

Issue 21  
March 2021



Mariposa

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## **Editor's Note** By Molly Hill

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Dear Readers and Writers:

One of the things we've learned from putting twenty-one issues of student writing online is that not only is there no end of good writing out there, but every single issue always feels like our favorite. And we're sticking steadfastly to the platitude that reading someone else's writing can't help but change you. It might make you angry, or hopeful, or empathetic, or leave you with a wow, *I had no idea (!)* kind of feeling. Our sincere hope is that we've given you some great reading to pass the time while you wait in line for your vaccine. We can hope!

We'll let you get to skimming this note and scrolling through the issue instead, which is always our priority. Hope you approach each brand-new issue as a choose your own adventure exercise. Sometimes you'll feel like an escape, and head for the fiction section. Come back later to dive into the personal essays, or check out the humor, craft, skill, emotion and construction of these poems. It will be hard to choose a favorite, so we'll leave you with some great lines below to get you started. The rest is up to you.

Spring is coming, we promise.

Molly Hill

Editor

*Lending him my laptop was easy. Letting him lean on me for the rest of the year was not.*  
*(Loathing, Rita Chernikova)*

*Outside the glass the field is white, sprung with down. Turn to see myself in the glass but see Imogen instead.* (Snowday, Crystal Peng)

*There is a version of this story in which they do not erase you. There is a version of this story in which mom smiled and dad frowned and at the end of the day we still gather round the dinner table.* (Sundays, Amy Wang)

"Stand up for the national anthem or get the hell out of here!" Trying to keep my composure, I kept my head down and closed my eyes. I could feel everyone staring at my team.....(Why I Kneel, ZiQing Kuang)

I became addicted to the feeling of feeling empty, addicted to the way I can't sleep at night because of hunger pains, addicted to the comments friends and family make about me finally losing weight.... (The Fear of Consumption No Longer Consumes Me, Miles Ortiz)

We'd gone 100 days with protests..... And then the smoke from the wildfires came and Portland reluctantly paused. It smelled and looked like mother nature had tear-gassed everyone. (Letter from Mateo in Portland to Stella in Cleveland, Mateo Sifuentes)

## Poetry

Portrait Of My Country As Chaos And Blood By Anointing Obuh

There is so much the streets/ are really shaped like chapels  
blood on Large bullets  
Many things I did not know until today  
Like how many lives we will lose before this country annihilates us

[Feel] We are all growing violence, perhaps that is why they shoot at us

[Like] What is his name? Write it down

[Puking] He is going to die. Do CPR!

My sister weeps quietly beside me. Tonight, a million Nigerians will cower in bed, tens  
of millions will become lava. *He is breathing! He needs air!*

Mark my words. We will all die together you know. We were born for it  
We should stop calling this nation [absent of motherly feelings] her. An iron fist  
is an iron fist, wrapped or not. They really bring hell fire & call it children toys  
Everything is baseless now. See how they reduce us to mere flesh & empty  
cartridges. What is it with soldiers stealing corpses? If I am burned,

We will sing our way into death. Let me burn to the

Let heaven know our land

was too green with envy. last

A man passes away from the flicker  
struggle. Hallelujah. What am I to tell  
my children unborn? That I hoped in  
a country which pilfered like smoke  
before my eyes or that I once

had a life?

Formatting: The Nigerian Map.

Anointing Obuh is a writer, singer and photographer from Nigeria. A one-time best of the Net nominee, her works have been featured in Rattle, Mineral Lit mag, Honey and Lime Lit, Barren magazine and elsewhere. You can find her tweeting @therealAnniekay.

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**GIVE & TAKE or how God takes his revenge** By Roseline Mgbodichinma

Heaven is divinity's finest theatics

But

My creation is no play,

Though my mother  
Formed me behind closed curtains  
& my birth was like staging a scene for holocaust,  
I am no drama.

What name do you give to children  
Who caused their mothers to push into Eternity?

What is my identity if  
I switched costumes with my mother in this plot twist called life?

She was cast as an extra for a judgement scene in her hospital robe

Nine months was the Audition for her role in this death series.

The scorching Sun is a portrait of  
My mother's wailing face,

The moon is her soul lighting up

My darkness.

& Every day I manage to squeeze out a prayer,

I ask God if salvation

Means taking a mother

Simply because He gave his son.

Roseline Mgbodichinma is a Nigerian writer whose works have appeared or are forthcoming in The African writer Magazine, The Hellebore, Serotonin Poetry, West Trestle Review, JFA human rights mag, Serotonin poetry, Indianapolis Review, Kalahari review, & elsewhere. She won the Audience Favorite award for the Union Bank Campus writing challenge – Okada books, she is the third prize winner for the PIN food poetry contest and a finalist for the Shuzia Creative writing contest. You can reach her on her blog @ [www.mgbodichi.com](http://www.mgbodichi.com) and Twitter @Rmgbodichinma.

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**Shh** By Elizabeth Train-Brown

she put her finger to my lips

said

this –

this dip here

this is from when they tell you to keep quiet

the split second before you fall to earth

flop out of a scarlet canal

scream yourself into the world

this is where that being

that Being

kisses

presses their finger

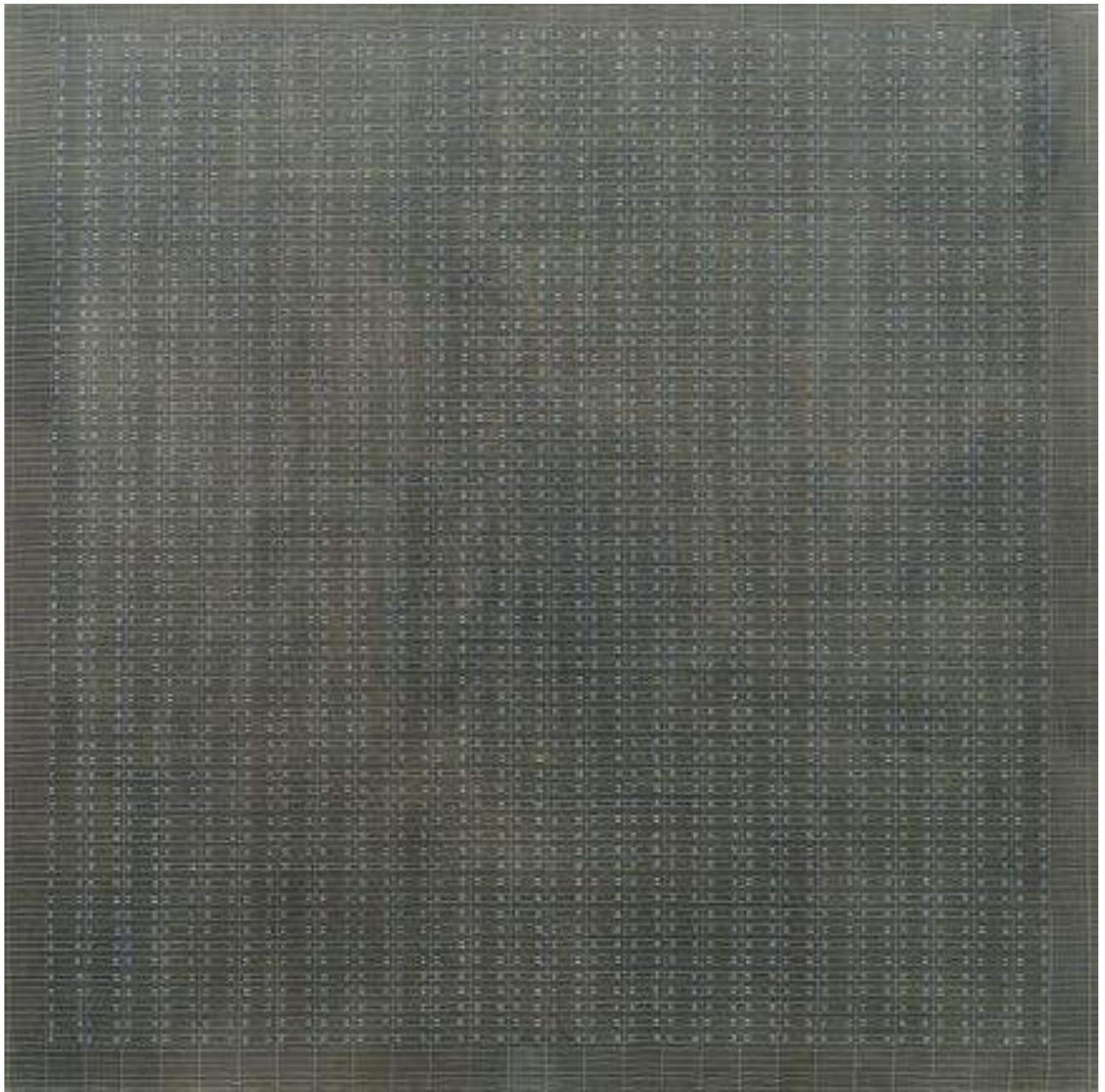
says

'forget me'

Elizabeth Train-Brown, a circus performer and award-winning journalist, studies Creative Writing at Lancaster University. She is the Marketing Director for MPN Magazine and Poetry & Fiction Editor for Flash Literary Journal. She won the 2020 Literary Lancashire Award and has been shortlisted in competitions by Creative Writing Ink, Voices, and Beyond Borders Scotland. Her work has appeared in *Planet in Peril* (Fly on the Wall Press, 2019), *The Future of Text* (Future Text Publishing, 2020), *Allegro*, *Tastzine*, *Qutub Minar Review*, *Cake Journal*, *SKYE Magazine*, *SCAN*, *Horla Horror*, *Wax Poetry & Art*, and *Crossways*. [www.bethtrainbrown.journoportfolio.com](http://www.bethtrainbrown.journoportfolio.com)

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**White Flower (after Agnes Martin)** By Grady Trexler



**White Flower, Agnes Martin**

Halfway up the spiral of that spacecraft,  
there it was — suspended at the level of  
illusion, box after box after box  
of white flower humming like an icemaker.  
The closer you got, the louder and more

beautiful the human hand, the brushstrokes,  
the flower, the flower, the flower. They hang  
the paintings on a slant, flush with the floor  
so that the viewers think the work is level.

Gridded out into the dark, the white flower —  
not so perfect as to lose the human touch,  
the artist starting with something perfect,  
this is that something less-than which survived;  
up close, the grid dissolves into the boxes,  
the boxes fade away into the strokes,  
oil, pigment spread across canvas — the hum,  
fractals of grids and flowers and beauty.  
Even the sloppiest of circles  
conjures the perfect circle in our minds,  
and every grid belongs with other grids:  
anything more would be impossible.

After, I saw white flower everywhere:  
crosswords, calendars, the subway map  
guiding us back to the hotel room post-  
Guggenheim. We took lazy shots then  
you crashed into sleep. It was too hot  
so I stayed up and counted tiles in  
the purple dark, the afterimage still  
humming in the aisles of my mind,  
even on the bus ride home to Richmond:  
white flower in the grid of windows,  
the lattice of chain link fences, the sidewalks,  
everywhere, packs of cigarettes re-

peating themselves over and over and  
over behind the counter, all of it.

Grady Trexler is an undergraduate at Princeton University studying philosophy and linguistics. He is from Midlothian, Virginia. He is currently using a purple and white toothbrush.

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**body of girl discovers life** By Trini Rogando  
—after sanna wani

i think i have forgotten how to live. i am looking at you,  
trying to figure out how you've shed your chrysalis of  
lowercase, how you've taught yourself to breathe in the  
space between these rigid lines of prose. *we are so much*  
*older than we used to be*, i think. *the weather is nice today*, i  
say. i think i have forgotten how to speak. i think i have  
forgotten what to do with my hands. but i want to relearn  
the stanzas of your skin — i want to touch mine with the  
same tenderness that time has scrawled grooves into  
yours. *i've missed you*, i say. i mean to say *I've missed being*  
*alive*, but my mouth is mutinous. those of poets often are.  
wait. was i a poet, once? a body breathing dreams into  
meter? there is a certain terror in claiming a feeling other  
than numbness; in believing we have ever been different  
than what we are. but you seem like a choice: to leave this  
silent womb or find an end in it. when you ask me, *are you*  
*happy?* i think of the world and its jagged contractions, its  
syllables sharpened to teeth, its moths blooming to die. if i

listen closely, i can hear their brief dialects swallowing the wind. Life is so large. I smile. Your laugh spills out and slicks down my throat. *This, I think, this is what feeling is.* I have not forgotten. You: sound splayed over full-throated time — Us: a collection of winged hearts; beating; beating;

Trini Rogando is a junior at TJHSST in Virginia. When she's not attempting to scribble down a half-formed poem, you'll most likely find her procrastinating on physics homework, fiddling with four marimba mallets, or sleeping. She wants to remind everyone to not take life too seriously; no one ever gets out alive.

