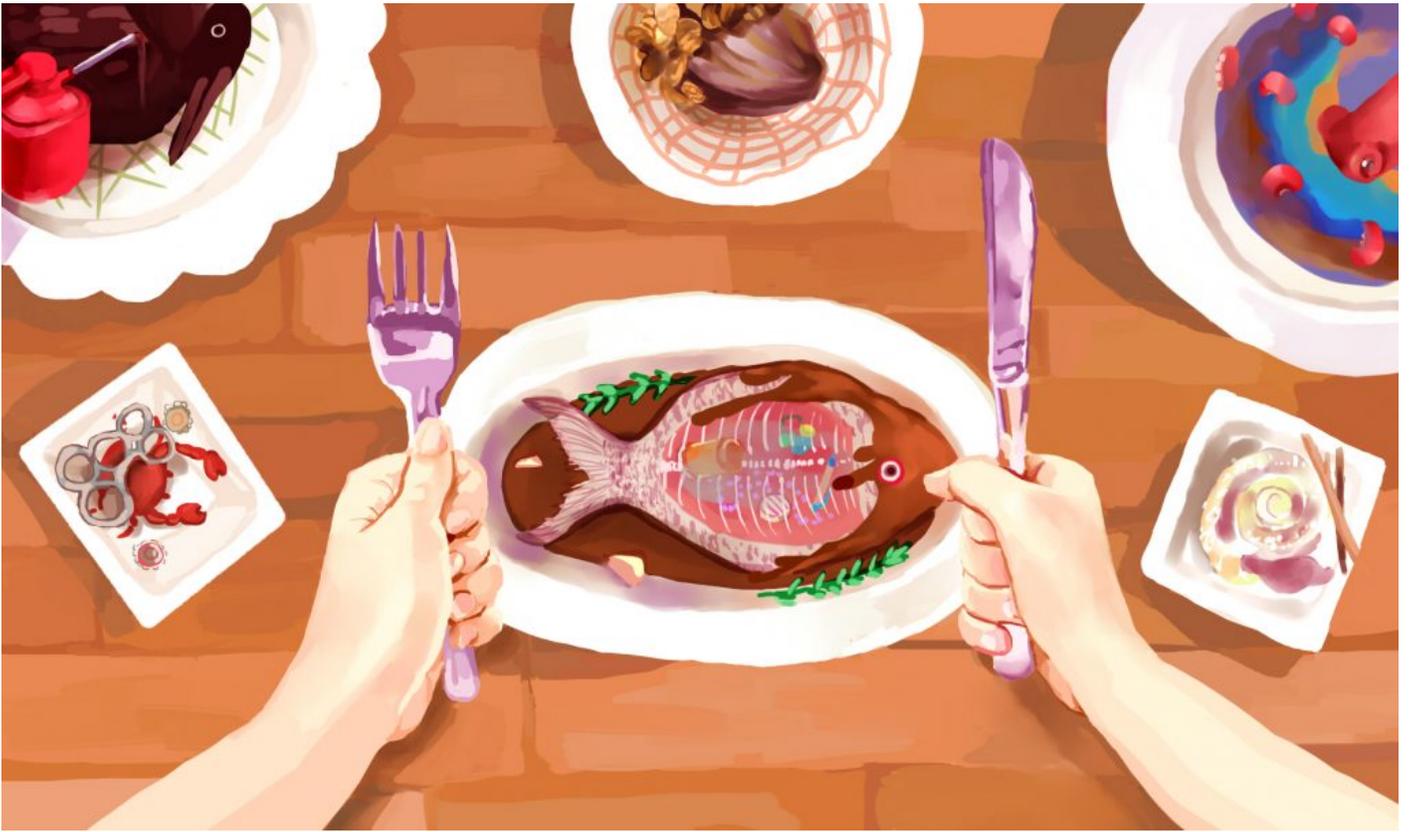


SEPTEMBER 2018

Issue Eleven



What Goes Around Comes Around by Connie Liu

Poetry

Written Missiles By Clara Leo

Written Missiles

15 years ago
Letters in licked envelopes entered

autonomously,
through
some
untouched,
and
flew
like
strange,
celestial
birds,
heavenly
space.

Today
they're
tossed
about

In blue plastic bins,
Shuffled and c o n v e y e r – b e l t e d
In a concrete, industrial-smelling space.

Slack-eyed workers (to be paid their wages) guide dumb word-parcels (mostly bills) from place to place,

Guardians of junk mail,
Of precious written missiles;
The honor of this task unrealized and
Wasted.

Clara is a college sophomore studying economics and music. Considering that her life hasn't quite started yet, there will be more to say about who she is later. Soon. Stay tuned.

Cicadas By Elizabeth Kuhn

hide
in shifts of fours.

Four night shifts in a row, years before
we stop forgetting you exist.

We remember one hundred and twenty
decibel screams. Something tangled in my hair.
you're half deaf. Dad,
in the car driving
a mile away
without us,
so the sound cut off.

It didn't

You believe in coming out
only when you taste November
roots, like my toes
in mulch, under the bush
in our lawn. Your daughters bury you in

under sixty-four-degree soil
so we don't see you for four years,
or seventeen

before you dig out. You sprout
like a weed
and swarm the irises
with a boot heel.

Your daughters pick your shells
off trees,
dig membranous wings

from under our nails. You cling
to the back porch, watch
bugs turn branches brown.

Inborn sirens
come in overwhelming swarms You don't hear
when the trunk hits the grass.
You don't pray
for the cicadas singing in our ears.

Elizabeth Kuhn is a literary arts major at Pittsburgh CAPA 6-12, a magnet school for the performing arts. Her favorite genre is poetry and she was won an honorable mention in the Scholastic Writing contest.

Baozi By Julia Zhou

Minced meat marinated in

beef broth

memories

free flowing

as a drop of oil umami

I lick off the side of a

well-shaped bun.

Julia Zhou is a seventeen year old from Herndon, Virginia. She is a rising senior at the Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, where her favorite classes are Biology and English. Her writings have been featured in Typishly and the Silver Needle Press. Besides reading and writing, Julia also enjoys baking, playing trivia, and listening to soft rain.

Four Entry Wounds By Brittany Adames

ONE.

In the rusted pan, stew simmers like skin. Mami stirs an array of meats and rooted vegetables with a wooden spoon—circular, slow motion. “You are not depressed, just confused,” she, or maybe myself, says. Like a match to the mouth.

TWO.

Outside, a man crushes the butt of his cigarette beneath his feet. His teeth, milk-grey and fractured, clip every word that rolls out his mouth. Beer coats the sparse hairs on his upper lip. He lifts his fingers in mimicry of a handgun. “Pew, pew,” he says.

THREE.

At night, I make enough room for the soft memory of a boy cradling a joint between his lips. My hands, like his mouth, fumble for a body that isn't there. You know, like scrambling for a breath that can't pave its way out of your throat. It is familiar, whole.

FOUR.

My therapist once told me I think too much about the future. You know, how I need to remain present and shit. I tell her I have weaponized my own pain. She asks why. I say to make myself beautiful again.

Brittany Adames is a Dominican-American writer. Her work has been previously published in CALAMITY Magazine, Bombus Press, Rumble Fish Quarterly, TRACK//FOUR, and Rust+Moth, among others. She currently serves as the poetry editor for Ascend Magazine. She has been regionally and nationally recognized by the Scholastic Writing Awards and was a Pushcart Prize nominee.

Perennial By Kate Castellana

we ride twelve feet tall on heat waves like they're coastal swells:

growing up in california

has born an unquenchable thirst for the sky in my throat

and on my powdery tongue

i wait all year for rain

like my cousins across the country wait for christmas;

stick out my tongue to catch acid precipitation like they catch sugary snowfall.

i learned how to love with a dry mouth and

that's the miracle:

something's still growing.

Kate is currently attending her second year at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon. She has contributed to and works as the layout designer for her university's literary magazine. When not at school in the Pacific Northwest, she goes home to sunny southern California, where she reunites with the three great loves of her life, including iced matcha lattes, the smell of lemongrass, and chocolate-chip waffles.

Written Missles By Clara Leo

Clara is a college sophomore studying economics and music. Considering that her life hasn't quite started yet, there will be more to say about who she is later. Soon. Stay tuned.

A Photo By Sam Smits

Green trees – A yellow

jacket – A waterfall – My

father clutching my arm. I

used to ask my parents to tell me that

everything was going to

be okay, but you can never be

100% sure of these things – So

we settled on 99.9%. I used to be afraid of

pain – Afraid that I would slip

and fall into the river – and

the water would fill my

lungs – the way it fills the

space between 99.9 and 100

Sam is currently a student at Colorado State University. He is interested in screenwriting, short fiction, and poetry.

the melting By Kaitlyn Von Behren

my wisconsin toes barefoot in january:

the snow shedding tears, but sparkling.

trickling streams divide houses –

a puddle slumbers atop asphalt, rain

pellets sprinkle divots, and padded

rodent paws scamper across grass.

the wind's rasping breath blows

my hair and the strands melt

into my face in spidering lines.

even the shingles drip and i am dizzy.

leaning on my house, i leave a hand

print in the brick – soon, a fossil –

roofs become sinkholes,
collapsing into living rooms
intruding into basements.

shingles – black, blue, and slippery
again – convince ravens to swoop
over houses and disappear as they dip.

i step into what's left of the snow and my toes go numb.

Kaitlyn Von Behren is an eighteen-year-old poet from Wisconsin. Her poetry has been honored by Teen Ink, the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, and Button Poetry. When not writing, she can often be found talking politics, annoying her cat, and eating sushi.

The Duck By Faith Quist

There once was a duck sitting all alone,
Out in the rain, alone in the cold.
Crying and shaking all through the night,
Left on a doorstep when dust covered the light.

Sitting, crying, sad.
Sitting, crying, no mom, no dad.
All alone left to fight.
But how do you fight when you have no might?

Little did the duck know,
Far from this land,
There was a mom and dad on the other side of the sea, Searching and searching,
searching for me.

Then one day the duck got to play,
In a large room with three other ducklings who were: Sad, alone, crying.

But in came moms and dads.
I couldn't believe, that I had a mom,
A mom who was there, there for for me.

I cried and cried because I was scared.
Not knowing that someone could love and care. Love and care for me.

The mom took the duck back home across the seas.
Back to a state with nothing but lakes and snow.
The mom took the duck back to a place that the duck didn't know. The duck was
surprised to see a home,
A home where there was a mom and a dad, two other girls too. The family saw how the
duck was covered in dirt,
So they cleansed and cleansed and cleansed and cleansed,
Until the duck was finally clean.

Free from the past that held her back. Free from the pain and she has gained. Free from
the hurt that made her cry. Free from the demons that hid inside. And for once no one
gave up on the duck.

Other than reading and writing, junior student **Faith Quist** also enjoys band, sailing,
skiing, running, biking, and watching movies.

