



Blue Marble Review Summer 2021

Editor's Note By Molly Hill

Summer 2021

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Deep summer is when laziness finds respectability.

-Sam Keen

Dear Readers and Writers:

Out of respect for the fleeting nature of summer, here's our easy to access and quick to read summer issue. Not to be missed—> the vibrant cover art *Fruits of My Labor* from DC based artist Lydia Jung H. We'd call her an up and comer, except if you've seen her work on Instagram or elsewhere, you'll know she's already arrived.

Like the season, our summer issue is brief! Enjoy the poems and shorts, and if you're a student writer between 13-22, maybe send us something of your own?

Molly Hill

Editor

Cosmic Youth By Julie A. Larick

Blessed, 19 years old in June, a cursed blessing —

giggly drunk as basement gods blessed —

trampoline danger game, bleeding chin blessed —

God-can-hear-you-bad-mouth words blessed —

pirate island in my cousin's backyard blessed —

college-kids-in-love blessed —

wishing on Ostara stars, Lake Erie blessed —

what-should-my-writer-name-be blessed —

washing background tables for coins blessed —

under-the-door-petrichor, storm-breaking traffic blessed —

Winter-Long hair, Spring-Short temper blessed —

Mom's snip-snip, split ends dead blessed —

broken 2 AM-suburb-train blessed —

willing cells to age, mourning cosmic youth blessed —

Blessing the young, middle, old, dead, alive, blessed.

Julie A. Larick is a student and writer living in Cleveland. She studies English, Environmental Science, and Activism at The College of Wooster. Julie edits for The Incandescent Review and interns at GASHER Journal. She has poems forthcoming or published in perhappened mag, Ogma Magazine, and others. Julie loves to sew, thrift, watercolor, and was born in 2003. Her portfolio is <http://www.julielarickwriting.com> and her Twitter is @crookyshanks.

Absence By CA Russegger

stone angels linger in the walls of hospitals and
curse you

painting the dust a dull Advil red

while you walk down the ominous white halls

nearing a heartless clinic where the angels made of flesh

brush white paste on your skull and stick

icy metal disks in your parched, stale hair
and tell you to go to sleep, go rest in
the bed the sun speckles with its light
and go to sleep so they can see the screeching in your
brain, the eclectic electricity of pathological
ups and downs, ups and downs, ups and downs
in your dreams you damn the winged statues
and as you wake you wait and wait and wait
for sheets of paper that tell you how infectiously
the voltaic sparks have contaminated your
abysmal neurology, learning three days after
your imprecated sleep that aberrations permeate
your brain from every angle
and in the presence of absence
(as the doctor called it; some kind of seizure)
/æb'sɒns/, sudden disruption of consciousness
you wish you could be
an angel, too

CA Russegger is a Filipino writer whose work doesn't appear anywhere much, but who loves history, literature, and dogs.

halfway By Kathryn Sadakierski

it is not mere happenstance
that, so often now,
people walk halfway
across parking lots,
into stores, banks,
post offices, cafes,
before turning back,

having forgotten
their masks,
essential
as air we breathe
now.

are we forever
to go backwards,
into the past,
retracing steps,
trying to remember,
grasping at air,
striving to savor
every breath taken,
albeit through a filter,
when our eyes look ahead,
hearts leading us
forward?

more doors have opened
in these days after
the fact,
but it is like we are still
inside,
looking out,
wondering when
the road won't bend,
splitting halfway,
branching in a new direction.
but if we waited for that,

we'd be waiting forever,
because, always, there is something
new, as change would will it,
all that remains
is that heart that stays the course,
leading us forward,
no matter how much
these days are different.

Kathryn Sadakierski is a twenty-one-year-old writer from Massachusetts whose work has appeared in *Capsule Stories*, *Poetically Magazine*, *The Voices Project*, and elsewhere. She collects vinyl records, vintage books, and memories, which inspire her art.

the man from the fish market By Katie Tian

how can i pull a kind of reckless
reminiscence from the fish market

in town—on sunday i go alone.
the gardenias are unwatered

upon my return, the chamomile
unsteeped, toppling odds one over

another over another, but i can
only wring the salt from my sundress

and fill my mouth with brine. i scribble
on soiled parchment—to my husband—

but he will not be home until the ink
bleeds dry. the fish eyes are seething

blind so i sever sinew from bone,
bone carved of alabaster, simmered

and made into stew for a blind man's
dinner. he will return riding the coattails

of a beer-battered high with not even
counterfeit love to give. i rock

in an armchair and think of this love,
cut from the lining of a singed oyster

shell, this love, wasted. before the
decades drowned themselves

in kerosene, i encountered a man at the
fish market on a sunday who gave

to me a spiraling romance in the ashes.
now, i tear the soft flesh of an apricot

naked from its pit and suck its nectar
from my gaping wounds—do you miss

me as much as i miss you? stranger—
you should see the acropolis i built

for you in my dreams. we are more
and more than this, you said. you

promised me more than a half-baked
existence so where are you now? now,

i lay a gallery of scraps on the beaten
cobblestone and wait for the coyotes

to feast at dusk. they say if the fever
does not kill you the loneliness will.

they say it is easier to play pretend. and
it is not until i have taped cellophane

ghosts to the sills and hung the linen
to dry that i recall—the man from the

fish market i married, but look what
has become of us now. a stranger

now. look—the tides are ever in flux,
shifting. look—i can no longer water

the roots of my saltwater fantasy.
look—how can i con serendipity?

pray that this life—clean, scale, gut—
is only a prototype for the next one.