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**Sorry!** By Jack Greenway

I call blue!

After my friends and I make our way back from lunch,  
we go straight to the old, broken down box,  
worn from years of kids like us playing at indoor recess.  
I sit on the cold floor with the boys  
and we begin to play.

Our games are always heated, full of trash-talk  
and petty arguments  
but I come out on top.

“Sorry!” I say.

But we all know,  
I’m not.

Jack Greenway is thirteen years old and goes to St. Patrick's School in Rolla, Missouri. He wrote this poem because it shows his competitive nature in all of the games he likes to play – and in just about everything he does.

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### Salvation of Maple Leaves in Haiku By Morgan Flodman

I

The maple leaves blush  
in the fine fabrics they wear  
for their funeral

II

They prostrate toward God  
once they hit the winding road,  
humble in the dirt

III

The wind carries them  
and they glide rapturously,  
soon to resurrect

IV

What about the buds?  
Righteous anger buries them  
underneath the snow

V

Until the Sun shines,  
they await their baptism—  
water seeps new life

Morgan Flodman is a writer from the village of Cherry Valley, Massachusetts. Her work has appeared in The Apprentice Writer, Calm Down Magazine, Kalopsia Literary Journal, and Trouvaille Review, plus she has been honorably recognized by the International Torrance Legacy Creativity Awards, and the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. Keep up with her literary endeavors on Instagram: @morganflodmanwrites

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**Insomniac** By Zoe Cunniffe

it is an autumn of hypnic jerks and dim-lit ceilings,  
turning over until both sides of the pillow smolder  
with the residue of last summer's heat.  
  
you are a mess of limbs, and sleeplessness creeps,  
leaking in the windows, melting across your sheets.  
here, in this three am purgatory, caught between stages  
of waking—here, it spreads across you like a sea of stars,  
glossy and gleaming, piercing every edge of your skin.  
  
something greater than daylight bears down  
on you and your restless head, and you blink,  
blink, blink, the syncopation of your circadian rhythm  
pounding like a bass beat all night long.

Zoe Cunniffe is a poet and singer-songwriter from Washington, DC. She has previously been published in literary journals such as Meniscus and The Showbear Family Circus,

and she can be found on Instagram at @there.are.stillbeautifulthings.

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**sometimes, I forget to:** By Sunny Vuong

i.and it all starts like / sometimes i forget to comb my hair in the morning & then it turns in to / i forgot to drink water in the morning & then it turns in to / i'm eyeing the scissors on the printer for much too long & then it turns in to / wishing i never woke up / and it's like: i look in the mirror and i am packing my bags and hiding in a motel room with no reflective surfaces & then / i am alone / & it is not unfamiliar.

ii.and it's starting to look like an ending. / you know? please don't ask me what that means. / it looks like *no, love, but really, how are you?* and it's like / *i am a passenger in this body watching myself speedway off the bridge. you're so sweet, thank you for asking.* / i don't even like anything about myself anymore but i still crush wildflowers in my palms and scream at them to sing / i killed the choir! i killed the choir.

iii. it's starting to look like you know *i'll always be here* / & then it turns in to well, yes, but i'm starting to think the more you know about me the less you're going to wish you did at all / and it's like *i am always here to catch you fall* and i am always stretching myself like elastic in parachutes to be right there for you but i am / reaching terminal velocity, you know? / & i won't let you ask me what that means. / & it's not your fault, because i just / can't cut my thoracic cavity open but oh my God i am falling / and i am falling alone. /

sometimes, i forget to ask for help. / kidding. i always am. always do. / i didn't forget, i just didn't. / & it's like: don't ask me what that means.

iv.and it's like, *do you even like me anymore? was i even a warm presence in the first place?* / if you're going to cut me out in silence, then be over and done with it because i am battling far too many closet skeletons / to deal with this right now. / i am your friend or i am not. /

v. sometimes i forget to be alive, and then i think sometimes i forget to let people notice.  
/ not like i ever tell them, i just forget to. / & it's like: no i don't. sorry. / & then i'm on the  
highway again, and i'm looking for heaven, and polaris sends me her butterfly kisses to  
soothe my aching heels, but / sometimes, i forget to look both ways.

Sunny Vuong is a second generation Vietnamese-American writer, and founding EIC of Interstellar Literary Review. Her works have been published by Kalopsia Lit and Bitter Fruit Review, among others. Find more of her writing on twitter @sunnyvwrites or Instagram @sunny.the.wordsmith.

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### **Space Song** By Kiran Masroor

The red wine rippled in her glass  
as she moved closer to me, eyes  
dewy earnest. She asked if I believed  
in life on some other planet. And I  
wanted to tell her, that through  
some combination of my senses,  
through the alien sheen of her  
purple dress and the dark red wine  
she held so precipitously in her  
hand, that how could I not? I  
found that I could not explain  
how dearly I believed that there  
were creatures out there, hovering  
between a black sky and a red moon,  
who feel insatiably lost. Maybe they  
pace chemical beaches or drink  
phosphorene in the morning, and

feel a strange beating inside of them.  
Maybe they stare at each other until  
they are convinced of their loneliness.  
My friend has sunk into the couch,  
limbs heavy with alcohol and sleep.  
When she is awake, I will find it in me  
to tell her how I have been waking up  
with a paperweight in my chest ever  
since we lost him, so she knows she was  
not the only one.

Kiran Masroor is a sophomore at Yale University where she studies Neuroscience under the pre-medical track. On campus she is involved in TEETH Slam Poetry, Timmy Global Health, and Yalies for Pakistan. Her poetry has been published in publications such as the Connecticut Literary Anthology, the Yale Literary Magazine, the Yale Global Health Review, and the New York Quarterly.

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### **Letter from Mateo in Portland to Stella in Cleveland** By Mateo Sifuentes

Dear Stella:

The protests are back. I mean it's sad.  
We'd gone 100 days with protests, is that how many The Plain Dealer counted?  
And then the smoke from the wildfires came and Portland reluctantly paused.  
It smelled and looked like mother nature had tear-gassed everyone.  
Speaking of, I was on the way back from soccer practice, listening to OPB.  
Turns out George Atiyeh died in the Beachie Creek Fire.  
My friend, Ryan, and I had just bathed in those turquoise waters a month ago.

I got some gray, fresh air with my mom a few weeks ago. We went downtown for a walk. Most of Portland, at least the Eastside is small cafes, Quaint little neighborhood grocery stores, like the one on 21st, with the bright orange walls. That one closed a bit ago though. I already forget its name but I still remember going to get milk in a quarter gallon glass jar for hot cocoa with Dennis Gurkin. Those shops won't survive. Why? Because the selfish people at Hillside, at Chapman Park, at the Docks, didn't do their part four months ago. The protests don't help either. But that's different. Hopefully, people keep their masks on and stay apart, because it's a worthy cause,

which is ironic, 'cause Portland lacks melanin. You can usually spot some black people at the rallies, seeping through the sea of skinny, freckled, ginger, mega-beard rocking, baristas. And Goodwill-shopping, striped-sock-wearing, tattoo-covered Voodoo Doughnuts workers.

Just like the way the subtle racism of this place seeps through the walls of the Legacy Emanuel Medical Center.

I bet Mimi remembers when that was a black neighborhood, when most of the Northeast side was.

Most people are oblivious to the racism in Portland's past. Now, it's a liberal bubble. I remember you telling me about Cleveland, that you get a bit of both. What's that like? Maybe that's better.

It was kind of bittersweet. They announced a Proud Boys rally at Delta Park, Northeast Portland. Twenty thousand they said. Two hundred came.

That's lightweight energy. Maybe we're better than we thought.

Maybe we'll get through this. Who knows? A friend from a different world,— Mateo.

Mateo Sifuentes is a student, and part of the Catlin Gabel High School class of 2021 in Portland, Oregon. As a Spanish-American, he spends his time playing soccer, and cooking and eating mouthwatering food. His preferred subjects at school and future career path involve biology and medicine. He is an advocate for improving mental health resources in schools in his area. While he tends to spend the most time learning in the STEM fields and new languages, poetry has given him an outlet to reflect upon this phase of his life that is now coming to an end. This poem especially has helped in avoiding becoming desensitized by every news-worthy event of 2020 happening in his surroundings.

## Fiction

### **Modern Fugitives** By Andrew Cottrell

I squeeze my legs out of our tunnel and look back at my brother, “It worked!” he shoots me a worried glance and I then remember that we are doing something illegal, and start whispering instead, “I mean, it worked,” I unknowingly touch the jewels in my back pocket, thinking of the portal they would make to a new life.

He looks back at me while struggling to squeeze out of the tunnel; my brother is a round man, and a fair bit heftier than I, so he had gotten caught on the tunnel’s exit, as it was smaller than the tunnel itself.

“Of course it worked, but are you still sure we’re safe?” my brother’s head shot furtively around, looking for the cougars.

That’s what we call them at least, everyone else calls them the police, but when you’re hanging around a bank trying not to look suspicious, it’s better to not talk about the missing police, cougars are much less suspicious, plus, where we live, everyone knows about the cougars who prowl the city at night: it’s the oldest trick in the book to get a toddler to sleep here in Denver.

I gave him a pat on the head, unknowingly pushing him farther into the tunnel, “don’t worry, the cougars are gone,” but I’m not so sure of myself, and I go check around the corner of the alley we are in.

The bright light of the street blinds me; I’ve been in darkness for so long. I blink a few times to get used to the light and then try to act casual as I scan the road for cougar cars. I don’t see anything threatening, so I go back to my brother, who is still stuck in the tunnel’s exit.

“C’mon brother, let’s getcha outta there,” I waltz over to my brother trying to act as cool and suave as a millionaire, when I trip on a rotten apple that was strewn on the ground, possibly by a homeless man. I fall flat on my face, and my brother starts laughing at me.

Then everything takes a turn for the worse, my brother is still laughing and the slight sound of sirens is heard in the distance. It’s not loud, but it’s certainly there. The expression on my face changes from pain to absolute terror in an instant. The cougars are here, and they’re on the hunt.

I scramble to my brother’s side, my face still throbbing in agony as I pull with all of my might on my brother to get him out of the hole. But he stays put. I can’t get him out of the tunnel to save my life. My mind wanders off the task and starts pondering how accurate the expression is to me. I imagine life in prison, scared, lonely, and taunted by my cell mates, but quickly snap the thought out of my head. We have to get out of here.

A loud pop rings out as the pressure holding my brother in the tunnel releases, “Great,” I mumble, ignoring the fact that he’s out of the hole, “now the cougars know where we are.”

My brother stares at me, it’s as if we’ve switched places, his face is one of absolute terror while mine is now one of annoyance, “brother,” he says to me, his voice small like a mouse

pleading not to be eaten by a cat rather than an international thief, “Shouldn’t we be getting out of here?”

I look at him, still annoyed by the cougars, “thanks Captain Obvious,” I ignore his response. It’s not important anymore, “follow me,” I say, and then stare up the web of interlocking fire escapes towering above us. *You’re such an idiot*, my brain says to myself, *shut up, brain, I have a job to do*, I respond. I look back at my brother once to make sure he’s all right, and then start up the ladder leading to the first level. I make my way through the patchwork of staircases and ladders, surprised by how easy it is to scale the things.

For a split second I allow myself to think that we will be okay, but then I look back at my brother. He is struggling to get up the ladders. While I am up at least ten, he is not even half that. My mind races on what to do, but in the end, I can’t leave my brother like that. I sprint back down the fire escape to help my brother, and that’s when the cougars pull up. Their sirens are like needles pushing into my skull. The bright lights flash, and I stare at my shoes. Embarrassed. A man shouts through a megaphone, but I can’t hear him. Instead, I stare at my brother and mouth the words, “I’m sorry”, and hop down to the ground in surrender.

The cougars place the cuffs around my wrists and lead me to their car. It’s dark inside. I take in the smell of the cab, a hint of donut mixed with tears of men, and I feel I can smell the defeat of thousands of people who were once in the same position as me. I look out the window; my brother is in this same position as me. I suddenly realize how much I don’t want to go, but the cougars don’t understand my emotions. Instead, they grab the jewels out of my pocket, shut the door, and take me away to my new life.

Andrew Cottrell is a thirteen-year-old who plays the clarinet,— and after eight years of training has a 2<sup>nd</sup> degree black belt. He received Gold Honor Roll every semester last year, and every trimester so far this year.

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## Sundays

By Amy Wang

*inhale.* Imagine that you are the eldest daughter of a heavily religious middle-class family living in the suburbs of Ohio. Imagine that I am your younger sister. Imagine that I am lying in bed as I write to you, the lamp throwing reliefs over my face, knowing that you will never get this letter.