In Nanjing By Julia Zhou

In Nanjing the summer weeps,

from joy or heat I cannot tell.

In Nanjing my apo jokes

about frying eggs on sidewalks

to sell from bike pedaled carts.

We'd join illustrious street marts,

holler 'lai mai, lai mai',

swat in customers with mosquitoes,

hum and smolder

under fragrant smog.

In Nanjing we sit on bamboo cushions

until the ridges grate our butts.

We'd peel open sticky rice sachets,

and munch the aches away.

Julia Zhou is a seventeen year old from Herndon, Virginia. She is a rising senior at the Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, where her favorite classes are Biology and English. Her writings have been featured in Typishly and the Silver Needle Press. Besides reading and writing, Julia also enjoys baking, playing trivia, and listening to soft rain.

All the Words That Cannot Lie By Cate Pitterle

1.

When loss tugs, I write.

The words sway like dancers

Under a cloud-shot September sky,

And I'm not sure where they come from—

Maybe from the calluses on my fingertips

Or the embers that burn in my bones or

The sunlight flooding my eyes and lighting

Even the darkest corners of my mind.

2.

One day, the words stop. I sit and

Stare at the wrinkled snow-white paper

No sentences scrawling from my pen,

And a lump rises in my throat as I realize

Without words, I don't know

Who I am.

3.

Days pass, months, fading in the red sunset.

Tears stain the pages

More often than ink.

4.

One March day at school, I ask David

What lights the fire in his blood

And my friend looks at me with a tight smile

That doesn't reach his eyes and says

I don't have any fire.

I am like him— scorched in summer heat,

Glowing in sunrays, yet unable to burn.

5.

When the April clouds start to drift,

I become stubborn.

A blank document scowls up at me

Like the twisted face of a long-dead ghost

And my cobweb nerves tremble under its gaze.

Seconds pass, the minute hand

Clawing at my skin, scraping

The dead coals in my bones

But I steel myself and make my heart become iron.

I set the font, crack my knuckles

Then write a sentence, another, another,

My blood burning like lantern-lit flames

In the night, and the sturdy type

Clicks out on the page like the steps

Of a *samba de roda*

The similes flying like feather-tailed gowns

On a September wind.

6.

Now,

Terpsichore dances across the pages

And my heart sings like a hammer on steel.

Cate Pitterle is a junior at Cary Academy, where she writes for the school's literary magazine and is the editor-in-chief of the newspaper. She also works as a second reader for Polyphony H.S., an international literary journal for high schoolers. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in Teen Ink Print, Body Without Organs, Foliate Oak, and elsewhere, and has been recognized by Scholastic Art and Writing. She has a seemingly permanent sock tan.

Fiction

Into the Trenches By Leah Mikulich

This morning was fine and dandy. The sun had popped out of the clouds after disappearing for so long. The air buzzed with heat and bugs hidden in the swaying grasses near the trench. I sat with my rifle leaning against my shoulder, sweat dripping down my neck. My captain lay next to me all quiet, as did my friend, Willis. They didn't say much today. When I first met Willis, he taught me how to properly stab a guy with the bayonet. Good man. I enjoyed talking to him better than the other boys. The other boys now, they were up top, doing whatever it was you did when you had free time in this goddamn war. Oh the war was going splendidly! I'm sure we are going to win within the next few months. At least, that's what they told us. I kicked my tired legs out, dirt spraying up. Just above, I was surrounded by miles of grassy plains overtaken by war. We were practically near no-man's-land. A few cracks sounded in the distance.

I lied. I'm a lying liar who lies. This morning is not fine and dandy. In fact, it is god-awful and miserable. My rifle may rest at my shoulder, but I have no bullets. The blade at the end of it is caked in dried blood, some of which may be mine. Our captain lays in a crippled position, flies swarming. Maggots grow in the wound in his stomach. Willis, bless him, is dead. He succumbed to a head injury. Most of our men are gone, too, blown to bits by grenades thrown into the trench in the earliest hours of daylight. The cracks in the distance are artillery fire, they are close. So close.

I am deaf in one ear, but I cannot tell if it is the right or left one. I don't remember the difference between right and left. The sunlight stings my eyes when I slide away from the captain to climb out of the trench.

"Good night," I say to him.

"Sleep tight," I say to Willis.

I am the only remaining man of my company. They were all gone. I'd thought that Castor may have still been alive, but now I see that the upper half of his body is stuck in burnt tree. That was a new one. I gag as I pass more men, eventually bowing to vomit in the swaying grasses that hide the little bugs. My only mission is to find ammunition. Until then, I have to make it up the hill. *Pop! Pop! Pop!* go the bullets in the distance.

I hike up past the half of Castor in his burnt tree to see if I can get closer to the other side without getting shot.

"Don't let the bedbugs bite," I say to Castor's body.

He's just another dead guy among thousands of dead guys. Just like me. I could be a dead guy, too. It didn't matter, nothing did. We have to die one day or another, and I'm glad I could die doing something useful for once. To think that I walk the exact ground as the kid whose eyes are missing from his sockets. Those could be my eyes. They were probably the same shit-colored ones I have. That man slumped over against a rock over there could probably pass as my brother.

They said it would just be a few months. They were wrong, it would be a few years. Sweat slid down my back, the fatigues nearly soaked. What I wouldn't give for a real bath and change of clothes. For the last week, our rations had been shortened and I can't recall what food tastes like. I'm talkin' warm bread with some butter, not stale crackers to choke down. I want to go home.

Where am I going again? Oh right, to find more bullets. Turns out, finding them was fairly easy. Always search dead bodies for ammunition. I snatch up a spare cartridge from corpse and load my rifle up.

"Thank you," I say to the dead man.

"You're welcome," he does not reply.

There are more gunshots farther ahead. Too close for my liking. There's bad men up there. They shot the captain, killed Willis, and blew up Castor. The only place to go is their trench. After all, I can't do anything else. I've got no friends, no food; but what I do have is my rifle. I'd almost died more times than I can count on both hands, considering I lost a finger or two, this past week. I don't see how almost dying another time could hurt. I mean, it could hurt a lot, but that's not the point.

The earth below me is ravaged with deep holes, the swaying grasses are crispy and destroyed. I stop behind a bush, frowning as its pointy leaves dig into my exposed skin. Someone's leg lays near me. They'll be needing that. What am I doing up here? I'm going to be killed. This is stupid, a stupid idea, but one of the best I've had. Willis would be proud; not sure what the captain would think. I'll be okay at the end, won't I?

The sun beats down. No longer are the bugs hidden as they fly at me. They are the only ones that find my sweat appealing. There is shouting, there is yelling. I need to remember those soldiers are not on my side. They killed my boys. My boys are dead because of them. *That* is why I came up here. It won't make a difference to them, but it will to me.

I move away, but on my stomach this time. I crawl along the rough dirt, feeling the shrapnel jab at me. I'm close, so close. Oh hell, this is it. Bodies litter the area around me. I can't tell if they are my boys or not. Then I spot a withering form up ahead. When I crawl past the man, he yanks at me. I turn to face him, but he has no face.

"Morning," I say to him.

A groan in response before he rolls away to another place to die. That was rather rude if you ask me. It's not like anybody did, but I expected a simple greeting.

I smell their trenches before I see them. And I thought our latrines were bad.

Then again, maybe it was the stench of death that loomed in the air. I couldn't imagine how many bodies were sprawled out around me. There were too many. Machine guns spray bullets that most likely caused the end of these men. Hand grenades soar into the sky, only to burst in the ground.

This is as close as I can get. Everything is loud and hot and sweaty. Please, I just want to go home. See, I even used my manners. The captain would have been proud. With shaking hands, I pull back my rifle and shoot blindly. Again and again I do it until they notice. I'm going to die I know. It's time to go I know, I know. I turn to run, nearly tripping over myself. I run past the bodies, past the faceless, no longer withering, form. I pass the rock where the leg is. Nobody has claimed it yet.

Almost home—no not home. Almost back into the trenches. Back to my boys.

“I'm coming,” I say. I'll be there soon.

But they're after me. Metal bits whiz by my face. Gotta go, gotta run. The trenches are right there! Then there is pain in my chest, blood on my fatigues, my knees giving out. This ruins all my plans. I realize I never did get to change my clothes and I suppose I do need that bath now. Maybe I'll choke down some crackers even though I want bread with butter.

“Fine and dandy,” I say to my corpse.

He agrees.

Leah is an aspiring author and this is her first published story. When she is not writing, she enjoys reviewing books, listening to music, and practicing French.

Carver Mountain Road By Jessica Fanczi

Here I was again, crouching in a relatively clean bathtub with a taco in one hand and a novel in the other, waiting for rescue. Knowing it would be a while, I decided to settle in and enjoy my food despite the chaos just outside the locked bathroom door.

Which was evidently not locked after all, because I was halfway through the taco when a very drunk someone stumbled inside, humming a Taylor Swift song and chuckling. I could see enough through the plastic shower curtain to ascertain that the invader was large, male, and so impaired that he had neglected to close the door behind him, allowing the roar of ugly music and drunken laughter to follow him inside. Even the sounds of the party, however, could not drown out the most chilling and ominous noise ever to enter my ears- the *whirrrr* of a descending pants zipper. *No*. I could only pray that he had consumed nothing but illicit liquids in the past few hours. *If he takes a dump here, I will die.*

The fragrant smells of pee and beer drifted through the room and assaulted my sinuses. Gagging, I dropped the taco and ducked my head and hands inside of my sweater, creating a scent-proof chamber of respite from the toxic atmosphere. I shot off another S.O.S. text to Nate, dialed his number, and got sent straight to voicemail. *When is he going to get here?* I counted down slowly from twenty to keep myself sane. Human Niagara Falls was still peeing.

It had definitely been over a minute, and the stream of pee was going strong. It was inhuman. Just when I thought my lungs would give out, my phone buzzed with a text from Nate: *here*. I indulged in one last safe breath from the inside of my sweater and flung the shower curtain aside, keeping my burning eyes firmly fixed on the doorway,

even as the Pantless Wonder strolled away from the toilet towards me. He attempted to greet me, and, failing to form a complete sentence, decided to take up residence in the tub I had just vacated. Kanye blaring on the speakers behind me, I lunged my way up the basement stairs three at a time, reaching for the light above like someone buried alive.

When I emerged into the cool October evening, the first thing I saw was Nate's baby blue Jeep Grand Cherokee pulled up by the curb. Ugly and dinged up as it was, I had never been so happy to see that lump of metal. Nate rolled down a window and smiled.

"Hey, Del. Nice evening, hmm?"

"Let me in, Nate."

"Not yet. I think some thanks would be in order first, don't you?" He batted his eyelashes at me. I knew Nate, and I knew we weren't going anywhere until I played along with his little game.

