded ten times, and she was a participant in the 2017 Adroit Journal Mentorship for poetry. Her work is published or forthcoming in Best Teen Writing of Arizona and Polyphony HS.

tattoo By Sofia Scarlat

the chair was as uncomfortable as were the bleachers we slept on when the game was done. however the pain was much worse than the burning sensation down my throat from back then. the needle hithithithit and hit again on the surface of my skin. 'distract yourself from the pain with pain in another area. pinch yourself' he said, as he held the ultimate power over my body in his hand, as the inky needle hithithithit and hit again. so I looked at you. and every moment of the golden hour was just all that much more volatile. and the pain was so much worse.

Sofia Scarlat is a fifteen-year-old short story and poetry writer, book author, traveler, movie and Chinese food enthusiast who finds making pancakes therapeutic and feels most at home in NYC. You can find her work in Whiteteethmag, Voices of Youth, The Paragon Journal and arts & culture Romanian magazine SUB25. She is a high school ambassador for Her Campus, as well as an editor for Artistique Magazine and blogger for her own website, where you can always find her, no matter where she is in the world.

erasure is By Stephanie Chang

erasure is

conviction boiling / at the line of screams

over autumn bruises / our faces

caged in river / this is where i weave ruses

& tell you how i collect rust in the barrel

of my throat / when i look you are de-aging

/ permafrost on lips / pretend that

only the earth is chapped & we are not

full of fangs / bottle-glass for teeth while

you mourn our bodies long buried

in a windowless room / a pool of slaughter

tugs at my ankles / garden snakes coil 'round calves

/ i lose step & watch

the whining of wings: blue jays bleed open

egg shells & fall out of the sky

/ what kind of death omen / tastes like apple cider?

requiems have no place here:

remember softness / tell me how you

fractured your arm singing from

the cliffside / did you taste the spill

of ocean like

grandiose rainfall or

did you drown in its yolk? / i ask

what you found on the hillside

& you lie / saying / *nothing*.

Stephanie Chang is a fifteen-year-old high school student from Vancouver, BC. Her work has appeared in *The Penn Review*, *The Rising Phoenix Review*, and *Horn & Ivory* zine. When not writing, she enjoys competing in debate tournaments.

Burn By Nandita Naik

At eleven, the burn left a dappled sea

across my legs. Picture body as terrain: swordfish threading

through reefs, divers rubbing their eyes in sleepless wonder.

Nurse told me to hold still. I couldn't.

Mako sharks were circling their prey;

how they laced my thighs like silvered scabs.

There is coral under my fingernails

from kneading burn cream into the reefs.

These hands of mine raised tsunamis, banished

the anglerfish to its cave. Tell

the electric eel it is no longer safe. Tell

the skin-bubbles that Nurse's needle

is buying for their blood.

(Like any good shark, it could taste fear.)

Five years later I pour green tea, unscathed.

A fly drowns in my cup. White hospital walls

dissolve with the tea leaves. Still I am afraid

of fish markets. Still it is not easy

to walk by rows of gutted eels and think:

Look at you, brother. They've got you now.

Every time I look at the sea, it muscles

into something colder. Seabirds are sent to pick apart my thighs, dark burn-spots

evaporating, smoothening.

The pebbled waves wouldn't know me now,

the way any good shark would call me alien

even though, I swear, I was animal once.

My skin wore bubbles like scales.

When I stole my body back from the tides,

I shook out the crabs from its pockets, listened to its pulse

the way fanged things fall in love with the night.

Nandita Naik is a junior at Proof School. She is published/forthcoming in the Rising Phoenix Review, Canvas Literary Journal, and Polyphony HS.

African Women By Kadra Haji

I come from a place where women clean,

wash restrooms and dishes not forced but

For a better future.

I come from a place where dirt rushes through your

Nails

where pedicures,

and nail polish don't even matter.

I come from a place where your feet rush through

sand

where shoes aren't even worn

I come from a place where not enough food is cooked

where the smell of spicy food runs through the valleys.

I come from a place where women's rights and education

were discriminated.

I come from a place where babies are left in streets

abandoned and born in refugee camps.

I come from a place where survival is the only choice.

Kadra Haji came to the US when she was three years old. Her family fled war in Somalia and lived in a refugee camp in Kenya. After years of trying to come to the United States, they were finally accepted as refugees and moved to St. Louis. She grew up in St. Louis and attends school there. She is in ESOL classes at school to help perfect her English. At home she speaks Mai-Mai, it is the language of the Somali Bantu people. In middle school she joined a poetry club and loved it. Poetry helps her express her feelings about life.

“ I am Muslim, and I wear a hijab, I am African, I am American, I am a part of two different cultures-I love it, but it can be hard. Last year we studied poems by Warsan Shire, they really spoke to me, and I started writing again. Writing poems just doesn't help me tell people who I really am but it also helps me understand who I really am. I see myself In the future one day helping make the world a better place.” (Kadra Haji)

Mirthless By Thamara Bryan

Bitter!

Blasé!

Chagrin!

He frowned lousily;

He wanted to die

As often as always.

These beasts allow themselves to smirch him

And denounce his reputation

Of honourable teacher

Into a blatant selfish monster.

Insincere!

Joyless!

Remote!

They must abhor him,

In his presence they are always oblique;

Speaking things their hearts couldn't feel-

But!

Behind his back,

Chiche! Gangs!

Vindictive fires

Words that pierced his soul,

-mind and heart.

He was obstinate.

He was dogged determined to disgrace them;

His decision was chancy-

But it mesmerized him completely.

The cheerful, joyous and jovial

Laughter and enthusiasm

They often share

As they bury him alive

Were prejudiced on his path.

He must set them to shame!

Teacher-

No!

Not that,

Nothing more than a sick savage!

It fascinated him;

How weak their respect was,

How lazy their hearts were,

How shallow their minds thought,

He was eager for his advantageous revenge.

Picking up his envious weapons

With a sharp smirk;

He walked into the classroom,

Holding the strength of his revenge.

The palliative source of his sorrows;

Tearing through their souls,

He let the beast loose.

-And no sound was heard.

He merried at their dismay-

All of them!

Everyone!

Looking so lost;

Mirthless!

Clueless!

And only five minutes remaining.

Thamara Bryan is a nineteen- year-old student of the University of Technology, Jamaica studying Actuarial Science. She gained a grade 1 pass in both English Language and Literature at the CSEC level where she sat 12 subjects passing all of them. She also obtained a grade 2 in CAPE Communication Studied. She has a passion for reading novels, poetry and stories and as such had experience writing her own works mostly based on experiences.

Ode to a Spork By Keegan Tunaley

Oh the spork

Ever smooth in your nature and physique

Slick

Encompassing

Spoon

Edged, to maim and massacre morsels

Sharpened

Deadly

Fork

Of Vilest abhorration of nature!

Most elegant hybrid of Amazement

Hidden and wrapped Corpse Prone To Penetration!

Clad in a shining cowl, ready to reveal it's simple beauty.

Simply a Spork.

Keegan Tunaley just started writing this year as part of a class, but has taken a liking to creative writing. This caused him to take a serious interest in getting published.

Fiction

Chickens By Zander Dorler

The Blackberry farm was a serene place with neatly kept fences and a large windmill standing as a nice landmark. Days were quiet except for a few snorts from the pigpen. But this day was an exception in the chicken pen, the day before Thanksgiving.

“Listen to me!” Ms. Cluckerson said with great anxiousness. “They are fattening us up, they are going to kill us and eat us.”

“Your crazy theories always make me laugh,” said Pickle-Strip while eating from the seeds and nuts on the ground. She thought Cluckerson was trying to be funny because there was no way the humans would hurt beautiful chickens like themselves. But Cluckerson was becoming quite bony from not eating and constant stress.

“The food will make you..’ Cluckerson was trying to think of something to convince her that she was right.

“What was that?” Pickle-Strip asked, full of confusion about what Cluckerson was telling her.

“The food will make you ugly, yeah it will make you ugly,” Cluckerson burst out thinking her answer was sure to convince her to stop eating. Pickle-Strip took great pride in her vanity.

“That is silly.” Pickle-Strip said. “How could food do that?” Cluckerson did not have an answer for that so she walked away thinking of other ways to convince her because if she convinced Pickle-Strip, everyone would agree. Everyone believed that whatever Pickle-Strip did was cool. And if every chicken believed and they all survived the human attack, Cluckerson would be a hero. All she ever wanted was to be liked.

Later that night she saw some chickens from three pens over being taken and was very alarmed. “Wake up! Wake up everyone! They are coming to eat us now!” Cluckerson shouted. By the time anyone woke up and looked, the people were already gone. “They were just here, they were. I saw them!” No one believed her.

The next day, a bus of school children came to visit Blackberry Farm on a field trip. Cluckerson thought this was the end for every chicken and that the humans would feed them to the children. She ran around saying, “It is the end!” It was, but only for her. All the beautiful chickens were brought to the petting zoo but Cluckerson, having nearly starved herself, was the ugliest chicken so no child would want to see her in the petting zoo. She was killed and eaten by the farmers for a very tasty light meal.

Zander does not write often, but enjoys writing when he does. He has three cats and loves each of them very much. He lives in a nice town in Texas with his mom.

Notes from a Chinese Nail Salon By Arja Kumar

I’m at the Chinese nail salon with friends who I think don’t love me anymore. I know this because they are talking about the trip to England they are going on with our English teacher on Sunday and not looking me in the eye when I ask them questions. I’m not going anymore. I cancelled because I’m afraid of flying.

Carmen said to come at about five, so I get there ten minutes early because I've always been late everywhere I go and am sick of it.

I'm the first one there. All the other customers look up and at me standing in the entrance. The door has a cheap rusty bell attached to a left over mistletoe hanging above. Its chime sounds as a barking whine.

A voice says, "*Hi hunee. Pick out yo colahs.*" I can't tell which nail technician it's coming from.

I go over to the color rack and examine different shades by holding them up to the ceiling light. Mom specifically told me not to get yellow because it reminds her of jaundice.

Carmen, Lucille, Kali, and Sierra all file in at once. They were outside waiting in their cars – waiting for Carmen to park.

Indecisive, we eye different colors in silence. When we all find a shade we like, we sit down and wait for our names to be called. They start talking in whispers.

"Are you guys talking about the England trip?" I question.

"Yeah. We had a meeting yesterday."

"Mr. Fredrick was wearing an American flag t-shirt and khaki shorts."

"Oh. My. God."

"Yeah, I know right. It get's worse though."

"What?"

“He was wearing sandals.”

“Oh no.”

“I know right. It was so ew.”

“His toes looked so nasty! And his nails were yellow. Yel-low!”

The lady who always does my mom’s nails approaches me and asks if I’m the daughter of my mother. I nod yes and she fills up water in the tub. She puts my feet in along with some blue gel that smells like toothpaste.

Keep feet inside and relax.

She knows me. I came here to get my nails done for prom. It’s me who always forgets faces and names. Nancy, that’s her name. Her American name. I have no idea what her Chinese name is.

She’s pregnant.

I try to estimate how far along she is. It’s hard to tell because she’s so skinny and her stomach is a giant tumor. Six months. She shouldn’t be working at the nail salon.

When Nancy is massaging my feet I notice she has a Pandora bracelet.

“Is that a Pandora bracelet?”

“Yes.”

“I have one too!” I gesture to the silver band on my right hand. “My mom got it for me.”

“Charms too?”

“Yeah. I only have three so far. A music note, a book, and a guitar. All my hobbies.”

She nods and keeps buffing at my feet.

I can't figure out how to work the massaging chair. The buttons are labeled in Chinese. I press a random one and get the wind knocked out of me. Shiatsu. The lady next to me laughs and tells me she can't figure out how to work the chair either.

I picked out a dark blue polish for my hands and a plum one for my feet. My friends are still sitting in a line, waiting for a manicurist to call them over. They are still talking about the England trip.

Nancy starts clipping my toenails.

“Why yo mommy no come?”

“She's still at the hospital...working.”

“Yo mommy very busy.”

“Yeah, she is.”

“What yo daddy do?”

“You mean what does he do for a job?”

Nod.

“He’s uhm... a businessman. But he’s not really working now. He stays home and takes care of us. So I guess he’s a stay at home dad.”

“That’s nice. Good fo you and yo sista.”

Carmen is the first one to get her manicure, even though she was the last to arrive. The rest of the girls don’t mind that she goes first because they’re all her puppies. They listen to her. She doesn’t listen to them.

Carmen is arguing with the manicurist because she doesn’t understand what Carmen is saying. It’s funny because Carmen is Chinese as well. She doesn’t know the language because she was adopted from China when she was a baby. Carmen wants gel nail polish. She cusses under her breath.

“Listen, I just want to get gel nail polish.”

“Ok, ok, come sit. I first massage you then put gel.”

“I don’t want a massage! I just want you to paint my nails!”