*exhale.* A month ago today, you sat mom and dad down in the living room. It was an hour after church and thirty minutes before mom was supposed to get the pot-roast out of the oven. There was a plate of apples on the coffee table when you began your speech. It was overturned on the floor by the time you were done.

*inhale.* My therapist showed me a breathing technique yesterday. I spent an hour on her dusty afghan carpet, crouched underneath bladed light, feeling the bone-drum clatter of heartbeat against breastbone. It was a waste of \$175 of dad's co-pay, but at least now I know what to do whenever I see your silhouette. Whenever I find myself in front of the door of your bedroom, hand on the wood sheltering casual silence. Inside, your bed is still unmade. Your closet door is still yawning open. The hanger of the jacket you grabbed on that last night is still broken in two on the carpet.

*exhale.* At dinner these days, we are three people and a ghost. Mom is always bent over her plate like it holds her heart, and dad is always blank-eyed, his skin salt-seared from his morning somewhere cloudless. After his violent, knee-jerk reaction, it's almost

surprising the way he's mellowed out. The way he has pressed spine into putty. The bible on his nightstand is untouched, caught perpetually flipped open to Psalm 127:3. It's almost funny how mom has done the opposite. Fingers folded in prayer, the lines on her palm have been cut into one. If anything, she is more religious now. After mass she is always one of the last supplicants in front of the cross. I can almost imagine that beneath her flowered skirt, there are permanent grooves in her knees. She hasn't taken our family picture off of the mantle yet, and every time the candlelight sparkles over your face in its little glass frame it is an exercise in nostalgia. An exercise in loss.

*inhale.* At church today during the sermon, I slid a foot over the burnished wood of our pew and expected to feel your Mary-Janes in the space beside mine. I should be used to the absence by now; if I count that first one, it's been four weeks since you last sat next to me. Time moves slowly here, like honey, like rosary beads down string, like the gentle clucking of neighborhood mothers, handkerchiefs fluttering in the air like dove wings. When the pastor sees me he is always stilted, wooden words falling hollow like rosary beads every time I open my mouth. As if all it takes to break me is a casual tragedy. As if I am not already broken. With every look they give me I wish I could undo myself. With every sigh I am one step closer to coming undone.

*exhale.* During Sunday-school, we draw hopscotch squares on bare cement, wreath them in chalk flowers and the purple dust of the only pink we have. The other girls never say your name around me. When they do talk about what happened, they couple their words with *dyke*, *damned*, *deserved*, syllables stretching longer the less they knew you. The first time it happened, I asked to be sent home. Now when they do it, I sit on the bench and imagine slamming fist to throat until their fish-mouths are scarlet red on pavement. I am almost ready. I am almost coping. I am almost surprised, really, at how easy it is to adapt to tragedy.

*inhale.* There is a version of this story in which they do not erase you. There is a version of this story in which mom smiled and dad frowned and at the end of the day we still

gather round the dinner table. There is a version of this story in which they reconciled faith with the child they raised, and hand in hand we walked into the sunset. In the version we lived, there was no exultation. No sweeping spotlight. Only the fatal kiss of car against skin against asphalt after you ran out onto a dark street without looking both ways, blinded by tears and our parent's rejection. Only a town of pointed gazes and the whispers swirling around our pew like storm drains after rain. Only a grave in a cemetery two hours away and an empty mantelpiece where our family picture of four used to be.

*exhale.* On some nights I still wake up at 1 am to the sound of your body hitting the hood of the car. The wet *thud* as you flipped over glass. The hum of the engine, as the ambulance took you away. The doctor's voice, as he told us he was so sorry. You will never know this, but the truth is that mom cried while we sat in the ER. The truth is that the dead do not soften under the tears of the living. The truth is that though I am pressing pen to paper as if in confidence, when in reality I will never know if you can forgive me for not running after you. For standing up too little. For choking back the words, even now.

*inhale.* Imagine, that as I write this, the sky is bleeding into the horizon. It is Monday morning. Imagine, that from my bed, I can see the lawn, where morning light cleaves and morning dew melts into rain. Imagine that you are now buried, somewhere silent and green, too far away for me to visit on my own.

*exhale.* I miss you, sister. But let me finish writing this letter. For a second, as I lean against the wall between our bedrooms and hear nothing on the other side, I ache. I let your absence envelop me. Let it swallow me whole. I will never not miss you.

Amy Wang is a sophomore from California. In her free time, you can find her reading fanfiction. Her work is published or forthcoming at Twin Pies Literary, Ogma, and X-R-A-Y Lit.

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### Snowday By Crystal Peng

Snow falls. Today: Wake up. Outside the glass the field is white, sprung with down. Turn to see myself in the glass but see Imogen instead. Her wrinkles etched onto me; scars inked into me. Ache but Imogen doesn't budge, flails tight against my pores. Yell Get out get out get out from behind the glass. Today: I want to Get out get out get out where Imogen can't be seen. (Things I carry: warmth ran between jawline, bedsheets heat welled into heart.) Where I won't be seen as Imogen, where I can't see myself as Imogen. Get out get out get out! Beyond the glass is a blinding blizzard, in that blizzard is a field. Get up: Imogen brushes my teeth. I brush my teeth. Rinse; twice. (Wool: Imogen is allergic to wool; I dress in wool.) Mother sees me see Imogen in glass, scowls at my foggy disproportion. Mother pours me breakfast porridge, tries to unfrown my visage. But I, I don't touch the porridge, no, instead I pin Imogen down in the glass. Tell her I don't want to wear her anymore. Tell her I want to peel myself like an orange, her skin like my rind. Mother yells at Imogen, NO, she yells at Me! Get Out! Late for School! Get sick without sweater! (Mother-heated words pelted at the spine; made to wear as parka.) But Get Out Get Out Get Out Today! Getting out to that field of snow! Imogen, she blinds away against the cold. The cold is where I finally breathe. Today I threaten, strangling Imogen with my own hair, teeth grazing her own skin. Break her glass. Sniff its sour edge. (Gloves gloved, feet shoed, no, booted!) Yesterday, I hid in her closet. A symmetrical skeleton to her bones. But Today I'll Get Out! Get Out & Away, Away to See

Imogen where she can't be Seen, Away into that blizzard field! Get! Out Out! Out Getting! Out To-day Out Today—

—Today, it snows. Today, sitting on the welcome mat I boot my feet, boot Imogen's feet. Today, sitting on the leaving mat I have decided to Leave. Check the thermostat, once. Twice. Thrice. I check it until my face is limp against plaster walls. Check stove. Check doors, windows (Don't look for myself in the glass!) Coat on, hair out from under the scarf, my breath already hazed like the blizzard. I'm Leaving Today. Leaving the chrysalis where I've homed, I'm leaving all my glassy shards behind. Gonna Leave Imogen behind to go to that snowy field, gonna leave her for the cold. Getting Out! I know what I'll do, yes, I will Leave her behind. I'm Leaving to where I'll be seen without Imogen. Leaving this land, no, this nation of Imogen. Leaving the Imogen nation. Leaving the Imagination. Get out! I'm Leaving! Today, I'm Leaving Imogen behind! I Leave Imogen Behind! I Leave what is Imagined Behind.

Crystal Peng is a high school student living in Vancouver, Canada. Her work has been awarded first prize in the Jessamy Stursberg Poetry Prize and has appeared in Poetry Pause and Sine Theta Magazine.

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## Two Thoughts By Robyn Gill

(i) Sarah:

At the end of the summer, I awoke to the sound of her leaving. A suitcase thumping down the stairs then rattling the gravel of the driveway. I lay in bed and imagined her sitting in the car, waiting to see if I'd come out and say something.

I didn't.

After I heard her drive away, I went out and sat in the glasshouse, like every other day that summer. It was always warm in there, even if it was cool outside and I liked the heavy smell of tomatoes that hung in the air. I sat there every day that summer and read and drank coffee or lemonade. She had started making lemonade that July, almost obsessively. I'd come inside and the squeezed-out shells of lemons would be piled up on the countertop like carcasses. The local pharmacy started refusing to sell citric acid to her. After that, she would disappear for hours, sometimes even the whole day, driving to the farthest pharmacy possible. I think she just wanted an excuse to be away. I think maybe she bought other things in the pharmacy, but I was never sure. She often returned home slightly different, as if some part of the fabric of her being had been altered almost imperceptibly, face flushed, eyes bright. The day she left, I searched the house for any hint of evidence, even the bins. I wanted the satisfaction of an incriminating, ominous bottle of pills but maybe she just didn't leave anything behind, not even a note or a message on the answering machine or any feeble attempt at an explanation. I suppose maybe she thought that it was all perfectly apparent. I thought it was a bit rude. That night I got a bus into the city. I was planning on celebrating, I think. The start of a new life or whatever. But I just ended up walking around in the dark. I found this street, lined with red brick houses and big leafy trees. It was nice. Expensive. I got a kick out of walking down it slowly, staring through the windows. Each scene of perfect family life framed in golden light. I stayed outside each house as long as I could before there was risk of being noticed. People can feel it when they're being watched. I stopped outside one house because I liked the front garden, big towering sunflowers bending over the path up to the door. The downstairs curtains were drawn but I glanced up towards the light spilling out of the upstairs window. There was a man, unbuttoning

his shirt slowly. He was handsome and looked tired. When I saw her, I nearly snorted laughter at the sheer serendipity of it. Her hair was still wavy from the plaits she had in the night before. She came up from behind and wrapped her arms around him, resting her cheek on his shoulder. She didn't glance out the window and see me standing, staring up. I briefly considered throwing a pebble, or ringing the doorbell, just for the sheer fright that I'd give her, but I decided that ultimately, it'd be a very awkward and unpleasant situation for everyone involved. They moved out of view suddenly, her pulling him back into the room, fingers clutching at the fabric of his shirt. I wanted to shout at them to come back, so I could get one last glance at her face because I think I knew, even then, that I'd never see it again.

(ii) *Annie:*

I left on the first of September because it felt like the right time of year to start something new.

I thought about leaving a note. Maybe tucked in amongst some withering flowers or in the drawer of my desk. It could have said, "I'm leaving," it could have said, "I'm sorry." But I thought that might be a bit melodramatic. I thought I'd just slip away quietly, and she mightn't even notice that I was gone. She was never here that summer anyway, always in her head, or a book or out in the greenhouse. And she'd just come inside and help herself to lemonade that I had slaved away to make without even a word of thanks. I kept making it. I started wishing that her teeth would turn yellow and rot, maybe even fall out. I used to have horrible thoughts like that that summer. I think maybe because I knew that she hated me and that he loved me. I used to go on really long drives, just to get a break from the way she looked at me. He'd drive to meet me, wherever I ended up, be it some beach or forest or small village. He didn't even mind if he had to drive for ages.

We always had sex in his car, not mine.

We used to go for long walks as well, wherever we ended up. He liked walking, probably because he was from the city and city people always get a kick out of walking around places with no lampposts. He would sometimes ask to meet her, usually when he suspected that I was in a particularly good mood, which didn't happen very often. He had this dream where we all lived together, one big happy family in his nice red brick house. He was full of silly ideas like that. When we decided I'd be moving in with him he asked me to bring her with me.

I refused.

He said something about family responsibility. Something about me only having one sister. I said we had spent enough of our lives living together already. I didn't choose her to be mine, genetics did, but I chose him. And besides, my parents had left it all to her, the oldest. Everything. The house and the fields and even the fucking greenhouse. It was all hers, I was just living in it, and I knew she was just waiting around for me to leave. So I did. I got up early and I drove to his house in the city and we spent the day lying in his bed, which would gradually become ours, watching the light change on the leaves outside the window. I lay in his arms all day, drifting between tears and laughter until night and exhaustion crept into the room. I watched him undress by the window and wondered if we'd be happy. I wondered if I'd be happier. Then I went to close the curtains, to shut us in from the outside. I looked out at a world all lit up by streetlamps. The view from his house, our house. The street was almost deserted, aside from one person, who for a moment I almost imagined was her, walking down the street, walking away from me.

Robyn Gill is in her final year of English and Drama in Trinity College Dublin. Previous publications include Sonder and Lilun Magazine. She recently attended the International Literature Festival Dublin as one of the Young Writer Delegates.