"I Delilah Thomas, lame and loserly nerd, hereby attest to the boundless and magnificent greatness of Nathan O. Brinkley, the most dazzlingly attractive and intellectually dominant man of all time!" I cried with the zeal of a TV preacher, banging a fist on the hood of the car. "Now let me in, idiot."

"*Beep. Beep. Beep.*" Nate shook his head slowly, with the utmost regret. "Terribly sorry, Del, but my sarcasometer is detecting a slight lack of authenticity in your praises. Perhaps if you tried some more flattering adjectives? A salute? An interpretive dance?"

"Nathan O. Brinkley, so athletically stunning!- *beep*- utterly hilarious! -*beep!*- unparalleled in wit and charm!- *beep beep beep*- the shining beacon of-,"

"*BEEP BEEP BEEP.* The sarcasm is off the charts! I'm afraid you're going to be stuck out there for a very long time if you can't find it in your heart to-,"

“Nathan, you let me in that ugly tin can of a car this second or I swear I’ll tell your mother about your little...camping incident.” I raised my eyebrows in what I hoped was a menacing expression. “I’m sure Susan would be delighted to hear about the creative way you put out the fire.”

Pouting, Nate popped open the lock on the passenger side of his dinged-up Jeep and let me inside. I collapsed into the cracked leather seat, tossing my purple paisley Goodwill tote bag onto the floorboards, where it joined the ranks of a greasy Wendy’s bag, a stained basketball sock, and approximately fifty pages of cello sheet music.

“That was even worse than I thought it was going to be,” I muttered, pressing my flushed forehead against the cool glass of the window. “No one talked. The only time people opened their mouths was to chug Coors. And they were playing *Kanye*.” The stale warm air trickling from the vents smelled like an Island Breeze Febreze plugin. Susan must’ve bought it. Nate would never have thought of something like that by himself.

“Del, you knew you were gonna hate it. Why do you keep going to these things when you always end up bailing in the first hour?” Nate took his eyes off the road for a fraction of a second to give me his best *why-don’t-you-just-listen-to-your-reasonable-best-friend* look. His slanted eyes were a warm toasted brown, like a mug of coffee in the morning.

I picked at a loose thread on my sleeve. “I dunno. I think it makes my dad feel better when I go out. Otherwise he thinks he’s a screw-up father raising a screw-up kid who only leaves her room to play FIFA at the neighbor’s house.”

Nate reached over to flick my knee. “You *do* only leave your room to play FIFA at my house.”

“Not true! I go out. To school. And the library. And Fro-Yo Jo’s.”

He snorted. “Ah, yes, aren’t you just the picture of social competence! Be honest, now-how crazy do you get with those librarians on Friday nights?”

“Oh, shut up.”

“Well, that’s not a very nice thing to say to someone who just saved you from certain death.”

I twisted a few strands of my hair into a braid, noticing for the first time the fraying split ends at the bottom. Mom always used to make my haircut appointments for me. “Sorry. I’m just worried. Dad has been really down lately. He hasn’t eaten anything but Goldfish and orange Fanta in two weeks.”

Nate nodded. His freckles were invisible in the dark, but I knew the one at the corner of his eyebrow would be twitching, the way it does when he’s thinking hard. “Poor guy. But you gotta give him some time, Del. It’s only been a year. It’s normal for people to take that much time to recover, after...you know.”

“It didn’t take me a year. I’m fine.” I stared out the window, catching a glimpse of the one and only street sign for miles: *Carver Mountain Road*. Nate loved driving back roads, but they freaked me out. No lights, and nothing but pine trees and dead deer lining the street. Creepy.

“Well, you’re not exactly normal, are you? Don’t look at me like that. I didn’t say it was a bad thing.”

Rather than answer him, I turned up the radio. Tim McGraw’s *Live Like you were Dying* crackled out of the speakers.

“Hey, no playing that country crap in my car!” Nate punched the power button with his pointer finger. I hit it *on* again, defiant for no other reason than to be annoying. Laughing,

he turned it off. I reached for the button again, but he caught my hand in his cello-callused one and lowered it, firmly but gently, to the console between us, like it was the most natural thing in the world.

I stared at our hands, mouth suddenly dry.

Nate saw me looking and smiled. "Del. I wasn't exactly planning on having this conversation tonight. Maybe it's not the best time, but I've been trying to say this for weeks."

Oh.

I had waited for this moment for so long, had wanted it so badly, but now that it was happening my intestines churned like I might throw up. My knees jiggled madly like that time I drank a Monster and an espresso in the same hour. I swallowed, tried to keep my voice from wobbling.

"Nate, I don't-"

He squeezed my hand, cutting me off.

"I want you to think about this before you answer, Del. Really think." I nodded, mute. I swear I could feel the swirls of his fingerprints on my skin.

"I know this has been a rough year for you. Our families have been through so much together. So if you're not ready, or you just see me as a neighbor and a best friend, I get it." His eyes were so brown, his dark eyebrows scrunched so far together they almost touched.

"You can say no, and we can forget this conversation ever happened. But if you want to try, I mean, if you think we can make this work..." He paused, pushed a hand through his

too-long black hair, and exhaled. “Well, that would make me really happy.”

I looked down. If I looked him in the eye, I would break. I could feel him staring at me.

YES! screamed a voice inside my head. *YES, I’LL DATE YOU! I LOVE YOU, YOU MORON! I’VE LOVED YOU SINCE WE WERE EIGHT!*

Shut up, I told the voice. I needed to think about this logically. Nobody ends up with their high-school sweetheart, right? Was I willing to risk a lifetime of friendship for the crappy odds that our relationship would actually work out? I couldn’t afford to lose Nate.

“Del?” But there he was, holding my hand so tightly, looking at me with those annoying, beautiful eyes and smelling like Old Spice shampoo and Susan’s laundry detergent.

If I let this chance go by, would he ever ask again? The air between us seemed to tingle and pop like the air just before a lightning strike. Yes, I tried to say. I felt the word form in my throat, opened my mouth to say it.

I was still looking at our hands when it happened. I never saw the other car.

What I saw instead was the fast glint of headlights on my chipped glitter nail polish.

I saw Nate’s knuckles turn white as his hand tightened in mine.

I saw a thin line of black weep down my pale forearm and pool in my palm, dripping over into Nate’s.

The smell of blood, rich and nauseating, bloomed like a red rose in the humid evening air. Nate was making sounds, tearing, screaming sounds that rattled in the back of his throat with each exhale.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry, Nate, I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, I’m sorry, sorry, sorry, sorrysorrysorrysorrysorrysorry.”

I was still saying it when the paramedics arrived. I was still saying it when they took my hand out of Nate’s.

Jessie is a Creative Writing student at Reinhardt University. Her work has appeared in *Copia*, *Sanctuary*, and the *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, as well as onstage in Waleska’s third annual 24-hr Play Festival. She is currently on the editing staff of the *James Dickey Review* and runs *StreetSigns*, a faith-based blog.

Space Punk By Worlanyo Mensah

I knew a girl who listened to space punk.

“What’s that?” I asked her every Monday. She always had a different response. Terry bet that she kept a list of random definitions in that thick notebook I mentioned she had tucked under her arm all the time. “She just wants to mess with you,” Terry assured me. Its cover had a picture of the galaxy taped onto it. She told me it was to remind us that space was always there, whether we could see it or not. Her name was Comet.

“It’s on my birth certificate,” she claimed. I believed her.

Terry asked me why I always talked to Comet. I told him because she reminded me of the stars. He furrowed his eyebrows and shook his head, but his response left me

unaffected. He wouldn't understand; he never met her, anyways. As I laid awake almost every night, thinking of Comet and the galaxy and Terry's disapproval, I watched the stars and hoped they'd take me to a cloud. Maybe I could sleep there. Melatonin sure never helped.

The next Monday I asked her about space punk again, expecting a different answer. "You can't hear it?" she questioned. "It's everywhere." My heart skipped two beats; she gave me that answer the first day we met on the city bus. She was bobbing her head to the music, each beat hypnotizing her soul and connecting her to the shining solitude of the moon.

"You told me that before," I remarked.

Comet grinned. "I did."

Terry was positive she was an escapee from a mental institution, but I wasn't sure about that speculation. Her mind was Harvard-bound. She spoke of philosophy and abstract mathematics like it was child's blabber. She told me about the origin of the stars and the moon and the sun with such simplicity a toddler could understand. The Earth is our mother; we get our emotions and human nature from her. "And if they could, Earth and Neptune would become one," she taught me on our way back home from school.

"Nothing is more alluring than something we can only see from a distance."

One night, on a Tuesday this time, Comet stared at me with a beam on her face. It was as if the moon possessed her lips, its radiance pushing through to challenge the light of the sun. Her straight brown hair was doing gymnastics on her head. Each strand was in a different pose, creating a massive mess above her wrinkled forehead. She was elegantly insane.

"I'm going to the concert," she announced.

She had never mentioned one to me before. “What concert?”

“Space punk.” She buried her face in her hands, the soft squeals emitting from her mouth and giving me chills.

“I thought space punk is everywhere.”

“Everywhere originates from somewhere. Can you come?”

I reminded her that I don’t sleep. She told me to meet her the next day at midnight near the school. The first minute of Thursday. According to her, I’d meet Saturn and Mars. I wondered what they looked like the rest of the day.

Comet didn’t come to school that Wednesday. She was preparing for the concert, I assumed. I went out and bought myself a galaxy shirt and black shorts the color of the darkest night. That evening, my fingers quivered as I made my way to the school. I was wide awake, about to hear space punk in ten minutes. If only Terry was invited.

Comet sat on the concrete ground ten feet in front of me. She looked so alone as she hummed along to the music. As I approached, she turned her head and acknowledged my presence.

“You’re here,” said Comet. “It’s time. Close your eyes.”

My eyes shut, revealing the pitch black underneath my eyelids. I heard Comet’s soothing voice whispering in my ear. “Feel the coolness of the stars and the heat of the moon. Get to know them and listen to the beat.” I did.

What I heard, in the thickness of my euphoric apprehension, was a sensational array of celestial rhythms and heavenly lyrics. The words were in a tongue only ones connected to the night could understand. Each beat — the *ticks* and the *dits* and the *zooms* — was

followed by a different reverberation: meteors crashing, the destruction of supernovas, the loving words of the planets. Melodies struck my eardrums from every direction. Space was everywhere.

“I hear it. Space punk is beautiful,” I told her. There was no response. Comet had disappeared and so did the music. I didn’t realize until I opened my eyes.

Comet never came back to school. Terry guessed she was brought back to the asylum, but I know she was brought back to the stars, her mission of gifting me with the galaxy that cursed me of wakefulness fulfilled. Now when I close my eyes, the cosmic experience vibrates through my body and sends my mind to the skies. Space punk is my method of slumber. And when I lift my eyelids and the harmonies escape me, I admire the neverending galaxy. There, I can see Comet dancing in the sky, entranced by the infectious rhythms. It’s so alluring to watch from afar.