Carmen looks over at the line of girls that are now laughing and recording her tantrum on their phones. Quick clips that they upload to their Snapchat stories so that everybody could see. Nothing is kept private anymore. Nothing goes unnoticed. A bored moment can’t possibly be passed without the internet – even when real people are sitting next to you.

I’m isolated in my little island to the far right corner of the salon with Nancy. She’s almost done painting my toes dark plum.

“Colah look nice on you.”

“Thanks.”

Kali is getting acrylic nails like always because her nail beds are too short. She’s wearing jeans today even though it’s ninety degrees and heavy heat outside. It’s supposed to start storming in an hour. Slight possibility of tornados. The storm two days ago knocked out the town’s power for four hours. It is supposed do the same again today.

Nancy helps me up even though she is pregnant and tiny. The first time I met her, I mistook her for my English teacher’s wife. They were both young and Chinese and I swore she was Mrs. Fredrickson. A couple of the boys told a story during lunch one school day about the time they saw Mrs. Fredrickson during a football game in October. She came after school ended that day, waiting for Mr. Fredrickson. The Spanish teacher and computer teacher were talking to her in the hallway while she waited for class to end.

“You look awfully young.”

“I’m thirty-eight.”

“You’ve got to tell me how old Mr. Frerickson is though. He never tells anyone. Not even his students.”

She didn’t know. Nobody did.

“I think he’s foty.”

In actuality Mr. Fredrickson was forty-seven.

Lucille is the last one up. She is the one that looks like her old mother. Her face is weathered and her hair is fried from straightening it all the time. She was my best friend

until seven months ago when she started to think that I was too boring. In my imagination, we officially broke up over text messages.

Y don't u talk to me anymore?

What r u talking about?

U seem like u don't like me anymore.

?

I bought u Pandora earrings for ur bday. They were 60 bucks. U forgot my bday. I'm always the 1st one to text u. U never text me anymore. I care about u, but it seems like u don't care about me anymore.

Stop the drama. Jeez.

I'm just telling u what I feel Luc. C'mon what happened to us being besties?

We still are.

I don't think so.

It's not my fault u don't have social media.

U don't like me bc I don't have social media?

I guess so. I mean, face it, ur out of the loop all the time. U always have a blank face whenever we talk about that kinda stuff. Tbh u don't rilly know anything ... so ur not very fun anymore.

I know she's been hanging out with Kali because they whisper whenever I look at them. Kali has a boyfriend and that makes her interesting. Kali has a *life*. Kali and Lucille have a Snap Streak of 300.

Nancy is massaging my picked at fingernails with cuticle oil.

"Erm... can you not do my left hand please? I play guitar."

"Hmm?"

"I need my calluses to be hard. So it doesn't hurt when I play."

"Oil only make cuticle soft, not callus."

I breathe. "Ok, good."

The massage hurts my veins.

"You play guitar?"

"Yeah. And piano."

"Thas good. My daughtah only play da violin, but I try to tell her play piano too."

"How old are you?"

"Seventeen."

"You a junior?"

“No, senior.”

“My boy a senior too. You know, he very cute.”

“Oh wow.”

“You very cute too.”

I laugh because I see where she’s going. “Thanks. But my parents prefer I focus on school right now.”

“I see.” She laughs under her mask even though she is tired. It sounds like a wheeze.

Nancy mumbles something in Chinese. She’s talking to her baby. *Don’t breathe until we get home. You don’t have to smell the fumes. They aren’t good for you. Don’t worry, I will pray for your lungs. Her face says pain and I need to work even though I’m not supposed to be because I need money to keep the house and buy the food and to raise the new baby.*

Sierra is the first one at the drying station. She usually never gets her nails done because she is a feminist and likes her body the way it is. But she is at the nail salon today. She’s discussing the upcoming school play with Carmen and Lucille.

“Minnie said if her and Leon get the leads, they wouldn’t have to fall in *stage* love.”

“Why?”

“Cause they’re already in *real* love, you idiot.”

“They’re not getting the leads.”

“Yeah, I know. They have no chance.”

My nails are done. Nancy sends me to the drying station.

“I can’t believe they’re actually a real couple.”

“Who?” I ask.

“Leon and Minnie.”

“Ohhh.” I don’t tell them I saw the two lovers three weeks ago at band practice. I didn’t even tell any of them that I’m in an indie rock band with the freshmen boys. Minnie and Leon came to spectate our songs, but really, they used the three hours as an excuse to make out on Reid’s couch.

I tell them, “Leon got a concussion.”

“What the heck? How?”

“He slipped and fell at work. Now he has a cane.” Leon works at an ice cream shop downtown. I imagined the incident happening like a cartoon; him slipping on a banana peel then growing a mountainous lump on his head.

“Where’d you hear this from?”

If I told them, they would question me to shreds. “Uhh, I just heard it somewhere. I think it’s just a rumor though.” I don’t tell them Leon told me himself at band practice.

Kali is finally done. She doesn’t need her acrylics to dry under the drying station.

“Ready guys? Her keys are in hand.”

Everybody gets up.

“Do you need a ride?” Lucille asks me.

“No, my dad’s coming to pick me up.”

“Are you sure? Because if you didn’t call him already I can drop you off.” Her voice is sorry because she always the one who has to take me home. I don’t want her to feel sorry for me anymore.

“Yeah,” I lie.

After my friends leave the nail salon I call my dad and pay at the cash register. One of the manicurists is a Chinese man that looks like a punk. I wonder if he’s Nancy’s husband or lover. His skin is burnt sienna, a separate shade from the rest of the pearly manicurists. I question if he’s even Chinese at all. He was talking to Nancy when she was doing my nails and he was doing another customer’s. They were exchanging foreign words that sounded like Nancy was in pain. I see her outline in the back room behind the cash register. She’s lounging back on a chair. Her eyes are closed and her hands rest on her stomach. She cries for the thing growing inside her because she is poor and doesn’t know what to do. She doesn’t want the thing growing inside her to suffer.

The storm is rolling south in tumors of clouds. A squall line of grayed lumps that look like they could collapse any minute. Veins of purple lightning run through the sky and deliver howling thunder. The earth is begging the sky for mercy.

My dad is on the way so I sit down on one of the waiting chairs. The salon is closing early because of the storm. The other lady manicurist is sweeping hangnails and dust off the floor.

I give the male manicurist at the cash register three dollars and tell him it's a tip for Nancy. There is no one left in the salon except the three manicurists, a lady in exercise clothes, and me.

The lady in exercise clothes texts her teenage son on her cell phone.

Honey, can u plz take the chicken out of the freezer? I'm running a little late.

K.

Tell your sister to take a bath too.

K

A picture of her pedicure.

Cute.

Nancy comes out of the back room to thank me for the tip. The lady in the exercise clothes is gone now. Now, I can say it.

"Nancy?"

"Yes, hunee?"

"Please don't work here anymore."

"What ah you saying hunee? I have to wohk heyah." She laughs and thinks I'm crazy.

"It's not good for your baby. I hear it howling inside of you. It's begging you to stop working."

She is confused. I leave her that way and walk towards my dad's car.

Arja Kumar is seventeen and is a senior at Aquin High School. She lives in a bucolic wasteland in the Middle of Nowhere, IL. Aside from writing, she likes filmmaking, punning, and playing music in an indie rock band with her friends.

Zombies in Space By Maverick Gillette

This is the story of me, Veronica, the popular for being weird, high self esteem, hair dyed ponytail kind of person. This is the story of how I tried to escape my problems by going to Mars. Emphasis on the word *tried*. It was the year 2037. I was hanging out at my house playing some dumb game, then all the sudden alarms just started going off everywhere. That blaring, annoying, worrying sound I will never forget to this day. I checked my phone, as I was worried and wanted to know what the heck was going on. First thing I saw?

“A “zombie” outbreak, as scientists are calling it.”

I stared in disbelief at the screen when, a new message popped up.

“New text message from ‘Little Bro.’”

I opened it, of course, and saw the conversation we had been having

“Heard about the new zombie game coming out?”

“Yeah, I heard it's pretty dumb

“Say what you will, I’m getting it”

“Whatever little bro”

I then looked at the one he had just sent.

“Coming to get you, we need to get on the spaceship.” Spaceship!? What the heck is he talking about?

“This isn’t a game, Travis, this is real life.”

“I am aware, I replied. They’re sending people to Mars as a last ditch effort, I grabbed Dad’s ‘In case of emergencies’ bag.”

At this point I knew we had an actual, serious emergency on our hands, and I was indescribably terrified. In my breakdown I realized something, I hadn’t paid any attention to the banging on my door. This banging made me even more terrified so, yay? Luckily for me Dad had also left me an emergency bag, but there was a problem... I forgot where it was located. I searched the house as the banging got louder, and louder, and louder still. In the end, nothing insanely intense happened. I found the bag in my desk, grabbed it, and waited for my brother to get here.

“Now Veronica.” you may ask “Why didn’t you just simply get in your own car and drive to the spaceship yourself?” Well, two reasons. First of all, I had no clue where this spaceship was. Secondly, you think I can drive a 2029 Subaru through a horde of zombies? Well the answer is no, I can’t. So I waited, and soon I heard a “beep beep” outside my room. “He’s here” I silently said to myself, and then I realized ANOTHER something. How the sham am I going to get to the car? And then I remembered that I have roof access... I’m “smart.” I climbed to the roof, about ten feet off the ground, and then thought to myself— “This is kinda high in the air and if I miss I’m probably dead...” Then I came to the revelation that this is life or death. “AND I CHOOSE LIFE!” I yelled,

jumping from the roof towards the car, afterwards realizing that I could've just dropped down and landed on the car just fine. I landed on my brother's truck and then transferred myself to the back of it as my bro started to drive.

I'll skip the boring part and just go straight to the spacecraft. The words "S.S Impenetrable" were written on the side in black. We got there in the nick of time because the zombies were thickening and they were about to leave. Military were all around, taking pot shots at the zombies. Now, these were not those running zombies that would kill you in two seconds, no. These were the type of zombies that you would get too cocky or stupid and that's how you'd die. Me and my brother hopped on the space shuttle and got ready. The sleek white design was kind of off-putting for a rescue vessel. A man by the name of Todd (I read off his tag) was standing at the door, helping people in. Me and my brother were the last ones on, but just then another family of three, a mom and her two children, drove up to the shuttle. "Please, just let me and my children on, there has to be room right?" the woman said, desperate sounding "Sorry ma'am, we only have two spots left." said the person who I assumed to be the corporal or whatever the top rank in the military was.

"Please, I beg of you."

Now my brother was a little bit, how do I say, too friendly.

"Here ma'am, take my seat"

"NO!" I yelled, "somebody else can do it!"

It was too late by that point though, he was already off the ship.

"I'll see you when you get back Ver!" he said as he threw me his I.C.O.E. bag.

“NO, DON’T YOU DA...” But it was too late, the doors were shut. I saw the military hand him some type of gun or something, but he gave it back.

The reason I didn’t tell you about the ride to the shuttle is because he’s the person in the apocalypse who is convinced there’s a cure and doesn’t kill anything. I saw him drive off and started to fear the worst for him and, before I knew it, I was on the floor, weeping. That guy, Todd, came over and started to attempt to comfort me. “Hey” he said, in a calm, soft tone. “It’ll be okay, I’m sure he’ll be fine, he wouldn’t leave if he didn’t know what he was doing.” Except, that’s exactly what he would do. The ship started to take off and within the blink of an eye, it felt, we were in space. Now, you might be thinking “How the smudge could things get worse from here?” Well, have you ever heard of something called “Snakes on a Plane?” Imagine that except zombies, on a spaceship. Remember that family that was let on last second. Well I forgot to include this detail, but the military was checking people for bites, and they didn’t check that family. The mom had gotten bit and so had the kids. They were easy to deal with, but not quickly dealt with. They bit a few people... Including me.

“So much for the ‘S.S Impenetrable’ huh?” I said, laughing nervously. I didn’t tell anyone I’d gotten bit in the fight for fear of being quarantined. “We still weren’t *technically* penetrated.” Todd said. Todd gave me the vibe of being a pretty serious, experienced, sarcastic kinda person, the exact kinda person my brother was. Made me miss ‘im even more.

Felt like it took years to get to our destination. That was probably just me being worried about my bite though. When we got there, of course, I slipped like the clumsy dork I was, revealing my bite to all. Luckily it was only revealed for a second and only Todd saw it. I looked over at him and he was looking at me with a terrified expression. He hopped down from the stairs and came over to me. “You hid this from me?” He said in an exasperated whisper.

“Maybe” I replied

“For... we need to get that amputated.”

“What my leg?!”

“No, your arm... WHAT DO YOU THINK?” He said a little louder than he should’ve.

“Fine, but only if I get a cool new leg.”

“This is 2037, what, you think you’re going to get a peg leg?”

“Ya never know Todd. (I read his name tag)”

“Did you just say ‘I read his name tag’?”

“Shut up, let’s go.” I said as I stood up and starting walking to the nearest infirmary.