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## Stages

By Dedeepya Guthikonda

### BIRTH

The doctor tells me she is small, underweight. In those brief fragments of the day where she is asleep, I'm afraid of something I cannot name; I place my hand over her heart, requiring those quiet fists of reassurance to know she is still here. The visitors—bearing an assortment of pink items and dinner platters—tell me she is beautiful. A *blessing*, they say. *God's child*. Yes—but I am not the right one for this child. I worry she will slip through my hands, shatter like a glass vase in front of me, that soon I will bear witness to my faults. I feel she is safer in my mother's or sister's hands. Why isn't she growing? It's only a matter of time, the doctor says. Time. This is what they tell my husband about his visa, too: wait for your time, wait until America wants you. My husband waits with sleepless nights and a restless mind. I wait with a foreign body; it's an exercise, I suppose, preparing me before I am once again foreign to a new country. I cannot recognize these rough patches of skin that had once emerged as barriers, sensing my daughter as an invasion. Now, her presence is enough to make me forget myself. I awaken to her cries, and when she drifts back to sleep, her fingers are wrapped around mine. At that moment, I feel she is melting me, softening me in all the hard places.

### CRAWLING

We are here in America, here where the baby first begins to eat the soft rice I mash with my hands. American food is cardboard, the doctor said to me. Feed her what you eat. I wish for the doctor here besides me. I wish for my mother and sister, too, but these are

the choices we made. Life is a trading game, my mother once said to me: you give up one thing for another. I do not have enough time to wonder if we have given up too much. The baby exhausts me. Every waking moment she is shoving something down her mouth. She thinks she is invincible, unaware of the harm she is capable of inflicting upon herself, oblivious to anything beyond her needs and wants. *Slow down*, I want to tell her, along with the other women in the apartment whose English I cannot understand. I am reduced to a nod and smile in front of them, suddenly missing something everyone else seems to have.

## ADOLESCENCE

When she begins to take the yellow school bus in the mornings, she forgets about me quickly. I am reminded of all those sleepless nights I once spent with my hand over her heart, realizing she will never know of them. When I first begin to drive—in front of the wheel—I am reminded of those first months with the baby in my hands: my heart pounding with fear, afraid of what I would do. My daughter wants a good, fast, TV mom, but I am nothing like that. She is embarrassed by my English, by the kind of mother I am. I try to do what I can for her; I cook the pasta and bread she asks for. She wants it bland, tasteless: a replica of the image on the back of the cardboard box. Don't follow your friends, I tell her. What do you know, she says. I don't know many things, I say. I tell you what I know.

## TEENAGE

She begins to come home later now, performing in the theater at her school. It makes me proud to see her on stage. Her English is clean, sharp: comes out wrapped graciously in slick film. It is nothing like mine. But when my husband and I go to see her, she meets us in an empty hallway before rushing us home. She does not want us there.

With my empty days, I begin to work at a department store. There are clear glass cases holding diamonds and creams, and in a long time, I wish for something I cannot have. Instead, I buy my daughter a few things she wants: a phone, some nice shoes, some makeup for her shows. Thank you, she says, before disappearing into her room. Americans say thank you only because they must.

On the rides to and back from the department store, my body begins to ache: a pain I recognize only from my daughters' birth many years ago. *Because of these winters*, I tell my husband. I tell him not to worry; he is tired enough, and I do not want to burden him with my inconveniences. On a day the pain is particularly bad, my daughter comes home crying. She shuts the door behind her. You don't understand, she says. You will never understand. I say no more. I have become a burden: something unwanted, incapable. Her sobs slip through the door, and all I can do is listen.

## AFTER

*Osteogenesis Imperfata*: this is what my doctor tells me is breaking my bones. I call my daughter to tell her; she is in New York studying English Literature. I keep the phone call brief, not wanting to disturb her studies. With my daughter gone now, it is only my husband and I. We go on long walks before we go to bed early. Too early. I am reminded of all those sleepless nights we once endured with our visa's pending, our daughter crying. There was a time she made me afraid, but now, she is strong enough to follow her dreams, to get what she wants. America lets her follow her dreams. This is what it was all for, I suppose. What we have given and what we have received. My daughter comes home one Friday. She is older now—beautiful in the way everyone said she would be. We are watching TV and she takes my hand, wraps her finger around mine.

Dedeepya is a high school student from Minneapolis. She finds inspiration in busy streets and warm weather. She loves coffee mugs (although not coffee!) and long bike rides.

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## Cyclical

By Mrinal Pattanaik

It's Friday morning and you haven't called once. I keep looking at my phone and expecting to see at least a *drive safe, baby*, but all my recent messages are from my friends and my mom. I call you twice (not more because I don't want to feel desperate) and go on with my day and think I'll probably drunk text my best friend about how annoying you're being.

It's Friday afternoon when you text me: *can you get to the hospital?*

I call you twice more and you don't answer, so I just drive over, hoping I picked the right one. When I walk in, I don't know what to say: *my girlfriend is here and she's visiting someone and she didn't call me and I was supposed to go on a ten-hour drive today and I'll have to wait until tomorrow because I'm her backup.*

*My girlfriend is visiting a resident. I think she needs to be checked in too.*

*My girlfriend is visiting a resident and I'm still jealous she gets all her attention.*

Finally, I decide not to say anything — how can I, anyway, when I only know your best friend secondhand — and go back to my car. I drive around aimlessly until I find a Starbucks and pick up two coffees, one black and one with four creams and two sugars because you've always liked your coffee too sweet. By the time I get back to the hospital, you're standing outside. Your nose is stained pink from the cold even though you're wearing a huge scarf, easily as big as you are when it's unraveled.

"Hey," you say, and then, "sorry."

"Don't worry about it." I say this often: I can't make you feel guilty because you didn't text me back in time or show up to our date or call me when I'm going on a drive upstate, not when the alternative is letting your friend die. It's okay being second-choice when it's like this, I think, so I add, "Seriously, it's not a big deal."

Your smile is small and reminds me of one of those wobbly cartoon ones. This is the part where you should say something like *you're the best* or even just *thank you*, but instead you fidget with the hem of your skirt before turning the radio on and half-heartedly humming to the top forty song that starts playing, too loud and too fast. It's the kind of song I'd be belting with you if your best friend didn't try to kill herself again today, but she did, so I just stare at the road and wonder how long it'll take before one of us gives up.

"You should talk to someone." I can't say you should talk to me because it feels self-obsessed and I can't afford to be, not now. "Even, like, those online sessions would be better than nothing."

"I know." It's always here where we start sounding like broken records, scratch and repeat and scratch and repeat. "I will when I'm ready."

Two and a half months later, you'll call me and say you can't do this anymore: because you feel bad about always leaving me on hold, because you can't make a relationship your top priority when someone's using you as a lifeline, because you still don't know how to talk to someone. I'll say I understand even though I want to yell at you or cry or do something insane, at least a little bit, and then I'll consider blocking your number but I won't, just in case you end up needing me again.

Six months later, you'll text me: *thank you*. I'll draft eight different texts back, some of them angry, some of them upset, one of them asking how you're doing, how she's doing,

and then I'll just say no problem. I've never been good at tying up loose ends, especially not with you.

Right now, though, we're in my car drinking lukewarm Starbucks outside your garage. "Drive safe tomorrow," you say. You kiss my cheek and something about it feels like I love you, though maybe it's just wishful thinking. I say I will, don't worry, and I watch you go in until the garage door closes behind you, a long, low hum.

I drive home. I text my best friend. I think about yours.

Mrinal Pattanaik is a senior at Neuqua Valley High School. Her work has been recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, Sandpiper Magazine, and Up North Lit, amongst others.

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### **Loathing** By Rita Chernikova

Lending him my laptop was easy. Letting him lean on me for the rest of the year was not.

I became the Laptev Sea that his little lolling boat could sail onto lie after lie. And I lacked in linguistics to let him learn of my level of loathing.

Rita Chernikova is a writer from Wicklow, Ireland. She writes in two languages, English and Russian but hopes that her persistent study of French will become her third linguistic funnel for thoughts in the future. When she isn't fanatically hitting the keys of her laptop she likes to play guitar, hula-hoop or do whacky art with bird feathers.

## Nonfiction

### 2020 Grads: We Will be Okay By Hannalee Isaacs

Senior year was supposed to be my first “normal” year of high school. After three different schools, familial health complications, a divorce, a natural disaster, and countless moves between the start of my freshman year and August of my senior year, I was ready to make a new start for myself. I entered the new school-year prepared to make a change in my life and finally be a high schooler. I wanted to go to the dances, football games, and parties that I had never been to. I wanted to put my education second to my happiness for once. I wanted to be spontaneous, live boldly, eat adventurously, and make the most of the last year in my hometown.

I did just that my first semester of senior year. I focused on building relationships. I went out with my friends on weeknights and stayed up too late. I said yes to every opportunity I could and felt ok saying no to things I simply did not want to do. I got my first B. I spent too much money at coffee shops. I went to my first and only football game and left early. I saw Lizzo perform with my friends and tried Cookout, a North Carolina staple, for the first time. I explored all of the hidden gems of my town, reached out to friends I hadn’t spoken to in years, and acted stupid. I finally downloaded Instagram, Facebook, and yes, Tiktok. I planned an 18th birthday trip for myself and many winter ski weekends. I celebrated with family members as they got married and announced their pregnancies. I planned a trip to visit my cousin at college in late March and made spring break plans with friends to go to Los Angeles. I cherished every single day and was finally present in my life and the lives of those I loved.

In January, as we walked into school, I pulled one of my friends, a Junior in high school, aside and told her I didn't think I was ready to say goodbye to high school just yet. "Five more months just isn't enough," I told her. She laughed away my comment and expressed how she only wished she was in my position, close to finishing my time at the school and leaving our town. Although that had been my exact sentiment for as long as I could remember, something had changed for me when the end finally came in sight.

With graduation approaching faster than I wanted it to, my stress about that date in June exponentially increased. How could I get my parents, who haven't spoken to each other in five years, to sit in the same room? Would I be ok if they could not put their differences aside to support me on such a momentous occasion? Would my sister be able to attend the ceremony, or would her health and ability further complicate the day? Can I invite my grandparents and extended family? Would I just feel further isolated with all of my loved ones in one location, knowing a happy union of the two sides is impossible? And even more so, will I be okay if they decline, choosing for themselves to not even bother dealing with the stress such an event merits? The day and the graduation that I had dreamed about had now become a nightmare.

I had stopped all conversations on the topics with my parents and tried to find ways to change the subject. I continued to work hard at school, occupy myself with friends, and create drama with boys. I engulfed myself in music and podcasts, trying to find the answers that my parents were not easily providing me. I bought a prom dress online and got it altered. In early March, I went to DC with friends and visited my grandmother, telling her there's no need to be sad when I left, since I already had another flight scheduled for June. "Expect many more hugs soon," I said as I left her.

I was wrong.

For a long time, the only constant in my life was school. In March, my world came crumbling down when I realized that too was going to be taken away from me. Only

weeks after we were sent home for good, I received an email saying that moving forward my school would

no longer be awarding credit to seniors for their classes. I was both relieved and left feeling empty. My most stressful and most fulfilling part of life was gone for the unforeseen future.

As the world celebrated my graduation through social media posts, virtual YouTube proms, and commencement speeches by President Obama, I felt both eternally grateful and confused. I had to keep reminding myself that the words of affirmation, praise, and endless support were not just meant for my classmates but also for me. I had worked hard for the past four years on my academic education and myself, all while having to overcome unexpected challenges. I was finally receiving the recognition I deserved, and I didn't have to unite my family to earn it.

Over the past several months, I have had countless hour-long phone calls and FaceTime sessions where family and friends ask how in the world I'm dealing with this change of plans and the possibility of no freshman year of college. In response, I tell them that in my 18 years of life I have never had a year go by without an unexpected surprise. My status as a high school senior aside, I am dealing with coronavirus the same way as everyone else. Recognizing my privileges in these unforeseen times, I quickly adapted to a laissez faire attitude on life. I separated my wants from my needs, stopped worrying about tomorrow, and jumped right into my new way of life. I learned to sleep in for the first time in my life, took three-hour long walks, put work to the side and tried out new recipes. I reached out to local organizations and asked how I could assist with food distribution and other essential services. I started religiously calling my cousins and friends to exchange our daily plans and accomplishments. Simply put, Coronavirus might have just been the perfect remedy to my chronic FOMO – fear of missing out.

Ironically, for me, a pandemic seems like the perfect conclusion to a hectic, unexpected, and inconsistent four years of high school. And to that, I say that I was not robbed of a senior year and a graduation. I learned what I needed to, made my amends, and more than anything, grew as a person. I feel content closing this chapter of my life and starting my new journey as an adult. Isn't that what senior year is all about? (Plus, this way I get to wear my cap and gown and prom dress around the house whenever I want.)

But instead of packing my bags and coming up with design plans for my dorm room at the University of California-Los Angeles, I sit in my childhood home, taking classes remotely and achieving only part of the college experience I dreamed about. I wonder when I will get to hug the friends I have made over Zoom, walk around campus, and finally experience all of the freshman traditions. However, I know that those opportunities are waiting for me, not going on without me. My life ahead may look a little different in the short-term, but my long-term goals remain the same. I am going to be okay with whatever life throws at me. I am only eighteen years old, and I feel so blessed to know this is true.