Worlanyo is a seventeen-year-old cinephile from New Jersey. You can find her absorbed in a classical movie, writing stories on her laptop, or gazing into the night sky long past midnight. She has been published on Voices of Youth.

The Silver Dragon By Chandler Wakefield

Alan hadn’t wanted to spend his last free Saturday at an amusement park, but Hui Jie had insisted on it. They would be in different branches of Singapore’s army after conscription next week, after all—Hui Jie would be training for police service and Alan would be in the infantry—and he argued they needed to have one last celebration. Alan didn’t want to start a fight, so he paid for a train ticket and came along.

The amusement park they arrived at had been built by an American company. There was supposed to be Asian food there, but all Alan could see was the neon signs and loud smells of Western restaurants. Not that it mattered: Hui Jie wouldn't stop to eat, even though Alan had skipped breakfast to catch the train. Instead, he ran straight to the nearest roller coaster, a massive one called *Silver Dragon*. Alan struggled to catch up with him.

They wove through the long line in front of the coaster slowly, Hui Jie cracking jokes and Alan nodding along while the sun beat down on his neck. The line reminded him of his military medical exam from a few months ago. He'd lined up with countless other teenage boys outside the local doctor's office, filed into the examination building, then walked out in a half hour with a promise that they'd be conscripted in Singapore's army. Alan secretly hoped that the doctors would find something wrong with him and he'd be prevented from joining the army's ranks, but his assignment to basic training came in the mail anyway.

Eventually they made it to the front of the line and got their first glimpse of the coaster cars. Alan had hoped they would look like dragons from Alan's childhood stories, noble creatures that flew in the sky above the small, petty humans. But they were just old pieces of metal, a dull, earthy gray instead of the silver he had been promised.

The two of them clambered into one of the cars as an employee read through the safety rules. Hui Jie was grinning as the announcer finished and the ride clambered upwards, but Alan stayed straight-faced. He wasn't a fan of roller coasters, so instead of focusing on the ride, he let his mind get lost in the blue ocean and the buildings on the other side of it. For a moment he thought he had sailed off the rails and was flying across the island, but then he realized they had just stopped at the end of the ride. His safety restraint lifted and he clambered back onto the main platform, disappointed.

After they went on a few more rides, Hui Jie announced he was starving and ran to the food court to buy chicken rice. Alan got a cheap burger, but Hui Jie teased him for it, saying that he should be ashamed to eat food that didn't come from his Chinese ancestors. "Just because your parents gave you a Western name doesn't mean you should okay with Western food," he said between big bites of rice.

"What's wrong with burgers?" Alan asked. "And you took us to a Western amusement park today, you know."

Hui Jie waved his hand dismissively. "That's not what matters. It's about representing your heritage wherever you are. That's why want I want to enter police training and become a bureau chief. I'll make my father and the Yang family name proud!" Hui Jie took on a soldier's posture and made an exaggerated salute. Alan laughed but didn't salute with him.

They got back into more lines for more roller coasters, and Alan quickly got sick of them. They were just glorified trains, really: they picked people up, drove them around in a loop, then dropped them off right back where they started. It felt uncomfortably similar to what Alan had heard the military service was like. He'd spend two years doing drills and exercises and learn to shoot a gun he'd never use, just because his country forced him to. And then what?

"And then what?" Hui Jie asked Alan, who was sitting down by a water fountain after asking for a break.

Alan watched the fountain sputter ungracefully and shrugged. "I want to go to college, but my family doesn't have enough money for it, and I don't know what I want to study."

"If I'm police chief by then I can help cover some of your expenses." Hui Jie laughed loudly, then grabbed Alan by the shoulders and grinned. "I'll probably have a family to take care of, too, but I'll help you out."

As Hui Jie gripped his arm, Alan finally understood that Hui Jie was blustering. He was about to be stuck in the military for two years, so he tried to fight his fear by showing a fake enthusiasm. But at least Hui Jie was bold enough to try to look excited. Alan had stopped bothering to hide his dejection months ago.

Eventually the sky got dark and the park cleared out. Hui Jie was tired, and so was Alan, so they made their way to the train station by the park entrance. But before they left, Alan turned around to look at the first roller coaster they had gone on.

Silver Dragon was still running for its final few passengers. As the metal coaster car slowly climbed up an incline, Alan longed for it to be a real dragon, one that could carry him away from Singapore. He would clamber onto its shimmering back and let it take him to places that didn't have security threats or conscription or roller coasters.

But that was just fantasy and nothing more. Alan turned back to the station where Hui Jie was waiting, showed the conductor his ticket, then sat down and let the train take him all the way home.

Chandler Wakefield is a undergraduate at Yale University. His nonfiction has been previously published at Forty-Eight Review. He blogs at thealbedo.wordpress.com and tweets at @WhitenedInk.

Springtime in the City By William Pikus

Elliot and Bev, that's short for Beverly by the way, first met where they lived in the same building, on the upper east side of manhattan. I think it was that building on the corner of 92nd and Madison. You know, the one with the ice cream shop on the first floor. The ice

cream shop made their home above it all the nicer as the constant hum of all those freezers was a comfort to them both and gave them added warmth. Together, they used to like to watch all the kids stop for ice cream on the way home from school.

Bev was the quiet and studious type, but Elliot was more free-spirited and was always able to draw the laughter out of her. They were very much in love. They spent all of their free time together, often times going out to eat. Their favorite place was an Italian eatery a few blocks away and they took a shortcut down an alley to get to it. They loved the spaghetti with bolognese sauce and ate it every chance they got. When meatballs were available, they loved those too. Elliot and Bev never ran out of things to do in the city. The best restaurant in the whole city, the crown jewel of New York, was without a doubt Shake Shack. Specifically the one by the museum of natural history.

Everything in the city was entertaining. The possibilities were endless. Elliot and Bev also took every opportunity to see the free concerts in the central park. Their favorite was the opera. Especially when La Boheme was playing. What could be better than sitting beneath a starry sky listening to beautiful music while nibbling on cheese and bread. Less frequently, but on occasion, they took in a Shakespeare show at the Delacorte theater. The Delacorte is free to all, but Elliot and Bev knew a secret way in and never even had to stand in line to get in the front door. Their favorite show was Hamlet. They saw it at least four times.

Sometimes the happy couple took in a movie. They liked the old theater on 86th street. It was shabby looking with cracks in its plaster but they felt at home there. Sometimes they had popcorn, sometimes they didn't. They always made their way up to the balcony which was usually empty and they had the whole thing to themselves sometimes.

Elliot and Bev had been together for quite some time now. Elliot knew that Bev was ready to start a family. It's not that he was completely opposed to the idea, but he knew

that Beverly came from a very large family. He also knew that each of her siblings had very large families of their own. He pictured Bev giving birth to multiples, and he imagined himself the father of quadruplets and wasn't sure he was ready for all that. But one day. For now they would enjoy the city and their time together. And they took frequent trips downtown to visit all those siblings, nieces and nephews. They had picnics and holiday parties.

While many are overwhelmed by New York City, Elliot and Bev were both born there and found the familiar sights and sounds a comfort. The taxis whizzing by, the occasional horn blowing, the hustle and bustle that took place all around them. One just had to be mindful of where one went and when and you were safe enough. For instance, if you went to Central Park at the wrong time you could easily meet with danger; everyone knew that. You had to be careful about crossing the street and you had to be quick! You stay far away from midtown, especially Rockefeller Center during the holidays, when even more people than usual were there and you could get crushed if you were near the tree.

As time went on, Elliot's love for Bev only grew. And as his love grew, so did his confidence. The thought of a great big family became more and more appealing by the day. On a cold January night on the High Line, Elliot finally ask Bev if she wanted to spend the rest of her life with him Bev was of course ecstatic. She didn't even need to think about her answer. The words just flowed from her naturally. Bev was now content that she had finally found her soulmate. They headed back up town to go back to their building and celebrate. Once off the subway they were just a few blocks from home. They hurried in all their excitement. Finally, they were at Park Avenue with only one block left to go when it hit them; or rather almost hit them. A car swerved toward them so unexpectedly that it almost crushed them both. It was one of those Ubers, you know, a car that looks just like a regular car but drives people around like a taxi and pulls over suddenly, without the warning of a yellow cab's color, to let passengers in or out. These Uber cars had been a problem since they started operating in the city. Suddenly the

roads were minefields of unmarked cars that seems determined to run them over. In the moment of danger, Bev ran toward the curb. Elliot, who first thought he was hit, was happy to discover that he was still alive, although he was in some pain. He tried to move but felt very stuck in place. His spine seemed to hurt and his whiskers twitched. Then he realized it: the stupid Uber car was sitting on his tail. He was in fact very stuck, and there was a chance the car would run him over further when it took off again. Bev watched in horror from the nearest sewer grate. In a flash, the car lurched forward and Elliot was suddenly free, although with a missing tail. Ouch, did that hurt. Bev ran to Elliot and helped him limp home.

When they got to their building they crawled through the space around the basement windows. They got to the safe feeling place between the walls and slowly made their way upstairs above the ice cream shop. Their cozy little beds made of cotton found at the Duane Reade nearby were a happy sight. The crawled into their nest and closed their eyes and tried to forgot the whole terrible episode. But the trouble was, the whole ordeal was unforgettable. His missing tail was a constant reminder to Elliot of the trauma. He started to grow fond of the idea of leaving the city.

He pictured himself leaving the city for the first time in his life. He saw himself going out to the Connecticut suburbs to raise his family. New Canaan or Greenwich seemed like it would be a very suitable place for his children to grow up. Although this seemed like paradise to Elliot, he could foresee one small issue. He had to ask himself if Bev would ever want to leave the comforts of New York City . Would she ever leave the vibrant streets that intrigued her so? Would she ever leave the intellectuals of the city? Would she even consider leaving the building where they lived on 92nd and Madison. Elliot knew that the answer would probably be no. But the city had changed a lot from when he was young. He just couldn't stand the thought of raising little ones in all the hustle and Bustle of New York's Uber cars. But if Bev wanted to stay, what choice did he have? He decided that he would just have to cross that bridge when he came to it.

In the meantime, friends, family and neighbors heard about the accident and brought food. Bev's sister and brother in law brought almost a half of an entire bagel which she dragged all the way from Manhattan bagel. Even pizza rat sent over a good size piece of crust. A friend brought a good piece of chocolate from Godiva a few blocks away; it is amazing what you can find in their trash at the end of the week.

The next day, Elliot got the news that would change his life forever. He was about to become a father. Surely to a large amount of pups. This news caused feelings of excitement that surprised even him. Suddenly, he felt happy and light. Even his flattened tail felt a bit less burdensome. Elliot and Bev settled in to wait out the rest of winter, and the arrival of their litter.