By the time we got to the infirmary my leg was starting to hurt. We walked in the front door and rang the desk bell. Soon a nurse came to the front. “What are y’all doin’ here? You hear about the zombies outside?” His Southern accent was heavy.

“We need an amputation,” Todd blurted out.

“Wha... I...” the nurse sputtered out.

“A.S.A.P”

“Fine fine, ‘urry to this back room.”

“Eh... I trust him” Todd exclaimed, confidently.

I'll spare you the details of what happened in that back room... Since the doctor had already fled, it was messy. Somehow, I didn't die AND I got a sick new robo-leg, I mean, what'd you expect, it's 2037, not some dumb year like 2017. The nurse gave us a pretty cool package deal, the leg and a set of knockout dart assault rifles also known as K.D.A.Rs. "Now go help yourself, don't get hurt or anything, please."

"We won't, hopefully" I said.

I think of myself as a realist. When presented with a situation I look at the situation as it is, not how it could be. So when we reached "Forttude Hill", as the sign read, I thought to myself "This place is great to set up some kind of like survivor safe haven or something." Because believe me, this virus spread quicker than a rumor in middle school. "Okay, a few things could happen when we enter this gated community here." I said aloud. "We either get jumped by apocalypse scavvers, it's infested with zombies, it's populated with survivors, or nobody is here and we get the place to ourselves." Now, the reason I called them scavvers is because it's short for scavengers. Even on earth in the first hour or two people were raiding buildings and... killing each other to survive.

"I pick option D"

"This isn't a choice, it's a list."

"Oh, okay... I still choose option D"

"But I just... you know what let's talk about something more important here. Why haven't we been attacked by zombies at, like, all?"

"But the spaces..."

"Apart from that Todd"

“Huh, I don’t know...”

As expected at that very moment a horde of zombies started shambling up the road to us

“You just had to speak Veronica, didn’t you?” I said, angrily. Todd had the brilliant idea to roll an explosive barrel, conveniently placed next to the gate, down the hill and have knockout darts attached to it, thus knocking out all the zombies! “Okay... let’s do it I guess.” The barrel was rolled, the plan worked, surprisingly, and we entered the gated community with a card we found off one of the dead... knocked out zombies. And boom, the gated community was empty and ours for the taking, or community starting in this case.

It was not an easy process to set up that safe haven. It seemed that new zombies just kept on coming. Scavvers wanted our supplies and stuff. And the walls were unusually low to the ground, making them easy to breach or climb over. We named our little community after what was left on the signs, and it eventually became a fully fledged small village. “Fortitude Hill, where all the cool things are.” As it came to be known in the years following. Their leader only known as “Lost Leg” and her trusty assistant “Strong Arm.” My main mission from then on was repairing and refueling that spaceship so I could go save my brother, that’s how confident I was that he was alive. I had a picture of him by my bedside and the people in my village had come to know him as “The Returning Savior” that would come back one day to save us all. Hopefully he does come back, but I might have to go get him. If I know my brother he’s probably already done the same thing 241 million miles away on earth. Probably has it where he’s destined to be lifted away to help more people if I know anything about him, and great googly moogly do I know things about my brother. He’s probably started some cult about video games or something, I didn’t know, I was on Mars! That is a story for another day though. Until then, keep surviving the apocalypse, or something.

Maverick Gillette has always wanted to write a story and get it published, so he decided to write this. He is thirteen and in eighth grade, and writing is his favorite thing to do. He usually doesn't write seriously or professionally, so this is his first time.

A Practical Man By Landon Smith

Jonathan B. Fitzgerald was a practical man with polished black shoes. To truly describe him one would have to have known him, and few did, for he was reluctant to let anyone beyond his tightly buttoned suit jacket. With the imperial stature of French nobility, the cold eyes of a Norse god, and the cultivated temperament that is usually found only along the Eastern seaboard, his small-town Illinois origins were all but brushed away with a brisk sweep of his well-trimmed hand. Wire spectacles rested lightly on the crest of his pointed nose, and he analyzed the world through their thin lenses (although one may have asked if he really needed them, for he saw what needed to be seen regardless of whether or not it was visible). He would never leave home without his monogrammed briefcase, a linen square in his pocket, and a measured stride. He seemed a decent man in all respects but, as Frank once put it, he was “the kind of fella to know your name and not much more.”

He took up residence in a tidy room at the Elite Hotel, across from Ward's Dress and Notions, in late May, although perhaps residence is not quite the right word. For although he resided in Clark City, Montana, Jonathan B. Fitzgerald hovered above it, like a placid mist rising over a choppy river. He did not sink into the daily life that existed in the noisy chatter of the Elks Club and the Starlight Five and Dime. As the gears and cogs of the world clicked and turned, he sat in his office and observed the motion around him. The 'office' was simply an empty storeroom at the back of the barbershop, but Jonathan B. Fitzgerald saw it as an office, so that is what it was.

Hanging from a rusty nail on one dead-white wall of this office was possibly Mr. Fitzgerald's most interesting possession. He called it "The Catalogue," but to the uneducated eye, it seemed to be a large chalkboard, covered with white lines and names and numbers. Mr. Fitzgerald's boss at Regal Real Estate Company (based in Butte, one hundred and ten miles to the west) would have called it a job well done, almost worthy of a raise. This board contained Mr. Fitzgerald's carefully compiled list of all the properties in Clark City, each boiled down to a precise set of specifications, including probable value, tax assessment, and number of residents per lot. Mr. Fitzgerald's job was to create this list and bring it back to his superiors, who were considering diversifying into the automobile sales business and had provisional franchise deals with both Ford and Texaco. Two lots on the east end of town owned by Walter Guthrie, proprietor of Guthrie's General Store and the ramshackle bungalow next to it, had caught Mr. Fitzgerald's eye.

Walter liked to say that he would make a fortune on the General Store if only more people would buy the items he stocked. Someone needed flour and eggs? He had flour and eggs. The bolts of cloth might be a little dusty, but they weren't too faded. For a fresh cut of beef or sound words of advice, people shopped elsewhere. Still, money can't always buy the pride a man feels in keeping his own shop, and everyone knew Walter wouldn't sell cheap. For a few weeks, the gravel crunched loudly under Fitzgerald's black shoes as he walked along the street, and people remarked on the vigor with which Walter now cleaned the store windows on a daily basis.

The third day of September dropped a bright blue curtain behind Clark City's Labor Day festivities. Trumpets shone in the sun, banners waved, and a general feeling of unity filled the air. The Chamber of Commerce and the Lions Club had each built a float for the parade, and Martin was selling wrapped chicken sandwiches out of his train car diner. Townsfolk lined the leafy parade route, which wound along the west side's broader streets. It was a good parade, but the thing people remembered about it was that no one had noticed Jonathan B. Fitzgerald among the viewers.

By the end of the day, word had spread like prairie fire that Guthrie's General Store and the land on which it sat had been soaked with gasoline, and Jonathan B. Fitzgerald had disappeared. The store was beyond repair, and most guessed that since Walter was likely not insured for gasoline flood insurance, he would have to sell for a song. Everyone knew who had done it, although no one could prove it, and the act spoke more to people's philosophical than their forensic natures. Doc impressively called it Fitzgerald's apotheosis, while Reverend Phillips quietly wondered if the realtor had baptized the land for its future life. Mrs. Jenkins, who was polishing the samovar in the church basement, simply clicked her tongue and said, "Who knows what rattles around in a body when there isn't a soul to take up space?"

If Mr. Fitzgerald had been there to answer, he might have said he was simply filtering the important from the insignificant. He might have said it was simply business. But he was on a train, traveling one hundred and ten miles to the west. He looked out the window, where the early morning sun had begun to melt the mist over the Yellowstone River and heat the sky to a rosy pink. He observed the scene for one minute then turned his head to face the seat in front of him.

"You can say what you will about Jonathan B. Fitzgerald," Abby summed it up several weeks later, while combing her magnificent red hair. "That he's cold, that he's conceited, that he's criminal. But I guarantee that no one this side of the Rocky Mountains could ever say that he is not a practical man."

Landon Smith is a student from Hanover, New Hampshire. He enjoys writing, composing music, and rowing on various rivers.

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Gerald was looking in a newspaper. For the first time in his life, he felt like going there. Most of the time he would grab the newspaper and look at the advertisements for amusement. But now, he felt that this was different. He needed money and a place to live.

“This is perfect!” he thought, “I can have a place to stay *and* I don’t have to pay for food.”

Sci-Co was a very famous company. They claim to make advancements in technology everyday. They’ve even invented *The Helper*. The Helper was a gargantuan machine on top of Sci-Co tower. It stood on the 213th floor, the very top. Sci-Co claims it is sending messages that improve learning in school. It seems to be working too. The government has shown the test averages have risen by 5%. It is their best invention.

“I need to get that job! I could do something different.” he thought. Gerald lived an ordinary life. He had to do the same job, write the same papers, and even eat at the exact minute of every day. It was getting to him. Nothing was different. Nothing at all.

And so, he ran to the phone just like anyone desperate for a job would do. He leaped from the chair, stumbled into his kitchen, and punched in the number so hard, that he knocked the phone to the floor.

“Hello, this is Jessica from Sci-Co tower. How can I help you?” said the woman on the phone. This woman sounded very dull. It’s as if she had a life similar to Gerald’s. Dull, boring, and uneventful.

“My name is Gerald. Could you tell me about-”

“Are you calling to complain about The Helper? We’ve fixed the mind bug. No more children can get brain damage.”

“No. I’m calling about the job offer?”

“Oh, that thing. Well it’s your lucky day!” she seemed to have a forced happiness in her voice. It’s as if she doesn’t care, but she has to, “You are the first caller!”

“I guess it is.”

“I think the only reason you are the first caller is because no one reads the newspaper,” she whispered to herself. Then her voice became louder, “Come to Sci-Co tower on April 17, 2032 for your meeting with the one and only Jeremiah Richardson. Make sure you-”

“That’s tomorrow!” he thought.

He was so excited that he drove straight to where he worked, ran to his boss’s office, and yelled, “I Quit!”

His boss was so stunned that he laughed and ran to his car. He didn’t remember ever being this happy. And so he went home and slept.

The next morning he threw all his clothes into his Clothing Compactor Suitcase and hopped to his car so fast that he almost forgot to grab his notebook. He used his notebook for everything he saw. If he saw an interesting car, then he would note it. If he saw his bossed stunned, he would note it.

He took it and ran to his car.

After an hour of driving, he made it to Sci-Co Tower, Thomasville. The tower was an intimidating 213 stories high. It was completely black, no windows, nothing. Gerald gulped and wrote in his notebook:

Don't look up at Sci-Co Tower.

As he drove around he realized there was no parking lot, just a sign that said "Parking" next to a small room a size so small that his car would fit perfectly in it. He decided to drive into it. He managed to fit even though he thought he saw his side mirrors fade through an edge protruding out. When his car made it all the way in, the way out disappeared. He heard a voice that said, "Hello Gerald Neily."

He was surprised. He's never heard of a talking room before. He noted:

Parking room talks.

"Don't worry," it said, "This room doesn't talk, it is an A.I. talking right now."

He stopped worrying and started thinking. "This room must know what I'm thinking, so that means-

"Yes, it does. Now get out of your car and go to the door. Don't forget to bring your things, you won't come back for a long time."

A door appeared next to him and he was confused.

“Why?” he thought just to check one last time to see if it could read his mind.

“Because you live here now.”

“But what about the interview?”

“A brain scan says you are compatible for your job. Now get out and go to the door!”

He was surprised by its sudden change in personality. “I should leave now,” he thought.

He hustled to the door and left the odd room.

“Hello Mr. Neily,” said a familiar voice. Then Gerald realized it was familiar because it was Jeremiah Richardson, “Welcome to Sci-Co Tower!”

Gerald was in awe so much that he could barely muster the words, “Um... Hi Mr... Mr.”

“Jeremiah, just call me Jeremiah. I’m here to show you around Sci-Co Tower”

“The whole thing?”

“No, that’d be stupid. Half of the floors are for living and half are for working. Except for The Helper room of course.”

“What floor are we on now?” asked Gerald.

“The 127th floor Mr. Neily. This is the parking room.”

The walls disappeared and once again, Gerald was amazed. He was in a huge room that went the length of three football fields in each direction. Gerald was astounded.

“Let’s go to your room.”

“I wonder how many people work here if this is the size of the parking room,” Gerald thought.

“Approximately 117,647 people work here including you.”

“You can read my mind too?” Gerald said.

“Anyone within 10 feet of me.”

“That seems a bit invasive.”

“It’s necessary. We use it to check for spies in our company. Just in case anyone sabotages us.”

“That’s odd,” thought Gerald forgetting that his thoughts could be heard.

Gerald went into the elevator and went to his room. Then he slept.

The next morning Jeremiah brought him to the working area. They were in the top ten stories.

“This is where you work.”

“Wow, ok who are they?”

“Those are your co-workers.”

“What do we do?”

“You code The Helper. Now start working.”