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Hannalee Isaacs is a native of Chapel Hill, North Carolina and a freshman at the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA).

### **Silent Flames: Barcelona After Uprising** By Gabrielle Ghaderi

It's late October and the Barcelona sun beats down on me with the sort of intensity I'd only thought was possible in late July. After nearly three months of living in Copenhagen, the coastal heat is a welcomed change from the cool Scandinavian autumn.

Five-story apartment complexes line either side of the narrow street of Carrer Gran de Gràcia. All built in a single breathless row, they almost appear as one long building, if it weren't for the changing colored tiles on the buildings' facade. About every fifty feet, the

buildings' tiles change from pale blue floral to beige swirls to yellow geometric patterns, as if they are wallpaper.

Sprouting out from these tiled buildings are symmetrical rows of black wrought iron balconies, all uniform in appearance. When I look up, I notice the red and yellow striped Catalonian flag hanging proudly from a handful of them. These flags, along with signs reading "Free Catalan Prisoners" and "LLIBERTAT PRESOS POLÍTICS," are the only remaining evidence of the previous week's violent protests that transformed this now bright and sunny city into what, from news clips alone, looked like an anarchic dystopia.

Walking down this now abandoned street, I can't believe this was the same city I had watched go up in flames on nearly every news station. The photos and videos of mobs of protestors hurling glass bottles and rocks at police through the fire barrier the demonstrators had lit in the street made me question if I should even come to the city I'd always dreamt of visiting. In my four-and-a-half months of living in Europe, this was my one week free from classes, and despite my hesitations, the voice in my head wouldn't let me forget that fact. From my little room in the heart of Copenhagen, I packed my bags and left.

Although the recent protests came as a shock to me, the truth is that these latest demonstrations tie into the tense, multi-century history between the Spanish government and the semi-autonomous region of Catalonia in north-east Spain. The region is home to about 7.5 million people who share a language, flag, and anthem, all of which are distinct from those of Spain. This unique history and culture has led to a rise in Catalonian nationalism since the 19th century and more recently, a move for complete independence that has been gaining momentum over the past decade.

In 2010, pro-independence sentiment resurfaced with Spain's Constitutional Court ruling denying the recognition of Catalonia as an autonomous nation within Spain. Seven years later, Catalonian voters held an illegal independence referendum in October

2017, to which the Spanish central government responded with direct rule over the region.

Fast forward to current day, October 2019, when nine Catalan independence leaders are found guilty of sedition regarding the failed 2017 referendum, receiving prison sentences anywhere from nine to thirteen years, sparking protests throughout Catalonia, and most notably, the region's capital city, Barcelona

Now, only a week after the October 14 sentencing and subsequent demonstrations, there are hardly any indications that anything ever happened. As I turn onto La Rambla and into the city center, I am immediately thrown back into the hustle and bustle of tourism. Thousands of people swarm the mile long street like ants to neglected food. They each walk sporadically towards one of the dozens of beige tent-covered shops that line either side of the street.

People walk past me from all different directions carrying their new "I heart Barcelona" souvenirs, but only a few days ago, La Rambla was flooded with 80,000 protestors waving Catalonian flags and pro-independence signs in the air. The shops that are still visible now, even through the crowds of tourists, were completely swallowed by the demonstrators. Now, it seems as though the fast paced and unsympathetic force of tourism has completely buried any indication that conflict was present. Although visitors are eager to ignore the conflict that happened beneath their feet, I soon learned that this amnesia is not felt by Barcelona's residents.

"Just three days ago, this street was filled with people," says Maribel, motioning towards the now empty street in front of us. "Hundreds of people with flags and signs chanting 'freedom for political prisoners.'"

A woman in her early fifties, Maribel sits next to me on a bench outside of a small music shop. Though, as a Catalonian native, she is used to the intense sun, ringlets of her dark

brown baby hairs still stick to her forehead, while the rest of her short untamed hair wisps around her head. Escaping the humidity is impossible, but Maribel and I are able to get some relief beneath the shadows of the tiled buildings.

Though we have just met, she speaks to me as she would an old friend. Growing up in the neighboring town of Sant Cugat, Maribel is familiar with the long history of Catalonia, a history I've only experienced from the desk of a high school Spanish classroom in Illinois.

"I was maybe thirteen or fourteen when Catalonia became recognized as a nationality. I remember it because it was around that time we started having elections and a president."

What Maribel is referring to is the 1979 statute of autonomy, which recognized Catalonia as a distinct national community within Spain and Catalan as an official language of the region along with Spanish. Prior to this process of regionalization, the region faced a suppression of Catalonian autonomy under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco.

Maribel continues on, seldom making eye contact. Instead, she looks somewhere over my shoulder as if the memories of her childhood are playing out on a screen behind me.

"I don't really remember too much. I was a kid so I didn't really pay much attention. To me it was all the same. I was Catalonian. I spoke Catalan as well as Spanish. I didn't understand why we needed someone else to tell us what we already knew...But to my parents it was probably a bigger deal because they grew up while Franco was in power and remember it."

She broke out of her trance and looked away from the imaginary screen over my shoulder and looked back at me, chuckling, "I guess that's what happens when you're a kid. You don't want to be told what to do because you think you know everything."

Although Maribel didn't recall having strong feelings about the region's autonomy when she was younger, that sentiment changed as she grew older.

"When I got older and started to understand more about our culture and history I realized that there are a lot of things shared between Spain and Catalonia's history, but there are a lot of differences, too," she explains with a confident cadence that is only achieved with age. "For me, it is not about money or politics. It is about identity. To have autonomy means we are recognized as a culture different from Spain's. I don't think that means we need complete independence, just recognition and respect from the Spanish government would be enough. But, if the choice is full independence or nothing at all, I choose independence."

Maribel shrugs her shoulders as though the ultimatum holds no weight, but the sincerity in her eyes tells me that this is a stance she takes on with a quiet passion.

Other than the whirring cars and the occasional clusters of passersby, the street in front of us is rather quiet, a trait that Maribel finds to be quite a contrast to recent days.

"It was like everywhere I went people were all over the place. Here, there, everywhere," she says about the recent protests, motioning her arms around her as if her hands were paintbrushes and the air was her canvas. This time, rather than looking off into the distance past my shoulder, Maribel describes what she saw with wide vibrant eyes.

"They would march down the street and twenty minutes later, I would look again and they'd still be there."

Despite believing in Catalonian autonomy, Maribel did not participate in the protests, nor did she approve of the violence that came from them. Although the demonstrations she witnessed were peaceful, many, especially those in the city center, were not.

"I did not see any fires or violence but I know they were there and I don't agree with it, but I understand why. You cannot ignore the fires."

Yet, one week later, here we are, looking out into the deserted street, and I can't help thinking that Maribel is right. Nobody could ignore the fires. The fires made the world listen, but now that they are gone, the world has gone back to forgetting.

The shadows of the buildings have now stretched out to touch the edge of the road. It is time for Maribel and me to part ways. She lights a cigarette as I gather my things. I walk back towards the main sidewalk leading back to the city center. Before I turn the corner, I glance back to the bench next to the music shop. As the puff of smoke from Maribel's cigarette dissipates, I notice something I hadn't noticed before. Above the music shop door, a little piece of paper hangs from its door frame that reads "Freedom for Catalan Prisoners." Its size is no match for the flags that hang from the balconies above it, but it is a reminder that the fight for independence continues on, even in the shadows.

Gabrielle is an English-Writing major at Illinois Wesleyan University, graduating in May 2021. She's written for her local newspaper and magazine, and is currently a features writer for her university newspaper. Most recently, the Illinois College Press Association awarded Gabrielle with second place for her features writing. Gabrielle also enjoys creative nonfiction writing and is working on a piece about identity inspired by her multicultural upbringing. To learn more about Gabrielle, check out her website at <https://gabrielleghaderi.wixsite.com/mysite>.

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**The Fear of Consumption No Longer Consumes Me** By Miles Ortiz

Have you ever been asked a question so many times that you feel like you should carry around a business card to hand out that contains the answers? Mine would look a bit like;

*Hi! My name is Miles and I'm anorexic. Yes, boys can have eating disorders too. No, I can't just eat something. I'm aware that I don't look skinny enough to have an eating disorder. Please do not ask me for advice on how to lose weight, I will not answer.*

Having gone through this introduction process hundreds of times you start to memorize the interactions. They'll try to give you advice, tell you that eating is easy, shame you for not caring enough to fuel your body, comment on your weight, all acting as if they're a doctor and as if they clearly know what's best for you. What they fail to realize is anorexia is an addiction. Anorexia is an addiction I have battled since I was 10 years old. I became addicted to the feeling of feeling empty, addicted to the way I can't sleep at night because of hunger pains, addicted to the comments friends and family make about me finally losing weight, addicted to knowing I'm the only one cold in a warm room as my body trembles and your vision blacks out when I stand.

Now don't get me wrong, I've tried getting help. Talking to counselors and doctors proves to be as effective as talking to a brick wall that just nods and takes notes. The doctors tell me that I'm not skinny enough to be a concern but don't worry they'll keep an eye on it so that way when I completely destroy my body, they'll be there to bill me for the hospitalization. The counselors try to wrap their minds around how I could be sick if my grades are fine. They give me videos to watch and books to read hoping I'll use those stories as a warning. I've watched the videos but instead of listening to their warnings I use them as a guide. Studying their techniques for burning off 50 calories after eating an apple or how to mask the feeling of hunger during a fast.

Despite the years of struggling and starvation I've finally begun my road to recovery. I no longer idolize the images and media I once used as inspiration, I no longer force myself

to burn calories after a meal, I no longer get joy from my addiction because I finally see it for what it is. Yes, there are times where I miss being sick. I miss having that feeling of control over my body and my life. Even though I consider myself recovered I still have to face the possibility of relapse every time I walk into my kitchen. I know that this is just something I have to live with because while I can't ever fully recover from anorexia, I can choose to not let it define who I am. I can finally change that business card;

*Hi! My name is Miles and I'm a writer. I enjoy music and spoken poetry. My favorite color is green. I love acting and performing. Please feel free to ask me about video games, I could ramble on for hours. Last but not least, the fear of consumption no longer consumes me.*

Miles Ortiz is a sixteen-year-old high school student from northwest Arkansas. He never once thought he would start writing, but after some persuasion from his teachers he decided to share his work. Miles took a creative writing course at his high school which is where he wrote his short essay for a final project. This essay, "The Fear of Consumption No Longer Consumes Me", is based on Miles' experiences growing up with anorexia. Though it is not ultimately Miles' goal to become a writer, he appreciates the opportunity to share his story with others.

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### **Don't Look Back 不要回头看** By Ai Li Feng

Sometimes, I think that transformation is a euphemism for death. A flower withers so the fruit may bloom. Caterpillar becomes pupa becomes butterfly. And I, burning for breath in the Guangzhou airport after the adoption goes through. Spasming at the terminal, slipping into a coma on the flight. My lashes flicker like dying lights, and I grow still when wheels touch American runways. Fire flares from friction, the plane a phoenix and I tangled in its entrails: split its skin and augur me a prophecy. Tell me of rebirth, of reincarnation. How my heart will stutter to a start, how I will open my eyes to a new country, a new life. The taste of ash in my mouth.

I learn to walk in the streets of New York City, where pigeons clutter the gutters like discarded dreams. I pluck pennies from the sidewalk and press them into my mother's palms, but she tells me to keep them. Pulls out her pocketbook to purchase a hot dog for me from the cart at the corner. When I wipe my mouth on the back of my hand, ketchup streaks skin like a stripe on the American flag. Like an open wound. I am lucky. This life is a privilege. Still, I feel heavy, my pockets weighted with copper.

We make our way to Penn Station, and I scuff my sneakers against concrete as we wait. A woman walks by with her daughter, laughing in Mandarin, and I look away. We never visit Chinatown. We will never visit China. I close my eyes in the city that never sleeps. Call it home.

On the subway, her face fades, replaced by my reflection in the glass and my mother beside me. A yellow girl and a white woman. And I think, for a shard of a second that digs into my ribs like a blade, that we are but strangers. Think that underground, the car feels like a casket, and wonder if there are ghosts. Wonder which is mine. At our stop, I stumble up the stairs and step out of the earth. Blink. Sun against salt against skin.

I find recipes online and print them out. Bake almond cookies in a cherry-colored stand mixer from William Sonoma. Measure out Crisco and almond extract: McCormick's, established in Baltimore, only forty miles from Washington DC. All American.

A Google search tells me that Chinese almond cookies are called 杏仁饼. Xìng rén bǐng. I spit syllables weighted with a heavy accent and they fall from my lips like a prayer. Again. Again. Like if I breathe them enough, they will become a part of me. I am still whispering the words when I electrocute myself unplugging the stand mixer.