Finally the day came. Seven babies were born, more than twice what Elliot imagined. But he couldn't help himself, he was happy. So happy that he couldn't imagine changing a thing. Spring was underway and the trees had blossomed. Food was more abundant and the feeling of joy was in the air for people and mice alike. For Bev was happy. She wanted her kids to grow up with all the sophistication the city had to offer. I guess there was only one thing to do: Elliot and Bev had to teach the kids how to avoid those darn Ubers!

William Pikus is currently a student at St. Peter's Prep in Jersey City. He is enrolled in a creative writing course for which this story was written.

The Music Box By Prisha Mehta

Tick.

Painted eyes flutter open. She's standing upright, balancing on the tips of her toes, one arm raised over her head and the other extended. Her left arm is caked with something—dirt? Dust?

Where is she?

Tick. Tick.

A box. Round and wooden, dim and empty, save for the dust and the two lonesome shafts of moonlight that pry through the gap under the wooden lid. She hears the murmuring of voices from somewhere above her.

Tick.

That sound. She knows that sound. But what-

Tick.

The scarce light skitters across the crack in her watch face.

Tick. Tick. Tick.

But no, the watch is broken; the hands have long ago ceased their spinning dance.

The silver light alights on the bridge of her nose. She tries to bring her arms down to her sides, but—she can't. Why can't she?

Tick.

She can't feel her limbs, she realizes. Something tells her that she should be horrified, but her mind feels clouded, wooden; all she can think to do is laugh.

I can't do that, either. I can't feel my face.

A final tick, then a resounding groan, and, slowly, the air around her swells with the steady breath of a simple tune, tinged with dust and infused with moonlight. It weaves in and out of her consciousness, ancient and strangely familiar, a long-lost remnant of a

forgotten lifetime. Each lonesome note seems to tempt the darkness, lingering only to pass on the melody before fading into oblivion. Swirling dips, twisting breaths, all infused with a life of their own.

And somehow, all of this – the tune, the moonlight, the musty smell – seems achingly familiar. She struggles to place it, but she can't; parts of her memory feel blurred, others entirely unreachable. Another groan, and she can feel the platform beneath her tremble, then begin to turn. Ever so gently, it spins her around and around in time to the swirling tune, her partner in eternal dance.

And then it begins to rise. *Does the music have wings? Or do I?* As it carries her higher and higher, she finds herself wondering. The voices whisper above her, growing louder as she ascends, but she can't quite make out their words. And yet, she feels as if she's heard them before...

The lid creaks as it slides to the side, into the wall of the box, and moonlight filters through, shimmering against her skin. The music seems to carry her up, higher and higher, enveloping her in its protective embrace, and through the opening, she can see two blurred, spinning faces peering down at her.

But it's she that spins, not them, and as she rises through the top of the box, the moonlight traces the sloping curve of her body, casting a soft halo of light on the wood around her. She seems to glow, angelic, yet somehow reminiscent of a demon rising from hell.

The voices. She can hear them more clearly now, a woman and a man, but she can't see their faces. She's turned away from them, towards an open window, her small frame drowning in the moonlight.

"My god, is that made of wood, too?"

The lid clicks into place beneath her, and still, still she turns.

“Yes, can you believe the craftsmanship? The hands are so-”

She can almost see them now; still blurry, but she can make out wisps of silvery hair and the edge of a puzzled frown. This, too, feels vaguely familiar...

“That’s funny; I don’t remember there being a watch.”

A watch. *Her* watch, and the woman, and...the music box. *The music box.*

A buried memory swells to the front of her mind, a rolling wave of thought, and she has no choice but to let it swallow her.

Her eighth birthday, and a beam of sunlight slips through the window, landing on two unwrapped presents on the carpet, both from her grandmother. The first is a watch, ticking gently, the sunlight dancing with its golden hands and tracing shimmering patterns across its white letter band. The second, a music box.

She puts the watch on first, pausing for a moment to admire it before the box steals her attention. She picks it up. It’s cool and smooth against her palm, and the musty smell of old wood weaves through the air. Round and covered in a thin layer of dust, the wood underneath polished to perfection.

She turns the key in the bottom of the box.

Tick. Tick. Tick.

And then, suddenly, the music begins to play. She gasps and stares down at the box, transfixed, as something within it seems to shift, as the lid slides away. She catches a glimpse of the

wooden interior, but a platform begins to rise up from the center, blocking her sight. She frowns; no spinning dancer stands on the platform.

And suddenly, it's as if the music speaks to her soul, and she reaches out to touch the wood. She closes her eyes and has the distinct feeling that the room is growing larger, that she, herself, is spinning. Tries to open them, but she can't, she can't...it's as if her body is made of wood—she moves nothing, feels nothing.

Then, darkness.

And she's back to reality; the music has stopped now, and she finds herself descending back into the box.

"I hate to part with it; it used to belong to my granddaughter, you know. She went missing four years ago."

"I'm sorry to hear that, ma'am."

And, slowly, as she spirals out of the reach of the moonlight, she feels her mind hardening, gently solidifying in wood.

Her painted eyes flutter closed.

Tick.

Prisha Mehta is a student at Millburn High School in New Jersey, and she is very passionate about her writing. She aspires to be a successful author one day, and has won

many writing awards, including a Scholastic National Gold Medal. Her work has been published in “Spaceports and Spidersilk” and is forthcoming in “Riggwelter” and “Body Without Organs”. When she isn’t writing, she can often be found scrolling through psychology articles, sketching in her notebook, or of course, reading. You can find out more about her at prishamehta.com

A Second Chance By Frank Yang

Wilson stared out through the large, expansive window. Having a window was a privilege, but the view from the 34th floor was depressing. Most of the other buildings were old, dating back to the days when they were meant to shelter people from snow and cold. Now the year-round tropical heat and humidity made mold grow over the city and concrete crumble like wet sand. A gray sea mist was coming in, making the buildings look even sadder. Only the new State buildings, all crystal and steel, stood out in the grayness.

As head of recruitment, Wilson had an office all to himself. On the wall adjacent to the window were framed posters featuring the slogan, “A Second Chance.” Sitting at his desk, Wilson reflected on his success. The Ministry of Life’s space program was about to launch yet another colony ship, the Falcon, on the long journey to GY129. The spaceship would lift off in three days, and Wilson just needed one more recruit to fill the ship with 5,000 qualified colonists.

There was a respectful tap on the door, then a pause before it opened and James Wong entered. Fresh out of National Training, the unremarkable-looking young Junior wore the standard black overalls with the insignia of the State.

“James,” Wilson said. “Come in. I presume you know why you’re here.”

“Yes, sir,” was James’s reply. “At least I think I do. I’ve been told I have a chance of being on the Falcon.”

“A great professional opportunity,” Wilson reminded him. “Are you aware that this is quite an honor for a Junior?”

“Oh, yes, sir,” James replied eagerly.

Wilson gave James his usual talk, finishing up with the Falcon’s mission and how lucky James was to be assigned to the colony ship. He was pleased by how humbly and attentively James listened. He was a perfect Junior, Wilson thought. If he stayed on Earth, he would probably rise to become a high-level official in the Ministry. But he was going to the colonies instead, which was a sign of devotion to the State. Still, he would probably do just as well in the colonies and become a high official there.

“Congratulations,” Wilson said as he logged into System and changed James’s status from Junior to Senior. Then he pulled out a set of dark burgundy Senior overalls, wrapped in plastic. They were identical to the Juniors’ uniforms except for the color. He handed it to James and shook the young man’s hand, surprised at himself for feeling a little bit envious. “Now,” Wilson said. “Let’s get you to the spaceport.” That was where James would receive his final training before boarding the Falcon and departing for the colonies.

They were whisked down in a Ministry lifter, one of the few existing in New Ocean City, then took the elevated hyper loop reserved for ministry officials. The hyper loop was a local, stopping at every station. As they passed Central Supermarket, James gasped at its size. “Back home in New Waterline, the State sent food out to us directly,” James explained. “There was no way for us to get any more than the ration.”

New Waterline, Wilson knew, was a much smaller coastal city. Actually, he mentally corrected himself, it had *been* a coastal city in the province of Pennsylvania until the waters of the Atlantic finally washed over it ten years ago. He did not tell James that most of the shelves in the Central Supermarket were empty. It was probably just a temporary shortage, Wilson reminded himself optimistically... though less land above

water meant less food for rations and almost no luxuries. The State's official position was that rising sea levels were not an issue that people needed to worry about, but the Ministry's generous funding of the colonization program suggested otherwise. At least half of what had been State land was now covered by water.

"We used to own a two-bedroom house on the beach," James reminisced. "It was me and two older brothers and our aunt. My parents left when I was only two. They were chosen to go to the colonies, back when they still had conscriptions." Wilson nodded. When the first colony ships were being launched, fear of the unknown made voluntary recruitment next to impossible. But as the oceans covered more land and life became harsher, more people signed up voluntarily. Wilson had even turned a few away, though they would undoubtedly make it onto the next ship.

James looked hopeful. "That's one of the reasons why I signed up. To reunite with my brother, up in the stars. He went to the colonies last year. My other brother died in the New Waterline flood, so I have no one else."

The sadness on James's face was quickly replaced with excitement as they approached the Spaceport. They passed through security and into the soaring entrance hall, several stories high with magnificent chandeliers dangling down. It was intended to make prospective colonists feel awed, and it worked.

Another lifter ferried them up to the 22nd floor, the Department of Colonial Training. There, Wilson greeted Leo, the training director, and handed James over to him. "Good luck," he told James. He nodded to Leo and left.

Just as he was about to get back on the lifter, Wilson heard the sound of laughter echoing sharply in the gleaming hallway. It came from a nearby conference room. The door was slightly ajar, and now Wilson could hear pieces of the conversation taking place inside. He recognized one of the voices: it was Ross, head of Colonization.

Thinking he should say hello, Wilson started for the door but then stopped, not wanting to interrupt a meeting in progress. Then he heard Ross speak:

“People are desperate enough to believe anything, I guess. Even if we detected a habitable planet in another system, we don’t even have the technology or resources to go any farther than Mars.” Ross sighed. “Sometimes I feel bad for those people, with their dreams of a Second Chance.”

“Maybe they do get a Second Chance,” the other voice said. “I mean, if there’s an afterlife.” There was more laughter. Wilson almost gasped, but he caught himself. He needed to hear more.

“Besides,” continued the other voice, “it’s not like either of us could do anything about it. Step out of line and the Controllers will find you and throw you into one of the maximum-security prisons. Or worse.”

“I know,” Ross said. “Plus, we’re reducing the population, and that means more resources for the lucky ones who survive.”

“Like us,” said the other voice.

“Like us,” agreed Ross.

Wilson felt his blood turn into ice. He could not believe the State was behind this. All that he had been told, and all he had told others was a lie. How much blood did he have on his hands? How many people had he, as Head of Recruitment, sent off to the “Colonies” that didn’t even exist? No wonder the launch site was so heavily guarded. They weren’t sending anybody into space. They were just murdering people. Now he understood why the State didn’t address the issue of rising sea levels. It was because they didn’t need to. Instead, they chose to reduce the population to allow the decreasing amount of resources to be shared among fewer people.