Gerald went to his seat and sat down.

“What do I do?”

“You will know.”

Gerald looked at his computer and saw commands popping up. The commands were weird. It asked him unusual questions but he answered them truthfully.

“See not so bad” said Jeremiah. Then he walked away.

He answered more questions for the rest of the day. Then he went to bed.

The next day he got up and went to work again. He noted the really unusual questions like:

Would you rather crabs be blue or green?

Gerald thought of these questions as free money. He got paid to answer questions. He never answered untruthfully because he feared someone would read his mind. It certainly wasn't boring because he had new questions everyday.

One day he noticed Jeremiah walked into the broom closet.

Gerald noted it and decided to take a look. He went to the door and peeked in. It looked like a normal broom closet, but there was one small detail that stood out. There was no doorknob. So when he walked in, he didn't close the door. For he feared he would be locked in. When he stepped into the room, the door closed behind him. He was shocked. It didn't just close the door. It slammed so hard that he would feel the hinges could break off. Then the door disappeared. He was locked in.

"You shouldn't be here." said a deep voice.

"Who are you?" said Gerald.

"You've met me before."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"You've met me before." it repeated.

"Where am I?"

Gerald was trembling. Then it hit him. This was the thing that talked to him in the "parking room". Before he could do anything else, the floor opened like a trap door and he fell. But he wasn't falling down, he was falling up. Falling and falling until he could see a huge white platform above him. He was getting closer and closer until he started to slow down. Just before he got close enough to touch the ceiling, he stopped and the whole world seemed to flip upside down until he realized it was him.

He spun around to see a man dressed in all black. The room was so dark that he could barely see himself let alone the man.

"Welcome to The Helping Room" said a weird voice, until Gerald realized it was Jeremiah.

“What is this?” asked Gerald.

“This is The Helping Room.”

“What... Why...”

“It’s ok Gerald, this won’t last long.”

“What is the-”

“The point of this is for me and only me. And soon, everything will be for me.”

“What do you mean?”

“This is The Helper.”

“That thing?”

A huge bulbous machine sat where he pointed. Oil and gas were oozing out of a cube-like blocks that was black leather. Prongs would stick out randomly as if they were getting rid of something. And he could see what it was. He saw them quickly throw blocks of information into a black moat around it. A pipe stuck out and looked as if it was pushed through the roof and not built into it. In front of it sat a chair with nothing but a wire sticking out.

“What does that hideous thing do?” thought Gerald.

“Sci-Co claims it helps kids and people with intelligence. And it does. But what really happens is that it takes out the stupid part of the mind and collects it from all the people in the world.”

“What are the-”

“Those blocks? Those are blocks of information, information of human stupidity. You see Gerald, this machine studies stupidity and collects the worse of it. It throws the rest out to the middle of the earth where we get rid of it.”

“What does that do for you?”

“It helps me Gerald it *helps me*. It tells me how to disperse it, how to make it... *spread*.”

Stupidity is a disease and I can use it for good... *my good*. If I know where to start the disease, then I know where it ends. And the best part is, I read minds. I know what you will do; every step you take is thought out.”

“I need to stop it.” thought Gerald.

“You can’t!” yelled Jeremiah. “I’ve thought of every outcome and this is what it came to. You helped me the most Gerald. You are the testee. You are the one I need to make it *learn*. Your mind is smart, but not smart enough. Now go to that chair, I need to see it soon.”

Gerald’s head started to hurt. And then he heard a voice... the machine.

“Come to the chair Gerald.”

“I... must... resist...” thought Gerald. But then he thought he couldn’t. He seemed to walk without control. His limbs were moving themselves.

“See Gerald? It is good. It is for the better. You’ll teach me.”

The machine grew louder as he neared it.

There was a bridge that went over the dark abyss where the stupidity goes, and he was about to cross it. With all his might he tried to think of everything he loved everything that was real to him, until he realized he had nothing. This world had nothing for him at all. He had no parents, his house was terrible, he would surely lose his job if he defied it.

“It can’t be too bad if everyone is stupid.” he thought as he took a step.

“Yes... yes... yes...” said the machine.

“If everyone is stupid, then no one will want to fight because they won’t know how.” he thought as he took another step.

“Keep coming.” said the machine.

Soon he was in the chair. Everything went white. He saw nothing. He couldn’t think. He couldn’t move. Nothing.

“That wasn’t so bad was it?” said the machine just as everything seemed to disappear into nothing. Nothing could help the world.

Trenton Gray lives in Texas. He made this short story because he likes science fiction stories, and thought it would be cool if he made his own. As it turns out, it was good enough to be published. It took him a long time to write it.

The Case of the Closed Curtain By Ivan Budanov

Looking back, I remember a bizarre incident that had happened on the eighth of September, the year 1909. We were sitting in the warm, stuffy Baker Street flat on a

rainy day. Holmes had gone to the kettle, and across the room he yelled, 'Watson, black or green?'

'Black tea for me, thank you,' I replied. In a few short minutes, Holmes returned with two steaming mugs as we both sank into the recliners. He handed me the tea and it tasted off.

'Sherlock...this is green tea?'

'Yes. I'm glad you noticed. Green tea's better at night.'

'But I wanted black-'

'You were mistaken, Watson.'

We sat staring out the rain pattered window and out on the dark street, where not a soul stood. Holmes had gone for more tea, but something strange had happened. A man, half dressed, his shoes untied and dangling, holding a soaking newspaper above his head, ran through the street. He had left his yellow taxi in the road unparked. His eyes were wide and worried, and his mouth open, like he was ready to scream. He ran along Baker Street, until he came so close to 221B that he had disappeared for a moment.

Downstairs was a hurried exchange between the man and Mrs. Hudson, who, as usual, let out her disagreeing moan. The man opened our door and ran in. His hair was stringy and shiny from the rain, and he bowed down from tiredness. Holmes came out; his face turned tighter and perked down to face the kneeling man. 'Goldberg', he said. The man looked straight at Holmes, clutching his heart and breathing heavily. 'Holmes,' he let out, 'the curtains...have closed.'

'No! The villa? Watson, take my jacket. We must go right away!' He ran out the door, and I followed. Goldberg started the car.

We rode in the cab. 'Holmes?' I said, 'What's happening?'

'Didn't you hear? The curtains have closed.'

'Yes, but what does that mean?'

'Oh, right, listen Watson; you must hear the whole story. I had been taking a walk in Harrow, on the East side. It had been a long walk; after a while, there started to be less and less homes. At midnight I came to a secluded villa, one surrounded by a large, empty lawn. The curtains had been closed. In the very back I saw a shadow of a man carrying a bag. A large bag, the size of a corpse, and throwing it into a hole. Five minutes passed, and the curtains had opened. The man stared at me, so I quickly turned and carried on like a passerby. I thought about the incident, and again returned a fortnight later. I kept watch by the gate. I saw the killer look out the window, surveying the landscape. He closed the curtains, but I heard the scream. Thirty minutes later, he carried a bag to the backyard.

'Once again, the curtains then opened. This enticed me – I didn't know the case, but I knew the connection between curtain and corpse. The midnight hour had come, and I had signaled a cab. And that was Goldberg; my driver and a Harrow native. I told him to come to me if he ever did see the curtain closed. Do you understand it all now?' I nodded, but couldn't think of the investigation that was to come.

The taxi had stopped in front of a black cast iron gate, through which I saw the daunting size of a two-story villa laced with a brown frame and marble steps. The lawn around it stretched as far as a football pitch. Holmes, who had very happily said his goodbye to Goldberg, climbed out of the car. The curtains were closed and the lawn bare of people, so Holmes and I stepped on the gate latch and climbed over. We came to the wall on the right side, as Sherlock stared closely at the marble. He looked through a small square window, the curtains of which he pulled aside.

'John' he looked at me, his voice quiet and rasp, 'Climb in.'

Soon we found ourselves in the room, with the shut door in front and the window behind. The room had been covered in drawers, big and small, each wall shining from the glow of hundreds of handles. A reek of gone-off eggs hit my nose.

'Ehh...W-what is this? A cupboard room? It smells of rotten eggs.' Holmes had not answered my question. Instead he paced around the room, flicking the wood, muttering 'maple' under his breath, and scratching the locks, muttering 'steel'. Finally, he crouched down on the floor, and like a snake, made his way below a small, rectangular drawer. His pointed nose leaned into the ground, and after a few seconds he turned to look at me.

'Rotten eggs! Rotten eggs! Are you a fool?' He pointed his index finger to the sky, smeared in something yellow, and pointed below the drawer, a whole pile of the yellow powder.

'Sulfur mustard', he paused, 'or mustard gas.'

Just then the window had clicked and shut, two hands locking it. There were heavy steps behind the door, which also clicked shut. Holmes continued, 'Sulfur mustard...under this door...' He took out his paperclip, peering inside the lock.

'A jimmy proof deadbolt lock' He hurried to bend the paperclip in two, and started to unscrew its bolts. I stood silently, not knowing any way I could help him. He now tinkered with the springs, pulling some, jabbing at others with the paperclip. 'We've loosened the lock, now it can be opened.'

The drawer pulled out and he looked at me with a grin.

'I knew it', he said, and handed me a gas mask. He pointed to the small gap under the door, to a yellow gas that started to float into our room.

'Put it on. Quick,' he said.

By the time we had both put on the gas masks, the room had filled with the haze of deadly mustard gas, and I could barely see Sherlock through it, who sat right next to me.

Sherlock pointed at the armchair behind which we sat crouched, and we both leaned in to push it by the door. We sat behind it, motionless and soundless, for about ten minutes, when we started to hear noises behind the door.

'Eyy. Dead already?' The muffled voice laughed and yelled a bit louder, 'Edgar, get the bags!' The door creaked open, and although nothing was visible through the mist, a dark figure with a gas mask came in the room.

'Finally got that detective. Knew he was up to no good those two times by the road.'

By the time Edgar had come back with two body bags, the dark man had started to walk through the room, looking side to side through the mist. His temper started to rise, and I heard the coarse whisper of 'Where are they?' come out under his breath. Sherlock nudged my shoulder, showing the door, and bending his fingers to show three, and two, and one, until we silently started to crawl out.

Holmes had made his way out first, and I followed around the corner of the step.

'WHERE ARE THEY? WHERE'D THEY GO?' the man yelled, and his foot flew at the armchair we had just been crouching behind.

Behind the stairwell, we spied on him as he crashed open the door, pacing through the hall. The sound of a cocked rifle flew through the cold air as he walked out with a Remington rifle and a lighted cigar dangling from his mouth.

'Sir,' Edgar had started, 'I thought I told you where to smoke.'

'Look up at the ceiling of the second floor. Notice the yellow-brain stains.' Holmes whispered in my ear.

'I'll stop once we've gotten our detective,' the man said. The mustard gas still floated through the air, and had spread through the whole house, where very little was visible. Edgar sighed.

'You look inside all the rooms, I'll check the perimeter.' Edgar paced through, checking the rooms one by one, when suddenly his gaze fixated on the stairwell.

Once again, we crouched down low, and crawled around the stairwell, the butler slowly looking around. I had rounded the corner, and even turned back to look at Holmes, who had been following me. But he wasn't.

He had paused, scratching his finger, the one that was in sulfur mustard.

'Holmes', I let out through gritted teeth, but he couldn't hear me. Edgar's tall silhouette continued to grow bigger as he came nearer, and when he had just stood in front of Holmes, I couldn't watch. My eyes had shut.

I had heard a piercing shriek, followed by short, heavy breaths. Edgar's foot had stumbled over Sherlock's bent pose, and now Holmes had bent over the fallen butler, whose arms flailed mercilessly. Holmes covered his hand over Edgar's mouth, as he slipped off Edgar's mask.

'Not a peep out of you', he said, and threw the gas mask far into the drawer room. Edgar had run off to the room as we quickly made our way up the stairs. We walked through the hall to the first door, at which Holmes took a right through a small corridor, and we had come to a stone door.

'Watson...limited time, limited time...' he showed me the hall, and I leaned out to keep watch. Once again he closely examined the insides of the padlock, bending the paperclip into a cross shape and slowly sliding it into the lock.

A shot rang through the house, and had hit the ceiling of the second floor. The sounds of four feet hitting the stairwell and the ravenous cries of the two men had completely worn me down.

'Hold your breath,' he told me, as he took both of our gas masks and threw them down the hall, 'that will stop them for the extra moment we need.'

Holmes opened the stone door, slipping the paperclip back into his pocket, and climbing out onto the balcony. We sat crouched for a moment.

'Look! The gas masks!' one of the voices said. 'Another wild card...check the room at the end of the hall.'

But none of that had mattered, for Sherlock Holmes and I had already finished climbing down the ladder, and we ran through the rain and to the gate.

'Excellent, Holmes, excellent,' I couldn't help but let out as he signaled Goldberg's cab. The dazing bright headlights rounded the corner from the street, and Goldberg's wary face pulled up to the street.

We rode in the cab.