Months eddy past like the river in my hometown whose name I could never pronounce, and still, only a handful of characters do not slip through my fingers. My gaze snags on the sharp strokes that carved themselves into my memory: 妈妈 and 广州 and 我爱你.

Mama and Guangzhou and I love you. Though I recognize them and remember their meanings, my voice falters when I try to speak. My pencil stills when I attempt to write. These words do not belong to me. It is as if I am meant to know, but never have. And so I do not learn.

But it aches when my eyes slide over hanzi like oil on water while ordering Chinese takeout. When I pause, ironing accents into the flat intonations to which I am accustomed. How the clerk expects me to speak the language of a country I cannot call home, how her face falls when an apology stumbles from my lips. Longing clinging to my lashes like tears: I am American. I am so very American.

She presses a fortune cookie into my palm and my tongue knots itself. A moment as vulnerable as a wound, then a soft thank you. Plastic tears like skin, the shell cracking the way my ribs might. My fingers snake into the hollow, extract a slip of white paper: 不要回头看. I bite my lip, and she translates for me, her voice as gentle as touch: bùyào huítóu kàn. Don't look back, she tells me. Don't look back. When I glimpse our reflections in the glass, she looks like a ghost. Looks like me. The cookie crumbling like ash on my tongue: sometimes, I wonder what we leave behind in moving forward.

Ai Li Feng is a fifteen-year-old writer currently studying Latin and Ancient Greek. The editor-in-chief of Indigo Literary Journal, her work is published or forthcoming in the Eunoia Review, Parentheses Journal, and perhappened mag, among others. Find her on Twitter @ailiwrites.

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**Why I Kneel** By Ziqing Kuang

"Go back to your own country or we will get you deported!" a voice shouted from the stands. There was shouting and screaming everywhere, and I felt dizzy for a moment.

"Stand up for the national anthem or get the hell out of here!" Trying to keep my composure, I kept my head down and closed my eyes. I could feel everyone staring at my team, who were all kneeling in a line as the national anthem played in the background: *land of the free and the home of the brave...*

It was my first varsity volleyball game of the season. We were playing in an area known to be quite conservative, and I thought I was prepared for the hate when my team decided to kneel during the national anthem before the game. I was sure I had already heard everything. It was always "you don't belong here" or "go back to your own country", but this was a totally different level. After taking home a win after the first game, our team was silent the entire bus ride home. Even though it was a victory, it didn't feel like one. We did not regret our decision to kneel, but there were young girls on the freshman and JV team who were terrified.

The next morning, our phones exploded with rude, racist, and disgusting comments about us. Observers at the game had "reviewed" us on the Google Review page of our school, remarking that we were "a disappointment to the country" and "extremely uneducated and dumb". At the same time, we had an immense amount of support and kindness towards us as well. Students from our school and even other schools took their time to message me and the girls on team, thanking us for our bravery and courage. Even they understood that our silent protest was very controversial and dangerous, but I still feel like it was necessary.

The very next week, the varsity coaches had quit, leaving the team shocked and hurt. One of the teams we had played made the theme of their home game "America". I'm guessing this was to harass and intimidate us. Every time we had walked into someone else's gym, there were Trump supporters wearing their shirts plastered with hurtful

words. It was upsetting to realize that a school board consecutively made a decision to allow spectators to belittle 14- to 17-year-old girls at a game and gave them the perfect opportunity to execute whatever they had planned.

If people gave us a chance to explain the reason behind why we kneeled, I would have clarified in the most civil way possible. But because I did not get a chance to, here is my explanation: I am kneeling for Breonna Taylor, Daniel Prude, George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, Elijah McClain, and all the black people in this country who were killed under police brutality and an unjust law system. I am kneeling for all the people of color in this country who are treated unfairly on a day-to-day basis because of their race, ethnicity, and skin color. I am kneeling not to disrespect those who have laid down their lives for this country but to respect the fact that they did not sacrifice their life for a prejudiced America. True Americans are the people who care about the future of this country...they are people who will not let racial inequality and racism continue in the United States of America.

Our silent protest should make a statement to those who do not understand: we respect our country so much that we are fighting to make the phrase “land of the free and home of the brave” reality. We will not stand until that statement is true. When will real people stop becoming hashtags? When will our neighbors decide to sit down and listen to the other side of the conversation? Even though I am an Asian, I will never ever understand the inequality and injustice that black people face every single day. So as someone who will never experience nor understand, it is my duty to do everything I can to educate myself. Over these past couple months, I have learned so much about culture, respect, and kindness than I have learned in my entire lifetime.

I have read books, watched videos, and initiated conversations about race. This entire experience left me feeling empowered and desperate for change in this country. I truly believe that our country can make progress regarding racial equality and justice, but it takes both sides to compromise to make that advance. We have to learn to love one

another and be willing to listen to those who have suffered from these events and experiences. This year has been a turmoil for all of us, but we have the ability to make it slightly easier for our neighbors by just listening. In the words of Malcolm X, "You can't separate peace from freedom because no one can be at peace unless he has his freedom."

ZiQing Kuang is a high school sophomore from Chandler, Arizona. She has worked with multiple magazines, including Girls' Life Magazine. During her free time, ZiQing enjoys playing volleyball, reading, and watching her favorite shows on Netflix.

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### **Writing My Way Out** By Natasha Mofia

Some prisoners doing life without parole have obviously conceptualized breaking out. However, life isn't a prison break series and Michael Scofield just never shows up. If he did, I'd be free from this concealed jail.

I stare at the ceiling in my room from dusk till dawn ,and I've learned a solitary life isn't so bad once it becomes quotidian.Going to visit a friend or taking a stroll is not a bad idea, howbeit, owning only two pants and sweatshirts from five years ago as well as using my mums phone draws me back. Also, being around friends in varsity escalates my anxiety and college topics are all greek to me. Dreadlocks and casual look subjects are my specialty on the other hand. But maybe if I had money, I wouldn't be so casual. I'd toss my buggy sweatshirt and trainers in the air and surprise my body with a corporate look, people would hear my heels clack from miles away like Alicia in her song,"One step at a time,"plus my family would have enough food to cobble dogs with.

Every girl dreams of the day her father will walk her down the aisle, but in my dream,He chases me like Freddy Krueger and it's a nightmare on elm street. His love for alcohol more than family has left us helpless and pariahs in our community.He curses us, throws

away our food and extends his savagery to the neighbours ,who as a result, want nothing to do with us.It has been like this since time immemorial. Memories of calling out for help while he dangled by a rope trying to commit suicide, as well as my sister hiding all the knives replay in my head.This childhood terror has left me battling with trauma based disorders and he's the reason my life has more holes than Swiss cheese.

My mum, siblings and I bake to sustain ourselves, even so, a dollar a day doesn't go a long way.Maybe one day he will change ,when pigs fly of course. Maybe one day I will let go, nonetheless, little Natasha will forever be stuck in a terrifying childhood and will never know how being taught how to ride a bike by her father feels like. This explains why adult Natasha cannot ride a bike.

I've thought of leaving many times but what about my mum and siblings? Plus, I just have nowhere to go. Saying my father has caused us great pain is an understatement, and like a bull chasing a matador, I am exhausted.

But as ridiculous as this may sound, my locks taught me to never relinquish my dreams. When I started my dreadlock journey, every day was disheartening as my hair just never locked. People with long thick locks were my role models, so I always asked them how they achieved this. I was told," The time taken for hair to lock varies from person to person due to different hair textures. However,it all eventually locks.Keep on retwisting and never give up." After heeding what I was told, my hair eventually locked seven months later. I now feel like Bob Marley's niece but my Jamaican accent in the mirror isn't so good though.What was meant for hair is what I see life through.

Every person goes through different struggles(hair texture),but if one keeps on trying(retwisting),their life eventually changes(lock).See why I said dreadlock topics are my specialty?

I believe that one day my history will be rewritten. Hope is what keeps me going and rekindles every flame that my tears put out. I am an eager beaver who stays up all night to write in English which is not my native language and someday somehow, I will write my way out. I've shared my story because it is not a cock and bull story, but my reality which I know will change. This is a place where I can turn every emotion into words. I don't live with it, here I leave it, it's my therapy. Maybe writing about adventure would have been more fun than this and I would show my mum. But how can I write something I don't know? Every person has a story, this is mine.

Furthermore, I wrote to reach out to even just that one person who will find a reason not to give up if they read this. For if I've not given up, then nobody should. I still hold on to hope and people need hope.

If something good comes out of my writing, then people are gonna know how powerful one's gift can be, this will make them search within themselves for that one thing they can use to change their lives. If more and more persons come out to share their stories, —solutions will form and healing will take place.

Like Andra Days song which got me an earworm: *I'll rise up, in spite of the ache and I'll do it a thousand times again.*

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### **Truckerado** By Emma Hill

The Zoom call makes Papaw's face look redder than usual, and he's shaved clean, which isn't usual for November. All throughout the year, Papaw keeps clean shaven, but in November up until New Year's, Nana allows any sort of facial hair he desires. By far the most popular among the grandchildren is the Santa beard. He can grow his white beard out into a jolly triangle and, with his rosy red cheeks and German nose, all he has to do is throw on a red T-shirt and take off his USAF ball cap and he's Santa.

Not this year. Maybe Aunt Kissy read somewhere that COVID likes bearded men.

#

"Don Henley and I used to play a game," Papaw begins. "With the others."

He means Don Henley the future Eagles drummer; "others" refers to Freddy Neese his third cousin, Jerry Surratt who would die in a car accident after signing a deal with Kenny Rogers, and Richard Bowen who was "just there". The "others" and Don Henley were two years ahead of Papaw at Linden-Kildare High School. They still invited him along, even though his success at football directly contrasted Don Henley's own failure at the sport, which led him to music. At night, a game was played, and it involved Highway 59.

As a small town resident myself, I understand how a highway can quickly morph from a means of transportation into an opportunity for entertainment. A weekend activity for Linden teenagers involved drag racing, dirt biking, or just watching the cars pass their monotonous way.

Sometimes, they played tricks on eighteen-wheelers.

From what I can gather, it was just those five; the whole of Linden did not indulge in such dangerous behaviors. Just those five would visit a closed gas station at two in the morning, where old tires were wrapped in brightly colored cellophane to make them look brand new, like oversized candies. Just those five stole an old tire (*Orange, Papaw thinks*) and rolled it to the highway's edge, where they arranged it so a passing trucker, who would be barely awake and not thinking straight at two in the morning, would think it had fallen out of a tire-supplier's truck bed. Just those five knew the allure of a brand new tire to poor truckers, who would slam on the brakes (*It takes eighteen-wheelers a long time to stop, Papaw reminds us*) and run out of the truck to find the tire. Just those five rolled the tire into the woods by then, leaving a bewildered trucker standing at the

empty side of the highway, wondering what medication would make him stop seeing ditched cellophane-wrapped luck turned sour.

Papaw can't even remember how many times they did it. They transported the tire to the highway in Don Henley's senior gift: a four-thousand-pound Chevy Cutlass that blended into the night. It never got old, and it helped take their minds off college, missed opportunities, and what could come next.

There was one trucker who stopped faster than the others. Papaw and Don Henley bent to roll the tire into the woods, shuffling feet against asphalt; they were too slow. The trucker, eyes bleary from the road, squinted to the promised orange treasure and saw high school punks trundling it away, giggling like babies. Perhaps he roared in anger. Papaw only remembers that the trucker bolted back to the cab of his truck, gunned the engine, and chased the five troublemakers down a one-lane dirt road not meant for eighteen-wheelers at all. The boys, barefoot, ran harder than they ever had before, the headlights bearing down on them and hot panic making them forget that Cass County famously had rattlesnakes hiding in the sand. The boys were terrified the trucker wouldn't stop, not only because anger was a stronger fuel than diesel, but because the road was so thin, he had no choice. So, they ran and he drove because that was all either party could do. The tire had been tossed into the woods — abandoned — at first sign of the chase. Eventually, the boys outmaneuvered the mechanical behemoth and disappeared into the dirt bike paths under quiet pine trees.

*That's the last time I saw Don Henley, Papaw tells us. He went to college after that. I heard about the band and the girlfriend when I got out of the military.*

*We sit in silence, wishing the Eagles were here to laugh with us about when everything was simple and impossible and real. And I want to give Papaw a hug, a Santa-sized one – to thank*

him for running fast enough, back to Bear Creek where his mother waited – but he's in Houston, and my neck is cramped from staring at the screen.

#

We wave goodbye and the screen goes dark. I study my face in the aftermath. Would I have ever taunted eighteen-wheelers at two in the morning with future Eagles, if I'd had the chance?