Then he thought of James. James, who thought he was going to reunite with his brother in the stars. At that moment, Wilson knew he had to get James out of there. He charged back towards the Department of Colonial Training and snatched James right out of the room before Leo's eyes.

"Just trust me. It's for your own good," Wilson said as they entered the lifter. Wilson told James all that he had heard. James almost fainted. Wilson thought they had made it out, but when the doors opened on the first floor, they were met by a squadron of Controllers, armed with laser guns and tasers. Wilson swallowed. "The lifter," he whispered. "It must be monitored by security." He felt a second of terror before everything went black.

When Wilson woke up, he was in a small barred cell, alone. James was nowhere to be found. His body ached all over and his mind was frantically trying not to think of what would happen next. Would they torture him before killing him? He knew what the State did to people accused of treason, and he did not see how he could talk his way out of the charge.

When the door opened a bit, he scrambled up, hoping to get some information, at least about James. But it was just a hand sliding in a tray with food and water. For two days, Wilson saw nobody, just that hand sliding in the tray.

On the third day, the door finally opened and two silent guards came in. From their gray uniforms with the State's insignia, Wilson knew immediately that they were Controllers. They would not speak to him, but just handcuffed him and dragged out of the building and into a prison transport elevated hyper loop with neither windows nor a clear destination.

When the transport finally stopped, he was pulled out again. When his silent guards turned him around, Wilson immediately knew what his fate was.

He had only ever seen pictures of the top-secret launch site, but he knew he was looking at the Falcon; the ship that he now knew would never take off. It looked just like all the ships in the posters. “They must paint a new name on it every time,” he thought. “For the publicity pictures.”

The Falcon was waiting for him, its last passenger. This was his Second Chance.

Frank Yang is a high school student in New York City whose passions range from reading and writing to science and technology.

Non-Fiction

Dia Dia By Ysabel Li

In the funeral home, I was looking down and staring at Grandpa’s face. It was pale and bloodless, but calm. I stood there with my parents and my brother. We were all wearing black. The carpet was tan, there were no windows, and five rows of empty chairs filled the small space, which smelled distinctly of air freshener. I was listening to my brother talk about the days when Grandpa taught him to speak Shanghainese with a better accent. My high-heeled shoes felt as if they were sinking. My mother and father spoke next, and they talked about the happiness Grandpa brought to the household. He’d always comment on how good my English was, although I was born and raised in America. When it was my turn to speak, I had nothing to say. I didn’t know why.

All I knew was that last week he was alive, and that today he was gone. What were we going to do with his green coat behind the door, his closed-toed slippers, or his reading glasses? What was Dad going to do with the wheelchair he had built for Grandpa? Everyone looked at me and waited for me to say something kind about Grandpa, but all I

think about was, why did he need a shiny satin blanket in eternity? And what was I supposed to say?

I recalled the time, just three weeks before he was admitted to the hospital, when I was sitting at my desk, studying French possessive pronouns. Grandpa stopped at my doorway, peeked his head in, and stared. It was a hot summer afternoon, and the windows were open but the cool breeze hadn't kicked in yet. He looked solemn, holding his hands behind his back and his face drooping. He didn't have much hair, but the hair he did have was all gray and swept to one side.

He was frail and thin, and he wore oversized beige polyester pants and a green knit sweater, even though it had to be ninety degrees in the house.

He casually asked me, "What are you doing?" I could tell by his face that he just wanted to chat and have some company after spending the entire day alone in our four-bedroom, two-bath ranch-style house in the suburbs, where nothing happens except the trash truck on Tuesday mornings and the sprinklers every night.

I was trying not to feel so exasperated at all the pronouns and derivatives I had to finish studying that night. As I sat gazing at his expectant face, I thought about how he had solely taken care of his family and his wife of twenty years after she'd fallen sick. It was back in China when my dad was only fifteen years old and Grandpa worked full-time as a mechanical engineer at a textile manufacturer. Though I didn't know the story about his life as a worker there, the scars on his hands and arms told me a piece of that story. I felt

guilty for not wanting to sit down and ask him about his life. I felt that I should have talked to him and taken notes and gotten his perspective.

TALK TO DAD ABOUT GRANDPA, FIND OUT ABOUT GRANDPA'S JOB AND WHAT GROWING UP IN SHANGHAI WAS LIKE, WHAT WAS HIS LIFE LIKE?

I said, "Just doing homework," and turned back to my book. I heard his slippers shuffling down the hall and the TV clicking on. A Chinese drama show played in the background.

Ysabel Li is a senior at Lynbrook High School in San Jose, California. Once a champion figure skater, she has retired her skates and taken up creative writing and water polo. Her work has been nationally recognized by the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. She loves to dive into ice cream (cookies and cream) and aspires to become a young scientist. She used to raise chickens named Linda and Caroline.

[worth] By Caleb Pan

[paintbrush]

I started with watercolors instead of washable markers and crayons. I subsequently loathed markers and crayons when I was finally introduced to them. Colors were usually limited to only ten distinctive options. Maybe eleven if they included a pink. *Boring*, I whined as a bratty four-year-old. Watercolor entices the expansion of your given

palette, the blocks of ink close enough to guarantee a delightful accident. I spent hours playing alchemist, my imagination staining innumerable paper towels from cleaning off brushes. Whatever I imagined, I gave myself the responsibility to birth it, training myself in the playful temptation of creation. Of course, this was the brief period of time before dreams were only okay as long as you didn't believe in them too much. A year later, at age five, I learned the world was confusingly unfair after a class friend and her family were killed by a drunk driver without warning; a hardened heart isn't healthy at an early age but I recognized dreams often die, too. That never made me settle for just ten colors, though (or maybe eleven).

[mechanical pencil]

In fifth grade, every day right after recess, I was pulled out of class with five others. We were part of a tentative study of "smart kids," reaped from gifted assessments we took in fourth grade. I was a "twice exceptional" – highly gifted and talented with a mental disorder, an interesting asset for researchers. Uncomfortable, I despised both admirations and belittlement from adults who decided to merit me with a blue medical report and a congratulations letter. As guinea pigs, we tested experimental enrichments, scratching out solutions to algebraic problems on lime graph paper. Fitful clicking ricocheted around the room, our lead repeatedly snapping as if the mechanical pencils we received were syringes desperately pumping fragile steroids into our fledgling potentials. If the medicine ever worked, I don't know; they took the data and left. I'm still a cerebral wild card, a clumsy renaissance man, an Icarus that flies too close to the ocean than the sun, a scarred and self-taught wielder of the double-edged sword. Regardless of how I turned out, I don't let two pieces of paper tell me who I am.

[highlighter]

In middle school, I never understood "getting the main idea" from a reading assignment. I lived my junior high career as a heretic, never highlighting that priceless one-sentence

summary we were indoctrinated to ceaselessly sniff out using an alphabetized list of context clues. Okay, admittedly, part of it was out of spite (bless my 8th-grade teacher's heart). But to this day, whenever I highlight something, I'm chasing after bizarre-looking butterflies and white rabbits – what I do and don't understand; there's no difference. Sporadic stripes of neon serve as a map of my curiosity; the summary is a footnote that I'll put at the bottom of my works cited page and probably neglect to put in my essay altogether. I inherited the mantle of the intellectual gadfly, the pride of Socrates: pestering dead poets and playwrights for their techniques and personal lives, stalking the posse of sci-fi and fantasy authors on universe building, ransacking essayists for their social commentaries, exploring the proclamations and pamphlets of history's greats and terribles. Forget about the summary; it's still a hobby of mine to drag the devil out of the details.

[ballpoint pen]

I never liked pens. You can't erase ink, and my handwriting is an ugly hybrid between print and cursive, the lines bleeding too closely together making my e's look like c's and my g's like gaunt commas. Because of the erratic pace of my hand, my letters often smear too. But I use pens to scribble out dumb ideas and write more absurd ones underneath them. I always attempt to be organized when writing with a pen. That never happens, of course: smeared ink and half-hearted doodles infest the margins and any white space between them. My idle ambition slumbers until I pick up a pen – ink has permanency and confidence graphite lacks, elements required to smelt lofty dreams into actual goals: the consequence of use could be the forming cartilage of a masterpiece or another reminder to celebrate my human failure. Whatever the result, I disown my notes and maroon them cabinets, lulling their unappeased spirits back to sleep, empty-handed without deserved credit. They come back, however, whenever I dash out my signature on a dotted line, claiming something captive in my name, ultimately having the last laugh.

[calligraphy brush]

Chinese calligraphy, like all things in the Sinosphere, could not be simple. It could've been just a writing style. But it also had to be an art; a discipline; a cultivation of character. In other words, bitterly difficult. Despite its reputation, the technique and form aren't usually what drives beginners away – it is the ubiquitous demand for patience. Children fail superbly, me being no exception. It takes time to know the right amount of pressure to apply on a hook stroke while resisting the urge to flick your wrist. The brush is traditionally considered as an extension of the calligrapher's body, coinciding with his or her virtuosity. If you can't subdue your impatience, you forfeit your concision and clarity. I've pulled at my hair more often than not just from writing my own name while growing up. Even worse, my younger sister was extolled by a master calligrapher, doing wonders on my then prepubescent ego. Eventually, matured with humility, I learned mastering anything requires investment in myself first; and even more difficult, to be patient with myself afterward.

[no. 2 pencil]

You must use a No. 2 pencil or you will not be scored.

Caleb Pan is a stressed out teenager who enjoys hash browns and maintaining his 4.0 GPA. He's an avid reader, writer, coder, and martial artist in his free time.

Ladies, Gentlemen, Etc, Please Take Partners By Char Pavlov

1.

Ladies, Gentlemen, Et Cetera, Please Take Partners for a

WALTZ

The view from above could either be a stirred pond of drifting flower petals or a box of ticking clockwork. Social waltz sits on the edge between organic and mechanical. Try to feel free, but still united with a partner. Respond to a partner while still fitting with the rest of the room. It feels beautiful to find that balance.

I like social waltz best when it's about balance,

but the dance has a built-in power gap.

Take another look down, and notice that some of the flower petals or cogs are moving more than others. The ones who move more are the follows, or in traditional terms, the "ladies," and their partners are the leads, the "gentlemen." Lots of people don't pick a role based on gender – I prefer to lead because leads spin less, and I get dizzy easily – and more experienced dancers, myself included, often learn both parts. But it's nonetheless relevant that the traditionally male part directs every move and is considered the more difficult part, to the point where sometimes a class will be taught by a lead, using a silent junior teacher as a prop to demonstrate moves.

Social waltz has the ghost of the patriarchy inside it.

Unless society is perfectly egalitarian, where everyone both decides what to do and carries out these commands, there will be power disparities.

And when there are power disparities, those with power will be tempted to forget the perspective of those without it.