'Holmes?'

'Yep?' he replied.

'Great work, but how did you know about the balcony? How did you know we could go through it?'

'Aha, yes, you see...' and he had started. 'I had first noticed the smoke stains on the ceiling, those that I had shown you. They were yellow-brown. Do you remember the man when he had stepped into our room? Before all else he had turned angry. He had not seen us yet, but the yellow smoke reminded him of his smoking addiction. So he kicked the chair. We had snuck out, and then he came out with a cigar. Much to Edgar's discontent of course, but his adrenaline had been at a high. You see, Edgar had noticed those cigar stains long ago, and so our man was forced to smoke outside. But he was too careless to go outside through the front door, since the stains came from the second floor. Hence the balcony.'

'You saw all of that from just a few minutes? Holmes, how do you do it...' I shook my head. There was just one last question.

'Of course, today those curtains had closed for us. He wanted to get rid of you, Holmes. But what do we have to prove all of that. To prove this attempted homicide?'

'Watson, Watson, think!' out from his pocket he took out the paperclip. 'The clip that is bent to the exact second floor entrance. There's not a better piece of evidence than that.'

Soon after Goldberg had drove us up to 221B Baker Street, and he looked at us from the front seat with a grin.

'If the curtains ever do close, I'll let ya know.'

'If they ever do...once again, thank you, Goldberg.' Holmes said, and I shook his hand. He had been of great aid this midnight.

The door behind the house had closed, and at the sound of it Mrs. Hudson came out.

'Oh heavens! Where have you been? Who was that? You need some tea! All wet and cold...' she stumbled off into the kitchen, and soon Holmes and I sat in our armchairs once again, staring out the rain pattered window and onto the dark street.

Ivan Budanov lives in Atlanta, Georgia. He enjoys writing and programming, as well as playing ping pong. He has traveled all over the world, and loves exploring different cultures.

The Hospital Incident By Malena Bertrand

I breathe slowly; I don't want the bad lady to catch me. I am frightened of her. She yelled at me this morning, and I didn't like it. This time, I have hidden under the bed, hoping they won't see me, that they will just go and leave me here. Alone.

My name is Edmund. I woke up this morning to be told that I had just been in a terrible car crash in which both of my parents had died. I didn't cry, I couldn't cry for someone I couldn't remember. Even now, I try really hard to feel something for them, but I can't.

The nice lady had said that I had amnesia, which she explained to me patiently. It is a medical condition in which due to an accident, traumatic experience or something like that, you forget everything.

I know she must have said the truth because I don't remember anything. I only know that my name is Edmund Osbourne William, and that I am ten years old, and come from Manchester, England. Or that's what the good nurse told me.

I like the good nurse. She came back again, just a while ago, to give me clean clothes and some cleansing supplies. I understood when I saw myself in the mirror, with my scruffy hair, dirty cheeks, and wrinkled clothes. When I came out, the good nurse said I looked

very dashing, but the bad nurse cut her off before she could say anything else. Her withering glare before leaving sent me straight where I am now, under the bed...

Even now, as I hear their footsteps fading away, I can't relax. The bad nurse might come back, so I'd rather not move.

It's really dark under the bed. The slimy floor is full of dust and there is eerie writing on the bedspring *escape, break free*. It gives me goose bumps. Idiot the person who did that, I hate him, I don't want to be where he was.

I scurry out and hide under the warm duvet. I can see the daylight from here. Clutching the covers is like touching mummy's hair. Did I like touching my mum's hair? I don't know, but it feels good now... I am never coming out!

The door opens, and I first peek and then rush out. It's the good nurse. I hug her. She smells good, familiar.

"Where were you?" I notice my accusatory tone as I mumble.

"I am sorry I took so long. I just couldn't find the things we needed."

"I was worried." I look downwards as I speak.

"Ohhh, puppet, don't worry. If something happened to me, I would immediately call you for help. You would get someone to help us for sure. Let's see, who could that be? Maybe the National Emergency Number. I always have their number in the office by the phone, just in case."

"Yes, that makes sense." My hair gets out of place as I nod strongly. We have a plan just in case. I like that.

“Anyway, why were you hiding sweetheart?” She asks with a warm and contagious smile.

“I was scared,” I say pretending to look out the window.

“Why were you scared?” She surrounds me with her protecting arm. Maybe a bit too tight, but I don’t mind. She is on my side.

“I was scared of under the bed.”

“Oh! Don’t be scared. There is nothing down there.” She doesn’t look, so I don’t believe her. “I know what we can do, why don’t I bring some paper and colours so you can draw?” I clap my hands in joy. Anything the good nurse suggests must be fun!

She laughs, and gets up.

“I’ll be back in a second.” I know somehow she means it. She really won’t take long.

Alone, I get bored. It is the typical hospital room, dull and solitary, with nothing to do. An old TV set hangs from the ceiling, but the remote is nowhere in eyesight. There is a window to my left, with a view to the world below. Unfortunately, I can’t wave hi to the good nurse sprinting through the garden because it is sealed shut. I lie back on the stiff bed and stare dejectedly at the ceiling, not even the sound of a passing car to distract myself.

The creak of the door announces her. She has brought colours, glue, scissors, paper... Even glitter! But I don’t see a blue felt tip. How disappointing, I was expecting it. Blue is my favourite colour.

“Told you I wouldn’t take long.”

She sits next to me, and together we start drawing pictures, and cutting out shapes. The good nurse even teaches me how to do a snowflake! She says, at Christmas, this room is going to look so good Santa will never want to leave!

I'm having such a good time, that I almost forget where I am till the door slams open making us jump.

"Janice, I need your help with a patient" the bad nurse barks.

"Okay I'll... I'll be there in a second" the good nurse stammers while thrusting everything into a folder she has brought.

"Do you really have to go?" I whine grabbing her wrist.

"Why don't you sign this so I know it's yours?" I nod eagerly, and use her felt tip to write my name on the folder.

"I remember how to write my name!" I gasp, and drop her felt tip under the bed.

"I'll be back soon." She does not notice what just happened. She is already rushing out, without looking.

"You! Be a good boy!" The bad nurse says it staring at me closely, and I notice my eyes getting wet. Her garlic breath is unbearable. As soon as she leaves, I go to my safe place.

This time, the memory of the darkness and weird writing returns with a vengeance and without thinking, I run out of the room to get the good nurse. But she is nowhere to be seen.

I am alone in a long corridor. Its worn out magnolia walls are scraped in too many places probably from the trolleys that bump into them. Poor maintenance or lazy staff I guess,

because no one is around to help me. The pictures on the walls are faded infantile prints like the ones in the old black and white movies mummy liked ... mummy liked movies?

I get distracted. At the end of the corridor the bright colour of the exit doors catches my attention. She is likely behind them, but before I can cross them footsteps stop me. If they find me out of my room, they will punish me for sure.

Fortune is on my side as the nearest room is empty.

“When will we give James’ son the next dose?” The bad nurse’s voice makes me shiver.

“This evening, with dinner.” She is talking to the good nurse. “We don’t want to take any more risks, leaving the window open almost meant his escape. Thankfully, we stopped him before he could jeopardize everything.”

“Definitely. The rage in his eyes when he looked at you ... It was surreal. It was a miracle he didn’t hurt you.” The bad nurse sounds baffled.

“I know.”

The double doors banged shut, their voices fade away. I wait. And I wait for a few more instants. Finally, I hold my breath, and without looking I run back to my room.

The good nurse is at risk. I have to protect her. The good nurse said so. It seems there is only one thing to do, and she did not dare to ask me to call the Emergency Number. Probably she was concerned about me. She mustn’t know of my mission, for she doesn’t like me doing risky things.

I slowly drag myself off the bed again, and cautiously walk out of the room toward the red doors. I hold my breath, and dash through them with my eyes closed. What I find doesn’t surprise me.

Warn out walls, faded pictures, and this time, a bright red sign hanging on the navy-blue door: personnel *only* sign. I don't care about limits when it comes to the good nurse.

I swing the door open. Old black and white photographs of hospital staff on the dirty magnolia walls. Most likely they are now deceased or rocking their nineties in some retirement home, but one knocks me off my socks. In the middle, in between a man and his wife, and with two small girls to his right, there is a boy like me. I mean, almost exactly the same as me when I saw myself in the mirror. Only that the boy looks older than me with curlier hair. Not to mention he is more in shape.

I start looking in the cabinets' drawers. Nothing. I look around and notice a round table. There are only a few papers in here. But they are all about me.

I pick up one of the papers and I read every word twice, before skimming through the rest of the papers and simply run out with them. The Emergency Number doesn't matter any more.

The corridor is cold, and threatening, and the need to hide too strong. I find myself getting into one of the patient rooms, rushing under the bed. I'm not worried that its patient might rat me out, because now I know there are no other patients in this hospital. Only me.

Suddenly, this darkness is welcome, it's safe. So they're alive... They're alive! They were looking for me. After three years, my parents were still looking for me! I try remembering them, but there is only blackness. Why would anyone do this to me?

And the good nurse not being good after all... My cheeks burning. At least the bad nurse was bad.

I toss and turn, cramped under the old bed. A sudden but useless realization stops me frozen. So I am James' son and the "dose" is for forgetting!

Unfortunately, darkness is not blinding down here. My eyes stubborn, can't avoid reading some of the news I took. It says I had disappeared after wondering off on a family trip, never to be seen again. The article was written a year after my disappearance, but I saw more in that drawer, the most recent being a couple of months ago. The article also included a contact telephone number.

I hear someone running in the corridor. They must have already realised I am not in my room. My fists close, my heart is bumping in my head. I sniffle, and stop crying before deciding what to do. I inhale and exhale slowly, accepting what's to come.

When I am sure they aren't near, I step out, and start walking. I don't run as it could give me away. I walk as slowly as possible, and it hurts.

I basically stroll in pain to the fire exit. I don't know how far they are from where I am. If they entered the staircase I'd be trapped.

I peek at the bottom of the stairs, no one. I step down nearly tiptoeing. At the bottom of the stairs, trembling, I push open the steel doors that reveal the lobby.

The door to the outside is closer than I'd have dared to dream. As I approach it, my heart thumps so loud I almost need to cover my ears. The sweat drops stubbornly down my forehead as I continue to stop myself from running.

I want my mummy and daddy. They are a blur, but that's more than what I had before.. The sweat gets in my eye. It is itchy, and it bothers me. This all bothers me. And I run. The last thing I should have done, but I remember my mother's laugh.

I am touching the handle, when I hear their footsteps. It is too late to hide, the only way out, is out.

"There he is!" The bad nurse shouts.

I turn the handle and run into the garden. They're already catching up, though I still try. I try running faster, my legs aching, my voice screaming at my fate.

"Let me go!" I try to break free even though it is of no use.

"Sorry kid, no can do" answers the bad nurse. "The longer you're here the better."

"Why?!"

"Because if you never appear then, she—" the ugly nurse points at the false good nurse with a bitter smile— "will inherit the whole fortune."

We start our walk back to the hospital, and she does not stop talking. She enjoys it.

"When your grandfather died, he left some money and a couple of properties to your aunt and me, including this hospital. But of course, your father was his favourite, so he left most of his fortune to him. Once your father dies, all the money goes to you. But if you disappear, your mother can't get the money since she didn't want to carry the family name. The money will go to my sister here. But of course, you have to have disappeared for a number of years before your daddy declares you dead. So, here we are." The bad nurse is having the time of her life.

"You aren't dead yet, because your other aunt here, prefers to do it slowly, for your daddy to pay. So when he is at his lowest... He will have his last breath. You will follow soon afterwards; the sedative slowly accumulating should eventually kill you."

I can't even wail as the good nurse pushes me into the room, and forces me to sit on the chair. I try to escape, but the bad nurse holds me. I can see my aunt with a syringe.

"No!" I sink my nails so deep into the bad nurse's skin that she screams and lets me go. I go straight under the bed, where I will be safe.

Only I am not.

The good nurse's arm stretches under the bed, and I start wailing.

"Shut up! You, idiotic child!" she snaps, but I keep wailing at the top of my lungs, dodging her arm every time it gets too near, until I corner myself. The bad nurse kneels to help her. Then, I smile.

I finally remember mum and dad. I promise myself that maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but that someday, I will meet them again.

And as I see the good nurse's hand with the syringe, the last piece of the puzzle fits. The eerie writing was mine, and the blue felt pen is where I left it with the good nurse's by its side, in the corner. As I feel her arm clutching my leg, I write "603-586-0932." Mum and dad's phone number from the paper. My body failing; my mind getting blurrier by the second, I scribble, "She is not good!"

Malena Bertrand was born in Cincinnati, but soon moved to Spain. As a toddler, she loved memorizing her favorite stories. Soon she started devouring books, and eventually writing her own stories. At ten, she was runner up in the COBIS Student poetry competition; at eleven, she was part of an e-book anthology of short stories curated by Dee White. Her most recent achievement is her first paper publication in Stinkwaves. When Malena is not writing, she loves practicing piano, reading and singing in the shower!