Probably not. Too many rattlesnakes.

Maybe Papaw could have been a Rockstar, but rockstars need to know more than three songs.

Emma Hill is a published author of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. She has appeared in the literary journals *HUMID*, *The Bell Tower*, and *Route 7 Review* and received recognition from various local chapbook competitions. When not writing furiously, she is enjoying her final year in Stephen F. Austin State University's Creative Writing undergraduate program. She also edits essays for SFASU's Academic Assistance and Resource Center, often with her not-so-helpful cat batting at the keyboard.

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**A New Curiosity Shop** By Jeremy Robertson



**The Dawn Treader**

At 8:00 PM downtown Ann Arbor is bright and loud. The white streetlights blend with neon red OPEN! signs and the flashing blue and green swirls of the dance club. In the evening, passers-by have to shout over the heavy beat of the dance club's music. A teenage couple laughs and clings to each other as they walk down the brightly lit shops, and a mother carries her screaming toddler away from a candy store. But in the middle of this bright and loud world of asphalt and electricity, a soft, yellow light shines out of a narrow storefront whose windows are stacked with yellowed books. The banner over top reads "Dawn Treader Bookshop." I don't visit downtown Ann Arbor much (because I hate parallel parking). But it is this out-of-place bookshop that brings me to downtown Ann Arbor.

When I open the door of the Dawn Treader, a bell rings, as if the door believes it lives in small town America. Any bookworm will first notice the air—stuffy, brittle, dusty. It's the smell of books. Even the tiny lobby is stuffed with tables of books, mainly displays of

titles like Gladwell's *Tipping Point* or Brown's *Boys in the Boat*. But these displays are—at least somewhat—crisp and organized. As I thumb through a copy, a man at the crammed checkout points me to the back and tells me to explore.

Even Robinson Crusoe didn't have so much to explore. As I move toward the back, the smell of books grows, overwhelming me. The aisles of books give only enough room for a person's shoulders, but not more. And Mr. Bumble probably wouldn't have a chance. The shelves run floor to ceiling, crammed with books. Stacks of books higher than my knee crowd the aisles. I can see books, smell books, feel books, and almost taste books. But I can't hear the books. All I can hear is the heavy-footed dancers on the floor above, pounding to a heavy metal beat.

The small staff keeps the shelves fairly organized. Down the history aisle, signs read "Australia," "Vietnam," "Egypt." As I turn the corner, my finger follows the line of books and ends on the nose of a 6'6" Egyptian sarcophagus. Ordinarily, a sarcophagus in a bookshop would surprise me, but the mummy seems at ease. After all, both he and the books are only dead scholars wrapped in yellowed pages.

Walking through the walls of books, I watch the characters cram into the shelves. The hungry little caterpillar squirms around the children's section. The boxcar children, Nancy Drew, and the Hardy boys congregate on the shelf vertically, horizontally, or any way to fit. Unlucky copies gather in piles on the floor. But most shelves are full of memoirs and melodramas, dictionaries and lectionaries, travel guides and vehicle repair guides. The alphabetically marked fiction shelves boast Dante, Darwin, Dumas, Du Bois, Dunbar, Dickens, and Dickinson. To the Dawn Treader's customers, just fingering through the books is like seeing old friends. The whole shop resembles a high school reunion.

And the Dawn Treader's customers only add to the general lack of space. A boy clogs up the D's in fiction, reading the opening line of *Hard Times*. Occasionally, he'll laugh at

Thomas Gradgrind's all-important facts. The clinging teenagers from the neon sidewalks are now thumbing through the dystopian section to find Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. "You won't believe how good it is," the girl tells her boyfriend. Even the screaming child from the candy store is smiling as his mother reads Grimm's *Rumpelstiltskin* to him in a crammed corner.

With people-watching and book-exploring, I find (like Rip Van Winkle) that minutes have turned to hours, and it's past my time to leave. Usually, I'll snag a classic I've not read yet or a Dickens novel I don't own and go to the checkout. With a book under my arm, I hear the bell of the Dawn Treader door as I enter downtown Ann Arbor again. Drivers are still honking, lights still flashing, music still blaring.

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Often, I wonder how this overstuffed trough of literature can compete with the pizzazz of the NECTO night club upstairs—how it stays relevant to anyone other than me. But it does. And it stays relevant not by competing with modern city life but by being a part of it.

I think someone's been telling us a lie that bookshops that don't rank as tourist attractions don't belong in modern society: "If it's not Mackinac Island, it's gotta be Detroit." But the Dawn Treader sits right in the middle of the lights and noise to prove that a building crowded with books can be crowded with people too—to prove that books aren't outdated or irrelevant. Books explain our past, interpret our present, and inspire our future. Books are vital.

Jeremy Robertson is a junior studying Humanities and Cross-Cultural Studies at Maranatha Baptist University in Watertown, Wisconsin. Jeremy enjoys writing personal essays, short stories, and stage scripts. He has published a one-act comedy play as a high

school senior. Jeremy grew up in Ypsilanti, Michigan with his five siblings and most loves reading, writing, and theatre.

## Art

**The Placid Lake** By Betsy Jenifer





### The Placid Lake

Art is both a therapeutic tool and an opportunity to explore one's creativity. Through art, I have been able to highlight simple and seemingly ordinary aspects of life as creatively as I can. I have used art to not only sublimate strong emotions into visual expression like paintings, but also to play with ideas, however random or odd, and to exercise my creativity through them. Photography, in particular, has been a medium that helps me capture delicate and easily overlooked moments in nature and life.

Betsy Jenifer is a twenty-year-old artist from Vellore, South India. She has previously been published in After the Pause, Alexandria Quarterly and Door is A Jar, among other places.

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### Reflection of Self By Jacqueline Wu





**Reflection of Self**

In times of crisis and strife, we need to take time to reflect on our inner selves to muster the courage and strength to hang on. We can then learn to develop a stronger mental mindset for the present and future so that we can support each other. I created and picked these pieces because I wanted to reveal my inner reflection and self and show that it's ok to not be okay. More than ever before, we need to be able to express our innermost thoughts and emotions to create a happier, more connected world with less judgment and more love and empathy.

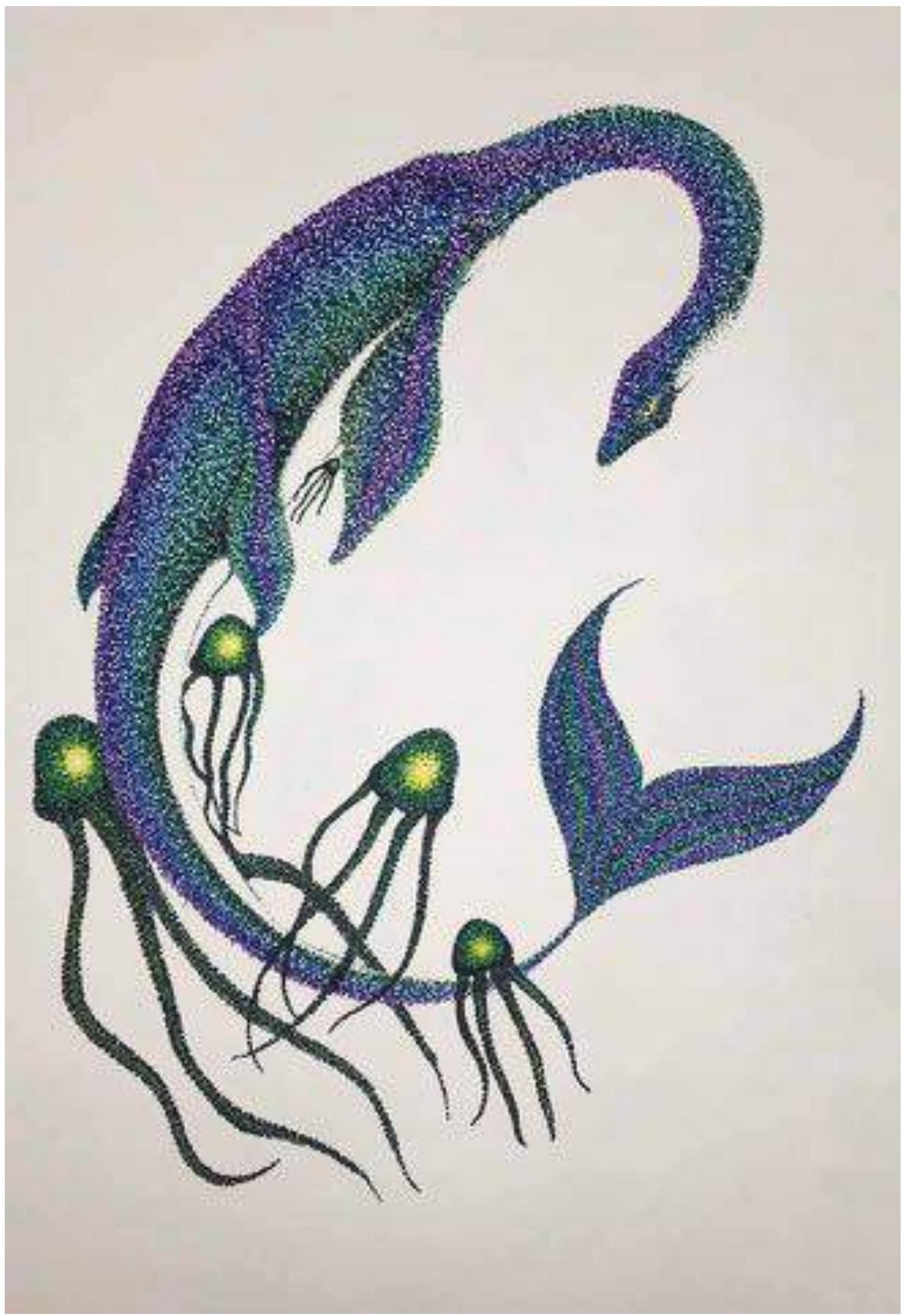
In my work, I focus on many themes concerning the complex facets of the human condition, in the hopes that I can accurately convey different perspectives and shed light on important topics. To me, art is the mirror which should reflect society, one that emphasizes what is important at that moment in time. My pieces explore the interplay of the concepts of life and death/mortality in our lives, lessons learned in my ongoing journey and experiences through adolescence and youth.

I have gone through phases of anxiety, confusion, and happiness, and I know many others who have had the same experiences growing up, making these shared pains and ultimately relatable to many. Through resilience, this has created a multilayered person and persona, influencing my definition of a meaningful and successful life in our modern, judgemental society. All the pain, growth, and resilience have come together to become part of my unique identity as I continue the long search for my truth and voice to become the best version of myself. My sincere hope is to empower others like me to take the time to carve their path and embrace their unique identities; everyone has a voice and message to share.

Jacqueline Wu is an artist from Long Island, New York. She has also won art competitions and awards, such as the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards and Celebrating Art. She is forthcoming in Remington Review, Teen Belle Magazine, and Celebrating Art. Jacqueline enjoys painting, drawing, writing, and playing the viola, and she hopes to continue to inspire and empower through the arts.

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**Mystical Creature, Favored Sister** By Tou Lao Moua



### Mystical Creature

I was always fascinated by fantasy and fairytales as a child. I loved myths and legends and oddly shaped creatures. On this pointillism project, I decided to create a seal-ish loch ness monster because it was one of my favorite mythical creatures growing up. I also went with the colors of the galaxy to represent the beauty of this creature, even though we cannot see it with our naked eyes. The ocean is barely explored and who knows if these creatures could be lurking under the abyss beneath us.



**Favored Sister**

As we grow, our parents expect the best of us children and sometimes would unintentionally compare us to our siblings. This leads many of us to develop jealousy and depression and makes one wonder why they aren't enough. Due to this, we are so blinded by the success of others that we may forget our own dreams and the purpose that brought us here. Once a dream is crushed, it is likely to be destroyed for eternity. The feeling of being meaningless is something we have to be cautious about and help others regain their hopes.

Tou Lao Moua, is seventeen years old and a senior at Johnson Senior High School in St. Paul, MN. He grew up with a passion for art and plans to attend Minneapolis College of Art and Design and major in animation.

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### **Sprouting Up** By Arielle Leong



**Sprouting Up**

During times of hardship and moments of failure, we often forget about what lies ahead of us and instead focus on the pains of the past. This is especially relevant to our modern-day world, where many of us are suffering from the COVID-19 pandemic. However, I hope that these sprouting plants in the photo can remind us of the endless possibilities that lie ahead – we may not be able to control our current situation, but we can continue to grow as a community of living beings and look upward with hope.

Arielle is a photographer based in the Bay Area, CA with a sincere passion for creating art through a multifaceted lens. She has experimented with portraiture, photojournalism, double exposure, and macro photography, but her favorite genre is landscape photography. Arielle hopes that her photos will reveal a different perspective and evoke a sense of appreciation for the natural world. Outside of photography, Arielle enjoys playing volleyball, baking, reading, and biking with her family.