One evening, I was following a waltz and instead of resting his free hand on top of mine, my lead was squeezing so tightly that I couldn't pull away.

If we'd been on a collision course with another couple, I would've had to put all my trust in this man I'd met two minutes ago when I'd asked him to dance.

We'll have a short break between sets. Get a drink, have a snack, keep your energy up.

We've got a long night ahead of us.

2.

Ladies, Gentlemen, Et Cetera, Please Take Partners for a

CROSS-STEP WALTZ

Recognize and accept that we're living with a power imbalance.

Come up with ways to make the voices of those with less power heard.

I've talked to people who teach beginner waltz who have successfully co-taught classes in lead/follow pairs, each having an equal voice so that each role's concerns are addressed. One pair even tried to teach all their students to lead and follow at the same time, so they'll be more flexible and sensitive to their partners' positions. It's tough to teach two roles at once, and rather confusing to the students. But maybe with a bit more attention paid to class structure, it could be managed. Or maybe there's a better way to teach lead/follow empathy.

I would want a classful of beginners who I can test ideas on. Maybe some of them will go on to become as interested in the problem as I am, and test ideas on their own students. Maybe one of us will figure it out, and maybe we'll be able to make the same principles work in politics, school, the office, or whatever part of society we land in.

3.

Ladies, Gentlemen, Et Cetera, Please Take Partners for a

Char B. Pavlov is a bigender Northern California native in their first year at a small liberal-arts college in the Midwest. When not dancing, they can be found acting in

Shakespeare plays, arguing about Star Trek, or reading books about medical malpractice. They are intending a biology major with a history minor

Crossroad By Oscar Liu

“...Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,

And by opposing end them.” –William Shakespeare

The time finally came for me to confront the inevitable decision. It was at dawn on a chilly September day in my hometown of Nanjing in China, and I, a seventh grader, was on my way home after school. Suddenly, I heard a loud cry from the other side of the crossroad. I looked over and saw a multitude of people gathering in a circle, the center of which revealed the cause of the commotion.

I rushed over, and, through the tiny gaps between the bystanders, I saw an old man lying on the ground. His pain was evidenced by his distorted face and continuous moaning. He grasped his kneecap with both hands. Drops of blood leaked through his fingertips and trailed down his thin, dark leg.

A string of impatient car horns grabbed my attention. At the intersection, the serpentine traffic wound its way around the commotion, tires hissing over the wet road. Some drivers banged their fists on their steering wheels, other drivers opened their windows lighting up a cigarette while cursing at the traffic officers. On the sidewalk, a group of office-workers went out for their lunch break. Smartly dressed people's faces winced and crinkled in disgust as soon as they saw the old man and slunk away from his presence. One thing remained consistent—no one was lending a helping hand.

This scene reminded me of the news that had swept across China in June of that year. A white construction van had hit a six-year-old child named Yue Yue in a market district of Foshan. The driver slowed down after the accident, apparently aware of what had happened, but then speedily fled the scene. What happened next was even more disturbing. For several minutes Yue Yue lay on the ground, still moving, as more than a dozen people passed by. Some glanced while others drove straight by, avoiding the girl, not offering any help. At one point a mother walking with her child saw the accident, covered her daughter's eyes, and hastened their steps. This demonstrated lack of compassion kindled a debate in China about the proper response of passers-by to accidents.

I knew the proper response. My parents had always taught me to be compassionate, and my teachers had encouraged me to help those in need. What lay in front of me then was a perfect opportunity for me to demonstrate my successful upbringing and content myself with an act of high morality. But my self-fascination and smugness quickly dissipated when I overheard the conversation of two young men standing in front of me.

"What happened?" the guy on the left asked.

"Seems like someone hit him," his friend answered.

"What do we do?"

"Just wait. Maybe the guy who hit him will feel bad and come back to help him."

"Why aren't we helping?"

"Because that old guy might be faking. I mean, who knows? You might even be mistaken for the one who hit him. It's complicated!"

It's complicated. I repeated the words to myself in my mind, feeling disturbed. I knew exactly what he was referring to. In July of that year, a month after the Yue Yue's death, a twenty-one-year-old young man in Guang Zhou helped an old woman who was lying on the street. The woman, however, falsely charged him for hitting her, and threatened to sue him. The young man, feeling desperate and overwhelmed by the commotion the old woman caused, paid her 2000 yuan (300 USD).

This incident reflected a horrible epidemic in China. People capitalized on other's sympathy or vulnerability and extort money out of the responsible people. *If I am naïve enough to help the old man, I thought, I might be blamed for a crime that I did not commit.* Like what was described in the news, the old man might grab my hand and not let me go until I gave him money. As I realized that my peaceful existence was at stake, the moral question became a dilemma of whether I should trust a complete stranger.

A lot of voices seemed to be whispering inside of my head, making me feel dizzy. As I struggled to make a decision during the twenty minutes, the sun faded, along with the possibility of my offer to help. I looked at my watch. It was eight, and the thought of dinner at home beckoned me. Thinking about my grandma's specialty, Hunan Pork, I turned towards the direction of home.

There was just one problem: the red traffic light across the pedestrian's sidewalk. The monitor ticked 30, 29, 28... Each tick seemed to challenge my choice. So I decided to give the old man one last look.

Instead of seeing his posture and expression, I noticed his over-sized and stained white shirt and a pair of khaki shorts. This was a typical outfit for the elders in the nursing home down the block. These elders spent their afternoons on the streets, either doing Tai Qi or playing chess around a vegetable stall. They conducted these activities alone, however, as their children were too busy to look after them. Abandoned and isolated by the rest of the youthful and magnificent city, these elders were like the dropping sun,

plummeting violently and alone towards the dark abyss. They had already burnt all their light and life for the generation that would wake up and see tomorrow's sun. As a part of that generation, I suddenly felt ashamed. I asked myself, what would I have hoped for in his position?

I turned back again towards the old man. This time, I was determined to act.

Oscar Liu is a Chinese student who came to America to study in seventh grade. He knew very little about how to write an English essay when he arrived, but his passion for writing encouraged him to keep writing. Oscar loves his home country, but it has some issues. One of them is the lack of compassion. With this personal story, he hopes to shed some light on the social issues in China. He hopes to make his country a better place.

For an Asian By Manya Zhao

I am five years old the first time I can recall feeling ashamed about my heritage.

The lunchtime bell had hardly finished ringing when I, along with my twenty brand new kindergarten friends, come pouring out of the room like jelly beans spilling from a jar — bouncing, clashing, full of sugar.

My stomach rumbles eagerly as I take out my two thermoses.

“Two,” my mother always said, “One for the rice, and one for the entrée. You don’t ever mix the two beforehand. The rice will absorb any extra moisture there is.” This wasn’t orange chicken, or broccoli and beef, or anything close to the disgrace, as my parents called it, of Chinese food they sold at Panda Express. This was authentic Chinese cuisine.

As I unscrew the cap of my “entrée thermos,” I let the deliciously pungent smell of chives and bacon wash over me. It isn’t chive dumplings, my favorite, but it’s close enough and smells like home.

Just four weeks prior at the airport terminal, Mama had had no choice but to forcibly peel my hands off of my grandmother’s pant leg as I melted into hysterics, begging Po po not to leave me for the first time since birth.

My doting grandparents had been making chive dumplings from scratch every weekend since I could eat solid food, and at that moment, all my fiveyearold brain had the capacity to process was, without my po po and gong gong, no one would make me my favorite food.

Struggling to hide the tears in her eyes from me, Po po had grabbed Mama’s hand right as we were about to step into security check, “Promise me you’ll make my little girl her dumplings.” Her voice had caught as she turned away, so I wouldn’t see the tears spill down her wrinkled cheeks. My mother didn’t get a chance to promise.

I glance around slightly boastfully at the other children with their cold PB&J’s, their dry chicken nuggets, their greasy pizzas, and pity them for not having a homemade meal like mine. I grin as I dig into my warm, savory food.

“Ew, what is that smell?” the little blond boy to my right me says, nose wrinkled.

“It smells like the toilet,” the redhead girl sitting across from me pipes up.

Their eyes seem to simultaneously land on me, and I feel the heat and embarrassment of

being different creep up my neck. Suddenly, a soggy old sandwich doesn’t seem so bad.

“What’s that green stuff?” the boy asks, blunt and direct, as kids tend to be, “I’ve never

seen it before, but it looks and smells kinda yucky.” The huge lump in my throat prevents me from talking, but even if I wanted to, I don’t have the vocabulary yet to explain to him

that it's actually one of the best foods in the entire world.

The girl to my left answers for me. "It's probably normal food for an Asian. Look, she has rice too, Asians always eat that." To this day, it's still beyond me how a five-year-old can recognize a different ethnicity, much less associate a food with it.

I go home that day and tell Mama I never want chives for lunch again. When she asks why, I tell her it's because it smells like the toilet.

For years, I only bring storebought American food.

After that, I learn to hide behind a westernized mask by pretending my quickly unaccented English is my first and only language. Pretending I prefer the frozen prepackaged Costco burgers and lunchables that everyone ate to my mother's ethnic, seasoned dishes.

Pretending I had only ever known the American way of life when I missed the frequent sparkling fireworks, the feeling of my grandparents' arms around me, the sense of belonging, more than words can describe.

I'm in sixth grade when my little brother comes home from kindergarten grade upset, near tears.

It takes much coaxing, but, eventually, in bits and pieces, the story comes out.

During their international unit in social studies, his teacher had asked which kids were bilingual, and my brother, along with a few other children in his class, had eagerly raised his hand, proud of being fluent in multiple languages. His teacher, who was monolingual, went down the line, having each child tell her their second or even third language.

“French.”

“Korean.”

“German.”

She had smiled at each, nodded perfunctorily.

When she reached my brother, he had proudly chirped, “Chinese. It’s one of the hardest languages in the world!” His teacher stopped then. Looked at him. Tilted her head and smiled like he was being naive.

“Honey,” she said gently, according to my brother, as if breaking bad news, “it’s not hard for a lot of people...” It wasn’t said, but I knew it was there: It’s not hard for an Asian. My baby brother hadn’t caught on to the insinuation, he had simply been offended for having, what he considered, a great achievement of his be carelessly dismissed by someone whose approval he craved.

My brother was born and raised here. He has never lived in China, nor will he ever, but our father doesn’t allow us to speak English to him or my mother at home, so we can preserve our native tongue.

Surrounded constantly by Englishspeakers at school, however, my brother and I typically converse in English, and he, having much less awareness, often turns to my parents as well and goes off on a rant in English.

My father usually calmly lets him finish before saying, mandarin syllables tumbling smoothly off his tongue, in a way my brother’s, and even mine, rarely did, “Say it in Chinese. We’re all Chinese here, why would you use a foreign language?”