The Forest By Sam-not-Samuel Millson

A thousand eyes shine in the light of the lantern, held high above your head. The swirling mists eagerly devour the light, and the path at your feet is lit only dimly, as though by the

last fading rays of dusk. There is darkness to either side of the path, impenetrable blackness. Rustles and scratching sounds come from the darkness, and shapes shift in the shadows. Branches snag at your clothes, twisted and gnarled, and you stumble on unseen roots in the gloom.

Lights flash amongst the dark trunks, silhouetting shapes lurking in the trees. Long, branch-like arms hang from bodies perched in long, arm-like branches. Heads turn towards you, baring razor fangs in hungry, mirthless grins. Pointed ears flick back and forth as pointed tongues run along pointed teeth. Long fingers twitch and flex, like nooses come alive. Wings flutter and then are still. The lights in the trees disappear, just as a gust of stray wind blows out your lantern.

You stand, pulse racing, in the darkness, listening to the sounds of claws scraping against bark and feet hitting the ground as bodies leap from the trees with apelike grace. The dry leaves whisper and rustle, the sounds growing nearer and nearer. You can hear them breathing, and every hair on your arms and neck stands up as the creatures approach. You know that you never should have come into the forest.

A bright light illuminates the woods, and you see for the first time that you're in a clearing. Dark shapes scamper into the trees, fleeing the light, and disappear once more. You turn towards the source of the light. A majestic beast stands amongst the trees, light shining from the twisted horn that grows from its brow. Its cloven hooves paw at the shining white stones beneath.

You approach the creature, one hand raised. It's looking away, staring into the darkness. You place your hand onto its flank and begin to stroke its soft fur. The beast lets loose a low rumble of pleasure, and you feel yourself relax. Your heart slows to a more normal pace, and your ears stop straining to hear every noise amongst the trees. As your fear diminishes, you realize just how late it is. Your limbs grow leaden as the lateness of the

hour mingles with the terror you've just been through. You feel lethargic and indolent, content to remain in the grove and pet the beautiful creature that saved you.

The beast's head swings to face you. Three rows of teeth are bared in a predator's grin, and its eyes are utterly black. Red blood drips from its matted, tangled beard as its forked tongue darts out to lick its lips.

You recoil and step back, stumbling as your foot slips on the bleached skulls which carpet the ground. You fall, and the beast advances. Its hooves are on your chest, and its face is mere inches from your own. You look into its cold, black eyes a second time.

It doesn't snarl or growl; it feels no need for such posturing. You and the beast both know who's in control. You clench your jaw tightly shut, promising to yourself that you'll face death with courage. You will not scream as it devours you, you say to yourself.

You lie to yourself, and your cries echo against an uncaring sky as the creatures come out of the trees to scrounge for scraps of the beast's feast.

If you're Sam-not-Samuel Millson, you have been writing since you could hold a crayon. You enjoy reading, writing, acting, second-person narration, and making clever comments at every opportunity. You grew up with *The Spiderwick Chronicles* and *The Belgariad*, among many other books, and live in your house's library. Your name is not Samuel, Samantha, or Samson. Samwise is also not your name, but is acceptable. You currently live in Martinez, California.

The Best of Times By Kathryn Ward

My father loved Charles Dickens. More than anything, perhaps. It was a fact of life simple enough for me to understand in my earliest moments of consciousness. Papa is

tall, wears glasses, has brown hair, and loves Charles Dickens.

Both my parents were immigrants, my mother from Bohemia, along with her mother and seven siblings, and my father from Russia, alone except for his English language collection. They met on a boat from London and were married in Manhattan in time to live together in the top room of the house my grandmother bought from the state of Minnesota. As Europe exploded into the Midwest, our family spun little webs of nations through the Twin Cities; my father, a doctor, could translate the twenty most common illnesses into German, Polish, and Hebrew, and my mother spent most of her time downstairs speaking rapid Bohemian with her siblings, all of whom remained in my grandmother's house except for my uncle, Ludvik, who had dedicated his life to the Minneapolis Communist Party and moved across the Mississippi to St. Paul.

The unity of immigration that bound our family ended there, however. In strict accordance to his bible, *Great Expectations*, my father vowed to bring me up with all the posterity of Miss Havisham raising Estella, which is to say in stark contrast to the carelessly emotive passion of my cousins. When my aunts and uncles sent their children to the big brick public school a few blocks down, my father hired me a tutor whose back he had fixed a few years ago and who believed heavily in the power of censorship. As my cousins learned the alphabet, I learned the detailed lineage of the Romanovs from Mikhail I to Alexei, and that Lenin was likely the first horse of the apocalypse.

Both my tutor and my father also shared the belief that books were the best way to learn about life, and agreed I was old enough to choose my first Dickens story as soon as I was able to string words together into comprehensible ideas. I chose *Oliver Twist* because it was about a child, but after stumbling through that first reading, decided that Charles Dickens had never been a child.

Regardless of the emotional scars the tale left me, I was entranced by Oliver's story. One evening in October my grandmother's brother sent a set of dollhouses from the Old

World, mistaking the amount of time it would take for a parcel to reach us by Christmas. My cousins and I spent the evening constructing a little village that, because our oldest cousin, Madlenka, voraciously claimed it was the capital of Bohemia, we named St. Prague. We shared our American-made dolls and invented an idyllic community around the front parlour of my grandmother's house.

Madlenka doled me out two dolls. One wore a faded blue suit and had the pink paint of his face mostly chipped off, and his partner had a red dress and one leg. They lived together near the river, and when Madlenka tossed a little china dog to me to complete the family, the connection between St. Prague and the slums of London was clear.

"Careful, Willa, you'll break her!" Madlenka cried out as my blue suited doll clashed again against the other harshly. "What are you doing?"

"She tried to protect Oliver, so Bill's killing her," I explained.

Madlenka stared at me for a moment, then laughed unsurely. "Whatever you say, *ty vole*. But if you break her, you'll have to buy me a new one. With *both* legs."

I doubt if she ever thought of it again, but all at once I realized that I was not growing up at the same rate as my cousins. We lived in the same house as each other, shared the same blood, but the public school, crowded dialects, and streetcar stories of my cousins pulled their branches of the family tree into western eruption, while steadfast tradition, Old World lessons, and Charles Dickens held mine close to the heart of the east. I saw my cousins every day, but after Bill Sykes murdered Nancy in my grandmother's parlour, a continental and impassable divide went up between me and my family.

My consolation prize for betraying Bohemia was my father's pride. While my cousins invented stories without me, my father and I discussed scenes, characters, lines, plot points I had undoubtedly missed, until it felt as if our upstairs apartment was London in the nineteenth century.

On my fourteenth birthday, my father purchased a brand new set of all of Dickens' works in chronological order, bound in red, green, and navy blue, with golden letters wrapped tightly over their covers and spines.

"You've chosen the path of the heart that never hardens, Willa," he told me in his doctor voice. "These books will teach you far more than I ever could, and I only expect that you adhere to their reason."

I ran my fingers over the delicately ridged spines. "One's missing."

"Yes, *A Tale of Two Cities*. You're not old enough to understand it yet."

This I accepted, but when I heard him tell my tutor he was afraid I was "impressionable enough to accidentally become a Bolshevik," the logic lost a bit of gravity.

That summer my uncle Ludvik moved back into my grandmother's house. Ludvik was shadowy and smooth, with greased hair, two clean, black suits that he alternated between every other day, and a gray cap that used to belong to my grandfather. At dinner he smiled and listened but never spoke, except to my grandmother, in a low, thick voice that reminded me of oil. More interesting than his return was that of his son. My cousin Anton was a physical reflection of his father, but what Ludvik lacked in social skills, Anton made up for in abundance. He was sixteen, told stories, taught us songs and poems, wore velvet ties, wrote plays for us to perform, spoke Russian, English, and the mother language, sewed up buttons and rips in his clothes himself, liked orange juice, knew the old Bohemian national anthem by heart, and remembered everything anyone had ever told him. He was ignorant to the ocean between me and the rest of our cousins, and for the first time since I learned to read, I was a part of the family again.

My mother didn't say anything about the return of her brother, but my father the tsarist made no attempt to mask his discontent.

"As if this country hasn't been good enough to us. He makes his money on socialism, for God's sake."

"Well, he had to move back in with my mother. He can't be making much."

My father said "hm" from the back of his throat and turned a page.

One day Anton knocked on my bedroom door before breakfast. "Good morning, Willa. We're going downtown to the river."

"Can I come?"

"No, I'm just over to ask your permission. Of course you can, *ty vole*. Come on."

Since Anton's arrival, the twelve of us behaved like young children again, and now under the rising sun and cloud of loving freedom, we filled the streetcar station with copper laughter and the smell of warm hair and wilting flowers. My younger cousins chased each other around newsstands while Madlenka and Anton bought a dozen tickets, the latter smiling at his long lost bloodline like a proud father.

Somewhere near the Mississippi, Anton led us off and onto the streets. I followed him blindly, as we all would, as we all did. We stopped in front of everything interesting—yellow birds in big cages lined against a window, piles of wool scarves imported from Ireland, a machine breathing in cakey circles and exhaling perfectly powdered doughnuts. For lunch we climbed down near the river's edge and Anton unveiled sandwiches wrapped in wax paper. As Madlenka piped out warnings about the water, Anton and I sat together on a bench under a dark green tree that dyed our skin in shades of emerald and gold.

He pulled a cigarette from his pocket and lit it. "I won't offer you one, little cousin."

"I wouldn't want one. I prefer cigars."

He laughed out a billow of smoke. "All that wit wasted on your big empty apartment." He cleared his throat quickly. "Sorry."

"It's true," I said, for Anton's approval had made me suddenly bitter for how much simpler his was than my father's. "It's like I'm not even part of the same family as you. If I went to school with everyone else, I'd really be your cousin. I feel like a stranger to Bohemia."

"Only because you act so much mightier than everyone else." He didn't say it coldly. "Everyone thinks you're better than us."

"Of course I'm not. No one's better than anyone."

"Spoken like a communist, cousin."

"I don't really know what that means. My father says politics are only for people who have lived through a revolution and come out without joining the socialist cult."

"There's your fatal flaw, Willa. Who cares what your father says?"

"I do!" I said with immigrated indignance.

Anton was quiet for a moment. "Your father doesn't like me, does he?"

"No."

"He doesn't like our family?"

“No.”

“Well, what *does* he like?”

“Charles Dickens.”

Anton looked at me the same way Madlenka had years ago in my grandmother’s parlour.

“Charles Dickens? Why?”

“He’s-”

He turned to look me in the eyes. I thought of the golden letters on the spines in the library, of the nightmares of becoming a pickpocket, of constant competition with David Copperfield, of great expectations hung in our living room and raised daily, of my father, the ghost of approval past, present, and future, and suddenly, in my cousin’s eyes, they were all meaningless histories of someone else’s child who would never fit into the New World, coincidental collections of antiquated letters that could not possibly define this moment, or the way love feels, or family. They were just words.

“- grievously overrated,” I finished.

And finally, Anton laughed.

“Couldn’t have said it better myself, *ségra*. You know what was especially awful? *A Tale of Two Cities*. Do you like the French Revolution?”

“My tutor doesn’t, so probably.”

“Eat slow and I’ll give you the short version. Don’t tell Charles Darnay, which is just about the most pathetic attempt at glorified self insertion I’ve ever read, by the way. And

you can't care *too* much what your father thinks, or else I wouldn't be your favorite cousin."

After lunch, we piled back onto a southbound streetcar and fell asleep on each other's shoulders. I thought about the tennis court oath my parents signed in London, and I thought of the tyranny of King Louis the Traditionalist, and I thought if Anton was Robespierre, I would be Saint-Just, and I would follow him to the guillotine or to paradise, and I wished with all my heart that I could have grown up like this.

In August, Uncle Ludvik announced that he had taken on a job in Chicago writing for a newspaper. He and Anton would move at the end of the month. I would be alone again.

On their last night in St. Paul, my grandmother and my aunts prepared a holiday meal and threw a Bohemian goodbye. Heartbroken, I tried to summon anger and lay outside in the grass while the rest of my family played charades. It was hot, but the stars were cool in the blue velvet sky, and music drifted out through the open windows. Tonight it tasted like kaleidoscopes and museums and the feeling of relief after you cry.

Anton came and lay next to me quietly. He was the only person I ever met who knew how to just be quiet.

"I'll run away," I said suddenly. "I'll go to real school with you and we'll be a regular American family and no one will know anything different."

I could hear him smile. "We *are* a regular American family, Willa. And there are schools here. All you have to do is ask." He coughed and handed me a little brown package. "Anyways I got you this."

It was a dime-store copy of *A Tale of Two Cities*. The pages were yellow and thin, and the font blurred in some spots, the complete opposite of the secret story my father kept locked in leather-bound idealism.

“You can’t be afraid of what you don’t know, *ty vole*,” Anton said.