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### **Crackbaby** By Angelica Eun





**Crackbaby**

Angelica Eun is a seventeen-year-old senior at Seoul International School in Seoul, Korea. Her artwork captures moments which compel viewers to wonder what has happened and what is to come. In each piece, a unique narrative is created from the interaction between characters and their environments. Yet while color, medium, or form may differ, her determination to communicate concepts of emotion and societal implications remains consistent. Several of her artworks have won recognitions in the

Scholastic Art & Writing Awards as well as a publication in the Penn Review. Stemming from her fascination with observing her surrounding environment, she unites elements from different mental and physical perspectives to craft a cogent narrative, most often to prompt reflection and consequent change.

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**Self Portrait** By Taylor Moon





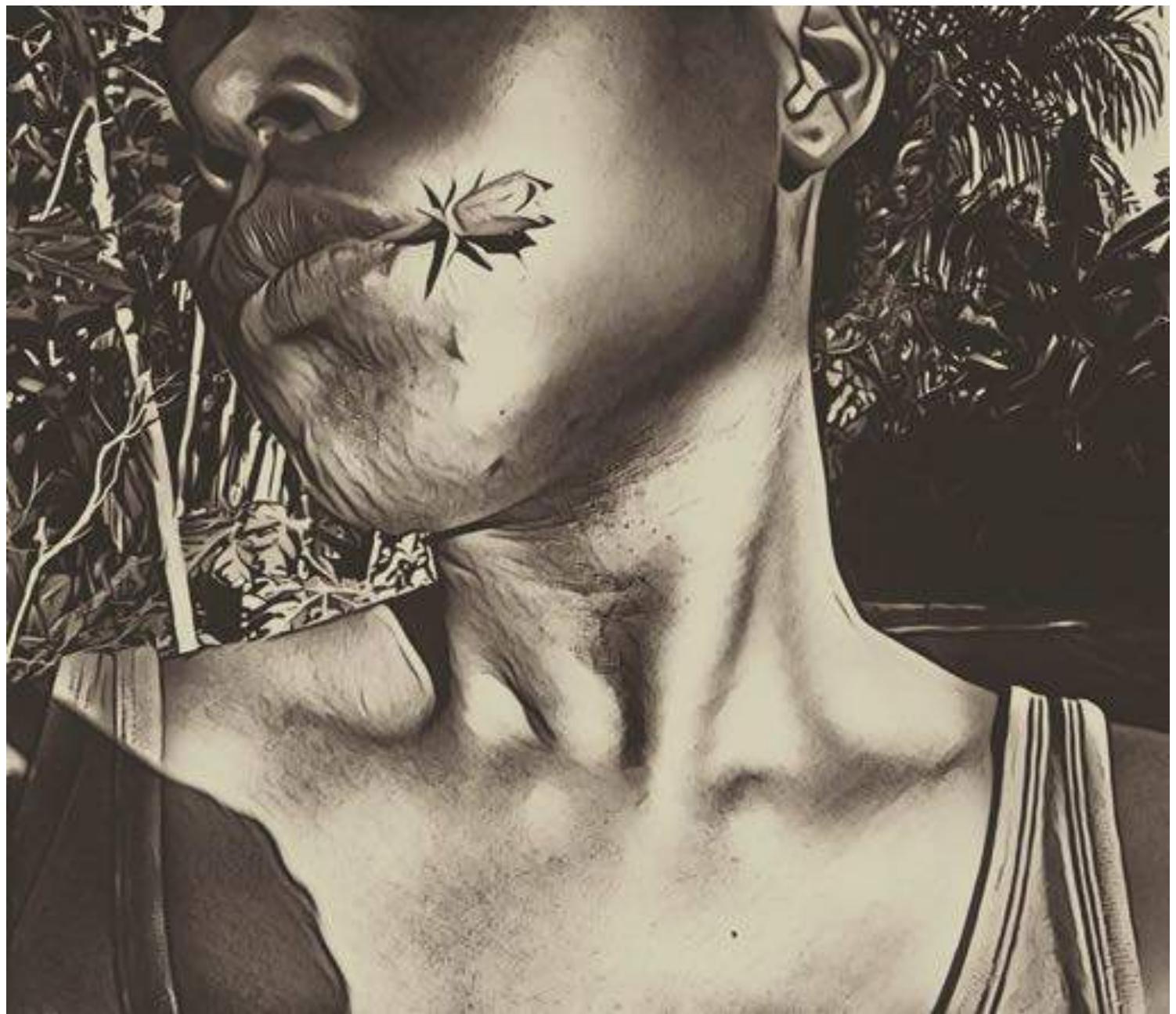
**Self Portrait**

*Ever since I was very young, I have made art. In fact, I cannot remember a time when art was not an important part of my life. Over the years, I have worked in a number of different mediums, including graphite drawing, oil painting, watercolor, silverpoint, and pastels. I have been artistically inspired by various experiences and artists. Last year, for instance, I did an extensive research project on Hieronymous Bosch's oil painting The Garden of Earthly Delights. Analyzing the work's use of symbolism to criticize the corrupt clergy and the loss of innocence among humans, inspired me to explore my creativity more deeply and to incorporate my ideas into my art in a more abstract way.*

Taylor Moon, Class of 22, is a junior from South Korea, who attends the Chapin School, in New York. Taylor has studied art at TASIS International School in Switzerland, studied with Sheery Camhy at the Arts Student League of New York and the Ashcan Studio in New York.

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**Femme, Unfettered** By Anointing Obuh



Femme





### **Unfettered**

Most of my stories begin in or around the woman and I think it is only fair. In Africa, a woman is seen as a vessel that holds the beginning of things, even though she might not carry it till the end. Like a mother birthing a child and handing him over to his father. A girl beginning her life with hopes and dreams only to drop them at the doors of marriage. I believe the feminine story is the most poignant tale you could ever tell and my images represent it as such:

"Femme" shows a young girl in a vulnerable stance, one that is preferred for a woman to have. The flower in her mouth representing both her body and an offering, taking into account that her body can also be an offering/is more comfortably considered as an offering by many. Her lips pulled together in a frown, the lines on her face. She is dissatisfied with this mandatory portrayal of femininity but does it anyway.

This is the reality of our young ones. We are pushed into boxes and expected to live our life within that cramped space. Expected to be everything our society terms "womanly" or "manly". Failure to do so exposing us to consequences beyond our imagination.

These photos come at a time when powerful forces seek to silence us as young Nigerians. The title "unfettered" comes as a prayer of hope in this case because in reality, we are shackled and afraid, looking over our shoulders. It displays the growing desire in every young Nigerian/African and other peoples around the world, who suffer from various injustices to just scream out and create change.

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Anointing Obuh is a writer, singer, and photographer from Nigeria. A one-time best of the Net nominee, her works have been featured in Rattle, Mineral Lit mag, Honey and Lime Lit, Barren magazine and elsewhere. You can find her tweeting @therealAnniekay.

### **My Great Grandfather Had Nine Wives** By Kechi Mbah

"Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter"

– Chinua Achebe

Egwu adiro atu afo, oburu uzo.

My great-grandfather's squinting eyes drew haze over the horizon belonging to my great-grandmother,  
creating a painting of African sun.

She was a woman of the earth//the earth made woman of her  
dirt laced fingers and sand peppered knees spoke love to corn and cassava  
praying only to the god she held within her bosom.

At the rise of afternoon pestle etched callous as she pounded fufu into brown freckled  
mortar.

Like all men--- my great-grandfather admired.

His yellowed eyes enchanted by her flat nose and cow belly plump lips  
to her skin peeled ripe from ebony and hips swept wide for birth  
to the sweet smell of a hardworking woman.

So he grew chest and three goats to bring back to her village  
and she agreed to be his seventh wife.

*Uto mmii wu ete bele.*

Drums beat to the laughter of pot bellied men  
wine carrying IS the wedding.

My great-grandfather squatted hidden in murraya bush leaves  
while my great-grandmother's feet kissed the ground to it's pulsing rhythm  
red wrapper bouncing to her waist  
palm wine swimming in the ivory tusk of her forefathers.

She searched through purple plume grass and behind corkwood trees  
only finding men pretending to be my great-grandfather.

Until the the rustle of murraya bush leaves seized her eyes  
tusk weighed his hands  
palm wine touched his lips  
and a river stretched out around their families.

*Mmanu akara di uto; onye ratu, ibe ya a ratu.*

My great-grandfather's land could make a village.

Splitting vast of dust rich colors.

For each wife had a house of her own

and they stuck together tightly

(clay, women, bamboo stick, children).

Leading to feasts that were long and winding~

sun fed siblings chasing behind the shadows of their mothers

and snapping stomachs waiting for their dent of garri to be filled with okra soup.

The open air hugging them tenderly.

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### **Mariposa** By Gina Ventry





**Mariposa**

This photo was taken on a trail close to my house that I often visit when the weather is nice enough for photographs. It's titled -Mariposa- and includes a gorgeous swallowtail butterfly. Butterflies are especially common where I live (Virginia). However, no matter how ordinary a bird, plant, or in this case a butterfly appears, I will always find beauty in the moments of stillness nature offers. In this particular moment, I was drawn to the lovely splash of baby blue and scarlet on the butterfly's wings. I thought it was odd that two colors that usually might clash when worn as clothing, looked stunning simply dotted along the edge of a butterfly's wings. I also found the pastel yellow of the butterfly's wings and deep, rich green of the

surrounding leaves made a pleasant combination. As an artist, I love to mix and match colors or make vivid sunset skies out of colorful paints that complement each other. So, I enjoy doing the same thing in my photographs. I look for contrasts of scarlet, yellow, pink, and blue or blends of white flowers in green fields, all for the aesthetic of beauty that complementary hues afford.

Gina Ventry is a senior in high school. She's moved four times in the four years of her high school career which sucked...lol. When not suffering through sleepless nights and maintaining a 4.4 GPA, she occupies her time with creative pursuits. Through the last few moves, she's discovered poetry, acrylic painting, and photography, and also started playing the bamboo flute. This is the first photograph she's submitted anywhere and she can't express the excitement of potentially sharing her art with others.

## Book Review

### **The World of —Throne of Glass—** By Cecilia Yang

Fantasy. An entirely different, impossible world. Fantasy authors create these worlds for us, the readers, to explore. The number of people who read paper books dwindles each year, yet the writers do not stop. Sarah J. Maas is one such author who paints a picture of another realm that ignites the imagination of her readers. Her best-selling novels, including the popular series *Throne of Glass*, are devoured by many young adult book readers.

The protagonist, initially named Celaena, is introduced merely as an infamous assassin. However, throughout the stories she evolves into something more, someone who can change the fate of her world. I followed her journey and growth through these books, as if I also lived and breathed in Celaena's world due to the vivid imagery and breathtaking descriptions. Celaena's world instantaneously came to life in front of me, a fantastical world full of assassins and magic. Celaena's dangerous yet exhilarating life and the

intrigue of the courts and palaces plunged me into this world, and it was almost as if I was a part of it.

In her book, Maas breathes life into her characters—a snarky witch, a stoic warrior, a stunning shifter. These rich characters are so well developed that despite not being real, they steal the tears and break the hearts of unguarded readers such as myself. For instance, I was devastated by the fate of a few of my favorite characters, twelve brave, fierce witches who sacrificed themselves to protect their leader.

Celaena herself, of course, is fascinating. Imagine a slim girl with untamed blonde hair and glinting turquoise eyes. She holds a careless attitude to the world, her every word laced with sarcasm and spite. However, she is powerful, and even though she has been held prisoner and tortured, she persists, never giving up. When she rises to power later in the story, she becomes even less selfish, willing to lay her life down for her friends.

Yet despite the many tragedies that occur, the series is not without its lighthearted moments. Celaena is a rulebreaker, and when discovered, entertaining scenes are bound to ensue. A particular favorite of mine in the first book is where it was the morning of a holiday, Yulemas. To her assigned servant's surprise and consternation, our dear protagonist was already up at seven, snacking on chocolate and candy. I find that unfortunately relatable.

Once I picked up *Throne of Glass*, I could not put it down until I was done reading. Celaena's world is iconic, filled with intriguing characters. If you have an interest in fantasy and a fondness for a riveting world and are looking for your next read, this is the series for you.

Cecilia Yang is a high school freshman from the Harker School in San Jose, California. She passes the time with her nose buried in a book. While she has been writing in nearly all the genres, fantasy is fondly her favorite. When she is not reading or writing, she can be found drawing or dancing to the city's sounds. Her story, entitled "Memories Bottled Up," has appeared in the Flare Journal.

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