I remember hearing his typical spiel about the importance of speaking Chinese once, just months after the chives incident, and feeling so frustrated I had screamed at him, “No one cares except for you! We live in America, Chinese is stupid, everyone thinks so, and I don’t need it!”

I genuinely hated it then.

English, to me, felt trendy, international, slipped out of my mouth as smooth as caramel. Chinese was awkward, bulky, mundane. It felt far more like chewing coffee beans.

The words must have stung, but he didn't say anything back, he just remained silent until I grudgingly repeated myself in Chinese.

"Trust me," he said quietly afterwards, the hurt clear in his tone, "Chinese or not, the gift of language is one of the greatest in the world. Being fluent is something you should be proud of. Your culture is something you should be proud of."

And he was right, my brother's pride of knowing the language of our ancestors shouldn't have been dismissed. I don't want him to learn to cope with the judgement the way I did at his age and often still do now.

It's the end of seventh grade when one of my friends, while we are fixing ourselves up in the locker room after PE, looks in the mirror at me, studying, analyzing, before saying, "You know, you're actually super pretty, especially for an Asian." It's not meant to be an insult in any way, simply an endearing observation. I force a smile and mutter "thank you," unable to respond in any other way to the blatantly racist comment disguised by a compliment.

The bar used to judge beauty had been automatically lowered because I'm Asian.

She proceeds to list all the qualities of my face she liked, briefly and superficially repairing the damage she had done to my ego. She concludes her analysis of my face with, "If you got double eyelid surgery though, you would basically be perfect."

She smiles kindly at me then, as if she had given me some sort of validation. As if saying, if not for the one shortcoming I had, the one belonging exclusively to my ethnicity, I would be beautiful.

What is the worst part, what hurts the most, as I think back years later, is how I distinctly remember nodding in agreement. I would be much prettier with double eyelids, like typical American girls, whose faces are composed of lines that connect in ways that seem fluid but defined, soft but bold, all at once.

Weeks later, I claim a sick day. Stay home from school spending hours perusing YouTube tutorials, trying to figure out a way to artificially induce double eyelids without surgery.

The summer before high school rushes by way too quickly in a flurry of freshly squeezed lemonade and painful sunburns, and the first day of school ambushes me before I can mentally prepare for it.

In my first class, I am approached by a cute guy, dirty blonde hair looking effortlessly windswept. He's tall, sinewy. He introduces himself, then asks, hazel eyes twinkling, "Can I see your schedule? I want to see if we share any other classes." I hand over my schedule and pick at my fingernails, freshly painted just for school, already bracing myself.

Exactly as I expect, he looks up half a minute later, previously flirtatious look replaced by a mixture of judgement and awe, "Damn, you're taking all the highest level courses? Do you not have any spare time for fun? Are you like, really smart, even for an Asian?"

I don't even bother to defend myself at that point, simply suppress the urge to scream, chuckle and shrug modestly instead. Finding no other common classes, he quickly finds an excuse to leave, and, for the rest of the year, we only make awkward small talk when we have to.

For an Asian. Those, collectively, are my least favorite three words in the English language.

In my mind, those words bring with them the connotation of being a prude, being ugly, being insufficient. They imply that I'm not good enough, that any accomplishments that I do achieve can be easily dismissed.

They are the reason that, for years, I work hard at changing myself, changing my exterior to fit the status quo, to look and act more "normal."

They are the reason that I westernized myself to the point where, years after my meltdown at the airport, when we finally return to China to visit, my beloved relatives can hardly recognize me with my strappy tank top, hoop earrings, lululemon leggings — hardly speaking, in shame of my now accented, longabandoned Chinese. I had only preserved the most basic of words to heedlessly satisfy my father.

When I am finally wrapped in my po po's arms once more, but with me, this time, towering over her small, shriveled body, the same warm florally scent she'd always worn encloses me. She says something then, and the Chinese, like coffee beans once seeming so bulky and bitter, are now rich and warm again.

I have to ask her to repeat herself, however, more than once, as my rusted understanding of the language can no longer keep up with her emotional, accented dialect. And then, then is when I realize the extent of the damage I had done to the foundation of what makes me who I am.

We step into my childhood home, where my grandparents continued to live the last ten years that I had been gone, unwilling to leave the memories and emotions, even though they could have easily moved into a smaller, much nicer place with just the two of them.

The smell of chives rush up, embracing me, welcoming me home. I glance at the table, where, just like all those years ago, freshmade chive dumplings await. Gong gong, back now bent with age, stands stooped over the kitchen counter rolling perfectly round wrapper after wrapper out of fresh dough, his hands still keen as ever.

He sees me, wraps me in a hug, and pushes me toward the table, “Go, go eat, I made your favorite.” He’d always been this way, communicating his love not through words, but through delicious concoctions. I don’t have the heart to tell him I have barely touched chives in the last ten years, unable to shake the memory of being called out for their putrid smell.

I tell myself to eat some just for his sake, and as I bite into one, and the memories burst through. Unfortunately, being chronically tainted with the bitterness of humiliation, it’s not as good as I remember it being, but the memories that come with it are. Exploding fireworks, bustling farmer’s markets, harassing the neighbors’ dogs. The nostalgia is overwhelming.

Before I know it, we’re all standing around the counter reminiscing, laughing, talking, eating, rolling out wrappers — my grandparents’ round, mine looking more like paint splatters.

But I am no longer punishing myself, no longer distancing myself from the culture of my ancestors for the sake of avoiding the ignorance and prejudice of others. Those three words: for an Asian, they still bother me, and I imagine they always will, but they no longer will me to change parts of myself. The American culture, it remains an integral part of me, but now the Chinese counterpart has become indispensable as well.

And the words that had become foreign, that felt like coffee beans in my mouth, they’ve started flowing more smoothly too. It’s not quite the consistency caramel yet, but it’s getting there.

Manya Zhao is currently a high school junior from Palo Alto, California. Besides reading and writing, in her spare time, she enjoys playing volleyball, cooking, and binge watching Netflix shows. Manya hopes to eventually become a trauma surgeon, but she would also like to minor in creative writing in college.

Art

Marmalade Skyline By Rachel Bownik



Marmalade Skyline is a photo I took at my uncle's farm in South Dakota in the summer. It's setting is the mile long driveway taken in the finishing minutes of the golden hour. The photo showcases how easy it is to end up lost in a daydream when the surrounding area is illuminated with marmalade colors.

Rachel Bownik is a photographer and filmmaker from MN. When not taking endless photos of the sunset, she works as a professional breadmaker.

Looking into Waimea By Selah Joy



Living in Hawaii, I am lucky enough to be surrounded by beauty at all times. The photo above was taken at an overlook facing the magnificent Waimea Canyon, through the

links of a wire fence. In order to capture the image, I had to crouch down and bend sideways, receiving more than a couple of strange looks from the other occupants of the overlook—my own family not excluded. However, I think that the resulting image more than makes up for any minor discomfort I might have experienced.

Selah Joy is a homeschooled ninth grader living in Hawaii. Reading and writing are her favorite pastimes but she also dabbles in photography, engages in various sports, and practices martial arts. On most sunny days, she can be found at the beach, two books next to her in case she finishes the one in her hands.

A Sticker for You By Ava Wang

collect as many Hello Kitty, Avengers, and glittery stars stickers as I could to learn English and work towards my goals. Ultimately, these stickers became a part of my identity as they served as the reason I learned English as well as the catalyst for the work habits I have developed over the years.

Ava Wang is a senior at the Westminster Schools in Atlanta, Georgia. She has works recognized at the city, state, and national level by Wildlife Forever, the PTA Reflections, and the River of Words. She is the Teen Ink Summer Issue Cover Art Winner, Teen Ink #1 Top Voted Photo Winner, and the winner of multiple Editor's Choice Awards. Her works are also displayed at the Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport as well as the High Art Museum every year and had been published in multiple Embryo and Teen Ink Magazines. Additionally, she is the head editor for her school's arts and literary magazine, the founder of Art Heals Foundation, and a board member of the Together, We Can Foundation. She also enjoys teaching her after-school art class at ASK!

Colorpoint By Seo Yoon Yang



I've been doing journalism for the past four years, and because I was first introduced seriously to photography in journalism, I was taught to learn to capture the moment, capture the spontaneous, capture the candid. But when I was given an assignment, this was part of my portfolio for an application, I wanted to experiment with photography

without having to capture the moment. I wanted to experience photography where I could map out every element, and I really wanted to see what kind of visuals I could get, compared to my candid ones, if they were all set up exactly how I wanted it. I had seen lights and rainbows used by popular celebrities on Instagram, but I wanted to add my own backstory to it. My friend shown in this picture is a dancer, so we styled her hair into a bun and put her in a leotard. Although it is not obvious in the photo, I wanted to capture the feelings of a dancer on stage, the way they look into the lights and the rainbows created by the lights against the air.

Seo Yoon Yang's dream is to attend a film college and become a film director in L.A. She started a YouTube channel under her name Yoonie Yang and is hoping to start her film career with that social media program. She loves photography, journalism, and animals.

Yellow Glasses, Yellow Prisms, Yellow Background, Full Spectrum People By Seo Yoon Yang





For my second piece, yellow glasses, yellow prisms, yellow background, full spectrum people, I wanted to make a point about racist jokes. As an Asian American, I have dealt with racism through a modern form: racist jokes. Being called chopsticks, rice, and yellow were my least favorite. But especially being called yellow. I felt judged and ugly called that color. It impacted my self esteem and the way I held myself to the beauty standard growing up. In the picture, both of my friends are Asian, and I purposely styled them with yellow glasses, yellow background, and yellow prisms because I wanted to portray the idea that although they were surrounded by their stereotypes and the judgments held by others by being an Asian American in America, they could still be full spectrum people, people who weren't confined by their racial stereotypes. I feel very strongly about this photo because of my backstory.

Seo Yoon Yang's dream is to attend a film college and become a film director in L.A. She started a youtube channel under my name **Yoonie Yang** and is hoping to start her film career with that social media program. she loves photography, journalism, and animals.

Augmented Reality By Ava Wang



Augmented Reality is a still life painting of objects I found around my house placed behind different glasses of water. With this piece, I wanted to capture the reflections and refractions through a transparent, glossy surface, in this case, glass, and how it alters the scene of a still life. I ultimately used this piece as an investigation of surfaces and visual illusions

Ava Wang is a senior at the Westminster Schools in Atlanta, Georgia. She has works recognized at the city, state, and national level by Wildlife Forever, the PTA Reflections, and the River of Words. She is the Teen Ink Summer Issue Cover Art Winner, Teen Ink #1 Top Voted Photo Winner, and the winner of multiple Editor's Choice Awards. Her works are also displayed at the Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport as well as the High Art Museum every year and had been published in multiple Embryo and Teen Ink Magazines. Additionally, she is the head editor for her school's arts and literary

magazine, the founder of Art Heals Foundation, and a board member of the Together, We Can Foundation. She also enjoys teaching her after-school art class at ASK!