Dependably, words failed me.

Around midnight we gathered on the porch to say goodbye. I had hoped to have something clever to say when Anton reached me, but when he passed from Madlenka’s arms to mine, all I could do was hold him with the warmth of falling asleep on Christmas Eve.

He said one thing, and it was the last thing I heard him say until I saw him the next month in Chicago. “Remember, it is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.”

Then he was gone.

As we climbed the stairs that night my father slowed down to speak with me. “You know, Anton told me something tonight.”

“Really?”

“He said tutoring is bourgeois nonsense and that the only way to truly gain an education worth having is by living.”

I looked up.

My father smiled. “What a thing to tell your uncle. Do you think it’s true?”

All you have to do is ask.

“I think I’d like to go to school, if that’s what you mean.”

“Hm. It does seem to do something for your cousins, doesn’t it?”

“Yes.”

He twitched his moustache in a little circle. “Then it’s settled.”

I don’t love Charles Dickens. I don’t pretend I ever will. But if there’s one thing I’ve learned from him, it’s that love is awfully hard to lose. It’s just too big. Love is greater than acceptance, than money, than death, language, streetcar stops, tsarism, my father, Anton, life, me. And always, it is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done, and one day and forever there is a far, far better rest that I will go to than I have ever known.

Kathryn Ward is a senior at Minnetonka High School. She works at the Minnetonka Writing Center and presented her research conducted there at the National Conference for Peer Tutoring in Writing in 2016. Writing has been the backbone of her life and will continue to be in her impending post-secondary education in English. This is her first publication.

Non-Fiction

When Crisis Strikes By Brooklyn Manga

When crisis strikes, the British put the kettle on. But for me, when crisis strikes, I reach a 3.0 GPA after years of hard work, graduate high school, and get accepted to my dream college all in one fell swoop. It was in January that the proverbial skeletons that hid in my family's closet made their way out into the light, and I found out for the second time about my father's infidelity. The first time I had found out were not factual occurrences but things that when looked back on in retrospect in the very instant that I learned the truth made it easy for me not to be surprised.

I had heard from my friends their own war stories of when they had found out the same things. They warned me that the divorce would be messy, told me stories of how their mom's became, and where their dad's went. But most of all, I was told that it was okay to fall apart a little bit in order to deal with the monumental brokenness that I felt inside me. Except, for me, that's never been how it works. I had always been more efficient during the storm: I was the person that people leaned on, the one who made sure things were orderly, the defender. It was the last stretch of my senior year, and though my parents fought endlessly over money, over his infidelity, over him going or her staying, I was determined to finish strong.

I never told my teachers. At least, not until near the end when there was no more work to fill my time. Instead, I systematically studied, wrote papers, did homework, asked for extra credit where I could, and when I needed to cry in the middle of class, I excused myself to go to the restroom, and I cried. I always chose the restroom downstairs and near the cafeteria. Nobody ever went into that one. It was far away from most of my classes but it was private, and it was only place where I could breathe.

There was a point when things got so horrible that even now, months later; I have no idea how I got through it. My mother had gotten drunk and left home on a mission to die. She didn't have to tell me for me to know what she was planning to do. I sat on the floor of my room, crying and texting her. But what strikes me now is the coldness of it all: How

my father had left texting and calling and praying for her all to me. He didn't tell me it would be okay. He didn't drive out after her to stop her. He went back to bed.

But even during this time, I still managed to finish my readings for Economics. I still managed to get good grades on my essays in English. I still made consistent A's on my Latin tests. My grades were shining, even though I was not. My attention waxed and waned in school. My sleep schedule was gone. I hardly ate. At night, I listened to my parents screaming at each other. My brother drove me to school. My mom left to live with relatives. My dad told me nothing at all.

Then came the part where I was no longer welcome in my own home. The part where I was blamed for things that were out of my control and I decided to live with my mom and our relatives. My school was an hour away. I slept on the couch. I had only a few pairs of underwear. My brother's t-shirts. Pants that I came there wearing. But it was easier, and though I felt shattered, I didn't cry as much. It was at this time that I told my AP Literature teacher what was going on. He was sympathetic and kind. As was my Latin teacher.

But it didn't matter anymore.

Official grades were coming out soon. I had finally achieved my 3.0 GPA. I was going off to the college of my dreams. Graduation was a week away. These things were enough to make my mom get out of bed even when she felt as broken as I had. They were enough to bring a triumphant smile to her lips, and a put a little glimmer of hope in her eyes. Now, I am in college and though the storm continues, I work and I strive and I drive myself to continue to be her pride. I cannot afford much. I don't have many clothes or any of the cute room décor items that the other girls have. But I have a reason to continue. My mom.

And that's more than enough for me.

Brooklyn Manga is an Atlanta-based author and poet with a preference for writing historical fiction pieces about queer youth, overcoming trauma, love, and nature. Though she has never been published before, Brooklyn has written two books, many short stories, an abundance of poetry, and is currently in the process of completing her third and longest novel yet. She has been an avid reader and logophile for as long as she can remember.

More Than Just a Number By Alex Rojas

The A/C is always what hits me first. Every inch of my skin feeling that cold embrace as the smell of fries and onion rings takes care of my nose. The tables are all full, and a crazy kid or two dashes past me as I walk in. I see a familiar face all the way behind the counter smiling. “Number 35, ready,” comes out of the intercom in a bored voice. Before I even make it to the line that face already announces in that jolly Mexican voice of hers “*chicken strips for Alejandro papas crispy.*” I wait in line just for the sake of paying (though they would gladly let me pay for my food later) and having a quick chat about how our families are doing. It’s been like that since Louis’ Burgers opened nine years ago. Still coming all the time, still getting the same thing, still the same looks of confusion on the people’s faces.

When I’m waiting for my order I always know that what I’ll hear over the intercom isn’t “number 36” or anything boring like that. It’ll always be “Alejandro.” That’s right, they call me up by name when my food is ready. The people around me always have a funny look on their face, asking themselves why would that kid get called by name? It’s a brief curiosity- makes them think about the complexities and stories that might be going on in the lives of the others around them. It fades away quickly and they get back to munching on their burgers.

It's a point of decent confusion when I bring my friends. "Did they just say *Alejandro*?" "Yeah, yeah they did." "But, that's not even your name. Why don't they call you Alex?" "Cause I kind of like the longer version, I never get to be called that." It's been nearly a decade since I've gone there and all of the employees still call me *Alejandro*. In all honesty, it's a nice feeling to hear it over the intercom, makes me feel special to have the monotonous pattern of "Number 33, 34, 35, 36..." broken up by me.

My parents enjoyed the history behind my name, Alex. It means protector of others in Greek, *Alexo*. Well known to just about anyone, it's the shortened version of Alexander, a name that has been owned by eight popes, and many a king, including Alexander the Great himself. Nowadays a female named Alex isn't very strange, but its traditional role was serving as a name for newborn Greco-Roman babies with aspirations of becoming soldiers. At the time, the most common of occupations for a white man, thus the name grew well in its crib, then disseminated through conquest. It's very rare someone doesn't know an Alex.

The name Alex has issues though, it's so... normal. My name drifts into commonality, the usual, just one of many. Being forgotten is a thought that haunts me to my very core, and I try to avoid it all costs. Having a name like Alex makes that tough at times. Sometimes, I'd rather have a name like Ezekiel or Leonardo or *something* that you need to use your whole mouth for. I remember those people, and I'm sure when they feel the flip side of it, that their name is too long, they can shorten it to *Zeke* or *Leo*. But my *full* name is just Alex. I can't nickname myself to something *longer*, that defeats the purpose. So when I hear that name over the intercom, *Alejandro*, it feels right, meaningful.

My parents though, attach my middle name to it. *Alex-Enrique... Enrique*. Something you can roll the r's in and feel when you say. That's not boring; the whole mouth is forced to leap into action, resulting in a more vivid memory. For a lot of kids the sound of their middle name erupting from the mouth of one of their parents makes them shiver. But... adding *Enrique* is a thing I enjoy, and most of the time to my parents that *is* my name.

It just makes it so much more interesting to add a little something. Replacing the x with a *jandro* or adding a whole *Enrique*. These things make the name different, more interesting, and memorable. Nobody in that restaurant will remember “number 34” or “number 35” and tie it to a pair of faces. But they will remember that little glitch in the matrix, that break in the infinite series, a kid’s name over the intercom.

Alex Rojas is a student with newspaper article experience and an active participant in the AP English classes offered at his high school. He’s been interested in mathematics since he was a child but recently has sparked an interest in the humanities after having an incredible professor.

Severe and Enduring By Laura Ingram

The hospital windows gnash together like God’s overbite, the rain tapping her long fingers against the industrial glass. Sixteen girls and two boys sit cross-ankled on a stained sofa, heads bowed over their books as if in prayer; quiet enough to keep our misery immaculate. I, seventy pounds of gossamer and syncope knot my legs, thin as embroidery floss, in tattered children’s tights, search for my sternum beneath the grey shag sweater my friend outgrew in the third grade. One of the women who watches over the ward, Maria, an English major with a Spanish accent, lines us up by the dining room’s double doors for the second snack of the day. She snatches my scapula before I reach the patient refrigerator, pulls my brittle hair back into a braid, several strands slipping through her fingers towards the floor.

“Miss Laura. You know the rules. Don’t think staff has forgotten how much peanut butter you can shove under those pretty little fingernails. Sleeves up, hair back, hands on the table-top,” Maria says, toppling me into a chair at table one. I push away the plate of boost pudding and banana slices, appeal to the faint fluorescent lights for the apocalypse of my flickering pulse.

The doctors here worry I will fall and break my hip. I worry my friends will find out I am just stress fractures and semicolons and stop sending me cards covered in curves of cursive. Although on chair rest I'm not allowed to check the mail tray, Maria hands me a pastel paper stack every afternoon. Today there are eight envelopes; my grandmother detailing her Saturday of shelling butterbeans, several sets of haphazard heart sketches from my bespectacled boyfriend, thick packets of Harry Potter fan fiction from my friend Sorena, printed in ten-point Times New Roman to take up as little space on the page as possible.

I read over the wrinkled sheets curled into the coral couch cushion, small and displaced as a comma splice, tuck the hem of my sweater between my teeth so no one can hear me cry. Someone else cries in the rec room. It's always someone else. The throw pillows are swirled with mascara stains. I don't recognize the pitchy pleas I've plucked from my skull until the echo from the other room ends. I sound like a newborn, pink velour tongue velcroed to teeth, cries from my empty mouth almost inaudible, every hour bringing about the harshest hunger I've ever endured, yet live without words for.

Weigh-ins are Monday, Wednesday and Friday, just like the literature summer camp for high school students I'd been accepted into three months ago and now couldn't attend because my parents had driven me to Durham two Tuesdays ago, a city grey as cardiac arrest, kept alive by the constant mumblings of machines, plastic clouds dripping down to the injected intersections like a normal saline line.

"It's my body." I said as my parents pull into patient parking. I don't try to run, just cross my arms, ringing my forefinger and thumb around my bicep, fingertips touching, clasp and unclasp the Hello Kitty watch I wear just over my elbow. "I destroy it." They popped the trunk anyway, pulled out swathes of chiffon from the children's department of J. C. Penney and ushered me into the foyer with its fake blue fire where a freckled

receptionist photographed my faded face for the patient portal system, the computer program where they log all our ugly numbers in pixilated, parallel lines.

We took the elevator upstairs. I watched my mouth not move in the shiny silver surface above the control panel. Dr. Stu, a Yankees fan with chapped cheeks tipped us toward the armchairs scattered across his cramped office. He sent my parents away with Jennie, my therapist, He steepled his fingers then, elbows on his knees, and told me that, according to my lab-work, my liver enzymes were elevated, a harbinger of multiple organ failure in anorexia nervosa, my neck cracking, eyes narrowed.

“You’re dying.” He said.

My chapped lips cracked and bled around chattering teeth. A half-smile. “I know.”

Weigh-ins are Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, after we’ve pissed in a cup and before we’ve lined up for breakfast. A nurse with stained teeth and spotless scrubs smooths the backs of our green gowns as if she’s testing the temperature in a claw-footed tub. She’s checking our underwear for coin rolls, half pound weights, or even the neon magnets provided to each patient for the posting of printed Pinterest quotes and family pictures to the white boards in our Technicolor rooms, each with only one wall painted, doors propped open even we dress and undress, clasping our dresses and fists, always clenched, crouched, floral fabric covering the air-strike zones dog-eared on our skin, blue and marked as tattered atlas pages. I wait until the child psychiatrist calls my bulimic roommate to swap her pink pills for purple suppositories before I curl into the carpet, seeping across the floor like a coffee spill, do as many crunches as I can before I hear Maria’s wooden clogs clacking closer, no—closer, her acrylics clutching the pilling of my pink sweater. “That’s enough.” She says while I turn away, hollow cheek pressed against the ground, rug burn reddening as I let her roll me over, help me stand. Still, I shake my head.

It's never enough.

Jennie, the therapist with hair the color of Nagasaki's shroom, calls me out of art therapy, pulls the lump she snatched from my throat last session out of her pocket.

"Dr. Stu wants us to send you over to the ER."

My hands, replaced with moths, flutter, light on my throat. I know completely that she means I'll be strapped to a stretcher, that doctors who would never let me use their first names will snap their fingers, ask a nurse for a tray with a tube to thread through my nose and down my throat to feed me, revoke the sole, primal power shared between anorexics, suffragettes, and other wrongly imprisoned protestors—refusal. The roof of my mouth itches and my ears ring. "No." I say, imagining uncooked eggs tossed between gleaming prison bars, Saint Catherine's assertion she could live off the seven sacraments alone.

Jennie wraps a wisp of hair around her right ring finger. "You have the ability to stop him, not me."

I stare at my hands, turn my palms up to watch my pulse waver at the wrist. "I can't—I can't eat. It's like at school, I'd have a juice carton in the cafeteria, one with a little striped straw, or a single spoonful of ice cream straight from the container when I got home because yeah—I was *hungry*." The syllables make the wrong shape in my mouth, isosceles. I start to cry. "I was hungry, but it didn't matter! This is just who I am! Some girls have acrylic nails and chipped teeth, others have high ponytails and higher GPAs, or spiral notebooks and straight bangs. I have hungry." I think I say, ears ringing, rubbing the fuzzy lanugo hairs on my arm the wrong way. Health class textbooks told me they grow in tufts to keep anorexics warm, but I shiver. I am so sharp. I am so cold.

Jennie uncrosses her ankles, eyes the box of colored Kleenex but doesn't reach for it. Jennie thinks handing someone a tissue is asking them to clean up their mess. My parents think she is too liberal. Jennie has too many bumper stickers, is probably bisexual, and definitely swears a lot. I take two tissues unprompted, put them in my skirt pocket. I always keep things I think are pretty, usually whatever my mother would want to throw away from my school bag.

“Helen Keller could see that you're anorexic, Laura. But Jesus, I've worked with teenage vanishing acts my entire career, and you aren't just hungry. You have a vocabulary taller than World Book and Britannica combined. You save pink tissues and patterned paper scraps. Your mind is a mountain range. Your hands are paper cranes. You are starving for information, ravening on your knees for a world where the physics of absence is better understood, where you aren't locked in a freezing hospital ward with a gang of girls who cry over soda crackers, or measuring yourself by how much space is left over after you scoot into the school bus seat.” She says, or maybe doesn't say—everything's stopped and static as a tornado watch, and I wilt, bones scattered like a jigsaw puzzle shaken onto a rug before it's pored over and put together.

I know the theory of light and matter, the distance formula, at least three of Edgar Allen Poe's poems, how to say “shit happens” in French and German, but I don't know how to respond to this neurotic, weepy woman, so odd and determined. I spend the rest of our hour drawing wilted flowers in the dollar-store journal she gave me the day I admitted, hair hanging half-mast. She demands nothing else, walks me to my room with her fingers closed around my shoulder, heels clacking as she trots the other way.

I draw the blinds, cover my eyes with my hands and crawl beneath the quilt my mom made although it's four in the afternoon.

I sleep through supper, chew my charred dreams.

Laura Ingram is a tiny girl with big glasses and bigger ideas. Her poetry and prose have been published in forty-three literary magazines, among them *The Cactus Heart Review*, *Forest for the Trees*, *Teenage Wasteland*, and *Gravel Magazine*. Laura is a creative writing student. Harry Styles once gave her his water bottle.

Snowless December By Young Jin Kim

December should be cold. It should be drinking warm milk while cozying up next to the fireplace; looking out the window at millions of snowflakes whose intricate patterns you imagine you can see. It should be the merry blinking of Christmas lights set up way ahead of Christmas, and taping them around the house, so that it ends up looking like some fairy godmother's retreat straight out of children's tales. But to someone living in Singapore, a December like this one would be exactly that – a tale.

December here is nearly indistinguishable from the rest of the months, both in terms of the weather and the *Zeitgeist*. It's still hot – the heavy, dense humidity suffocates just the same and induces a thin film of stickiness on every inch of skin not within an air-conditioned room. The rains become more frequent, and heavier, as if it's an equator-bound country's substitute for snow. We don't wake up to a skinning of the surface, a peeling of a moist, moldy crust for the revelation of white baby skin. No, no such metamorphosis of nature occurs in December. We wake up and don't waste time looking out the window. We brush our teeth instead.

Our holiday spirit is, at best, a weak imitation of Western culture, a counterfeit merriness you can only feel in mega shopping malls. Employees wearing Santa Claus hats, with huge fake grins and an especially servile attitude. Shops exhibiting plastic Christmas trees, dusty from being used year after year, positioned beside 50% sale boards so that the lucrative offer is sufficiently illuminated. There's this place called Orchard where they deck the roadside greenery with all kinds of festive flotsam,

stringing Angsanas trees together with colored ribbons until a sort of fabric arch forms above the streets. Orchard is the retail hub of Singapore.

No one prances around wishing everyone else a happy new year like how (we think) the shameless Caucasians do. No. We stand silently in public transport, blank-faced as usual, each immersed in his own world of problems.

I once encountered a group of Americans on the train. They were huge, and freckled, and loud – they had to stoop to fit inside the compartment, and their hands were like five sausages stuck onto a chunk of red meat. Every word they said came ripping out of their mouths, punctuating the air with exclamations and flamboyant tones. They oozed hedonism. Every move they made was done so with bravado, every expression of theirs conspicuous and alive. I glanced at the Singaporeans glumly regarding the foreigners. Their faces were etched with ennui; all their zest for life seemed to have been sucked away by the jolly Westerners. We were the living embodiments of *taedium vitae*; the polar opposite of our white counterparts.

I would often speculate, after a particularly moving movie or an encounter like the one above, about the cultural chasm between the Oriental and Occident countries. What was it about them that enabled them to so stirringly manifest their inner selves? Or maintain an optimism, unfounded or not, through thick and thin? Perhaps it was their tendency to break, ruthlessly and irrevocably, all social norms standing in their way. Their tendency to, with their special blend of emancipation and antinomianism, make me squirm and blush whenever I watch a Western flick with my parents. A liberation of the spirit from conservative mindsets may be the key to achieving their unbounded devil-may-care attitudes.

But devil-may-care is the last thing on Asian minds. We are stuffy, and stiff, and conform to rules that are decades old as if it is the only way to preserve our national identity. Elders being always right is *de rigueur*; subordinates being always wrong is in vogue.

Eccentric dreams are condemned; we have to become a lawyer, doctor, or a disgrace to the family. Unlike the Western world, our countries are full of neither debauchees nor geni.

Maybe that's why our Decembers are so stale and stagnant compared to theirs. We are a different people. Theirs is a world of possibilities and brightness, though their amorality may not always serve them well. Ours is a practical one tainted by realism. They can believe in Santa, and leave cookies and milk on the kitchen table, and taste the coldness of the North Pole in the candies from red cotton stockings. We can do none of that. I see Christmas as a day to convince my parents to buy something for me: "We're supposed to give one another gifts today!"

"Supposed to", my parents reply. "Not must".

The more fortunate among us fly overseas in December – as if December is enjoyable in anywhere but home. I open the app where people show off their perfect lives and digitally perfect faces, and see my classmates in America, Germany, Italy, Switzerland. Tasting the snow they had never tasted; breathing in the minty air of winter countries; donning mittens and scarves for the first time in their lives. They're happy there. Experiencing what they had never experienced before.

Others I find in libraries, diligently preparing for the future. They don't care about it being a holiday, a time for recharging and fun. When we have our eyes on a goal, nothing can stop us.

December, for us, isn't about celebration or creating the perfect Christmas atmosphere. It isn't about enjoying the meteorological phenomena of our country or extravagant spending on fragile red and green trinkets or euphoric public exchanges. December, for us, is the last month of the year. It is the month that precedes a new year; a new year with new problems and new challenges. It is the month to learn what we did not have a

chance to learn in the previous eleven months. The month to neatly tie up the bundle of a year. Boring, but practical. Colorless, but pragmatic.

Young Jin is a high school student in Singapore. He's a bookophile – everything about books, especially the smells, fascinates him. Dog ears and creased spines are the banes of his life. He's quite confused, for now, about what exactly he wants to write about. "Creative non fiction" has caught his eye, but he doesn't want to part with science writing or opinion pieces. He's interested in Physics and programming, and one day wishes to make a physics simulation programme so that kids can avoid solving Newtonian questions by hand.

Art

Horseshoe Loops in Canyonlands By Mollie Tom



Horseshoe Loops in Canyonlands

Canyonlands National Park is located southwest of Arches National Park. It's known for its dramatic desert landscape carved by the Colorado River. The Colorado River and the Green River divide the park into four districts: Island in the Sky, The Needles, The Maze, and the rivers themselves. The whole place is way too big to see all in one day so we decided to take a plane ride over Canyonlands. It was well worth the trip! This photo is of two successive opposite horseshoe loops.(MT)

Mollie Tom is a lover of traveling and she should be. There are so many exciting places to explore. Most people rather not leave their hometown or go on vacations, but she is not one of them. She rather walk to the nearest bus station, randomly pick what town she'll go to next, and then spend the entire day adventuring before checking into a hotel. "Feeling free – I have nowhere to be and no one to see. I have the whole world in front of me and two feet to take me there. That is the best feeling in the world." – Mollie Tom

A Camel at Choki-Dhani, Jaipur By Trivarna Hariharan



“I clicked this picture at the beautiful Chokhi Dhani in Jaipur, India. It is designed in a way that symbolises the joyous village life of the place. It represents its inner radiance and warmth. It was wonderful to see so many birds and animals living here – elephants, peacocks, sparrows, camels, squirrels.

I love camels. They’re beautiful creatures. The camels here are decked in such bright, traditional clothes. At dusk, they give rides to the people who come by. They’re so calm, composed and majestic as they walk around Chokhi Dhani.

This picture was a beautiful moment – I clicked it early evening. It was totally heartening to see the camel smile so joyously and lovingly!”

Trivarna Hariharan is a writer and musician from India. She has authored *The Necessity of Geography* (Flutter Press), *Home and Other Places* (Nivasini Publishers), *Letters I Never Sent* (Writers Workshop, Kolkata). Her writing appears or is forthcoming in *Right Hand Pointing*, *Third Wednesday*, *One Sentence Poems*, *Alexandria Quarterly*, *Birds Piled Loosely*, *TXTOBJX*, *Front Porch Review*, *Plum Tree Tavern*, *Red Bird Chapbooks*, *Calamus Journal*, *Fourth & Sycamore*, *Eunoia Review* and others. She has served as the editor in chief at *Inklette*, and is the poetry editor for *Corner Club Press*. Besides writing, she learns the electronic keyboard, and has completed her fourth grade in the instrument at Trinity College of Music, London.

The Endearing Sunflower; Time Slipping By By John Tuttle





The sunflower:

Color is a beautiful thing as can be the absence of it at the opposite end of the spectrum. We say our lives are “colorful” when they are instilled with excitement. Color plays an often crucial role in people’s vision, yet I find that color is something rather difficult to define. Could the painter function in the absence of color? As with the eye, the window to the soul, the lens of my camera is subject to the sensory element of color.

For years there were two types of photos: those in black and white, and those in color. The age of digital photography has opened many more doors to creativity, not least among them the effect of selective colorizing. With the aid of digital software, a photographer can edit a still shot so that only a few hues (or even just one) are in color and render all other hues to appear as monochrome.

This allows me to isolate the colors of my choice, drawing more attention to the colorized object. One of the stirring thoughts which provoked me to capture this image was the thought of individuals who are color blind, those who can see but without the vibrance of color. The endearing two-toned sunflower serves as a tribute honoring all those who suffer with color blindness, those same people who see no difference in the color of skin of any human being. This photo also serves as a reminder to those who see the world in the fullness of color to appreciate the world as well as the gift of their own sight.

The hourglass:

The reasoning and editing behind the creation of the hourglass shot are similar to that behind the sunflower photograph. It is another photo captured outdoors in the elements and in genuine lighting. I love using real sunlight and shadows. The actual concept of the hourglass with the pink sand in motion is a simple one.

The running sand itself can be taken to represent our lives. The time it takes for the sand to run out is brief, so also it is with our short lives. The sand is always moving and never stops until it runs out; too many of us never slow down and enjoy the richness of the moment; we are constantly on the move until our lives are entirely spent. And as the

sand starts to run out it grows white, losing its color. We say our lives are “colorful” when they are instilled with excitement. Thus, as the bright hot pink hue fades it symbolizes the dullness or greyness too often associated with old age.



John Tuttle is a young Catholic man with a passion for journalism and mass communication. Based out of Cherry Valley, Illinois, he is a writer, blogger, photographer, and video maker. He wishes to pursue a career pertaining to those fields.