Katie Tian is a fifteen-year-old writer from New York and a student at Jericho High School. She has been recognized nationally by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards for her work. She hopes to share her visions with a larger community through her poetry and prose.

eating a three-course meal at a high school house party By Grace Liang

the second boy i've kissed here with tongue has thinner lips
than the movie tickets i had cut my fingers on to watch

a coming of age flick rated 4.7 stars out of 10. maybe practice
makes perfect but the sessions sure aren't. i duck into a

corner and hide from sharp eyes who know that showing up
uninvited is only for quarterbacks with skulls crushed into

medals of sophomore-year honor, senior girls with swaying
hips they'd promised a good time yet still deposited here,

shallow apologies shackling their hands. just a little bit of
aloofness is allowed, as a treat — an appetizer only

for boys wrapped in faux leather jackets and painstaking
nonchalance; meanwhile, being present at all makes

people recoil if you're a negative space in the walls: a
ravenous phantom here to struggle — to sample a

rendezvous that you cannot pronounce, to taste mandated
teenage rebellion and sirens on a school night. and

no, you cannot just take two bites and leave. it's rude to
the hosts who left before you. so tonight, while i find

crumbling convenience store lipstick to be the only thing
that tastes bearable with stolen alcohol in red plastic,

it kills me to ignore hospitality. i gorge on the tongue of a
third boy and call it an act of grace. serve him dessert

by leaving a crimson lip on his empty beer can. after all,
i can tell he's starving just from the way he's here.

Grace Liang is a teen writer from Toronto. She enjoys reading fan fiction, watching video essays, sleeping, and playing piano. Find her on Instagram at [@yf.grace](#).

A Real Writer By Tejal Doshi

Steps to becoming a real writer:

Pull apart your ribcage in the
heavy turns of night, when time
teeters on a cold cut-throat cliff.

Dig your uncut nails into your
vibrating heart. Let the crimson
stain your fingertips, and let the
blood vessels snag your nails.

Breathe in the warm beating
of your heart and ask yourself
who the hell you are. Why the
hell are you holding a pen and

what makes you think you have
the right to finger a piece of paper?
Bite your lip hard and draw more
blood and let it drop into your ink
bottle, creating swirls of bubbles.
Then do whatever helps you hyper-
inflate with chemicals/emotions.
Drown yourself in music, or more
words — whatever. Make sure you
ache unbearably but keep your screams
bitten tight behind your teeth, then grab
that paper, watch your fingers quiver
and spew everything on the page.
Remember, don't even *imagine*
showing these words to anyone.
Remember, this is for *your* eyes,
only. Remember, in a writer's strength
lies vulnerability. And when you wake
up with the golden sun, honey, you can
make it all striking and pretty for the
world to see.

(I don't know if I qualify as a real writer.)

Tejal Doshi is a high school student living in India whose work has been published in The WEIGHT Journal, Cathartic Youth Literary Magazine, Voice Club, and elsewhere. She is a member of MIST (Mental Illness Support for Teens). She also fails to understand why nobody laughs at her brilliant jokes.

My Therapist Wants to Know How I Do in the Mornings By Mayowa Oyewale

after Tiana Clark

“I”?

I founder.

I fall from the sky of dream. I grab

bedsheets like they are

parachutes. I gasp. I gasp nightmare

into dawn. I thrash about in blue dark,

scramble for my phone. I can't write

on paper. I write what I remember

on a notebook app — most times, I remember

nothing. For a long time, I close my eyes &

hope for memory. For a long time,

time passes.

In a next room, my

mother is yelling at God

in her sleep. I close my ears & open

my eyes to light feeding the curtains.

I open my mind to the moment &

the movement of myself.

I wrestle between being broken & being

torn. I turn off airplane mode &

messages pour. Angry

WhatsApp messages. Preaching WhatsApp messages.

E-mails. I skip the

unfortunatels. I read. I read.

I highlight Tranströmer: *I'm awake and don't know where I am.*

I envy that [his] life finally returns, envy

any name that *appears like an*

angel. I sprawl. I spread

into a pool & ponder. I ponder.

I wonder why some hands can hold hope
when some cannot even hold themselves. I curse
inward.

I write sgshjsnsnshdhdbbd.

I cross out sgshjsnsnshdhdbbd.

Bach. *The Art of Fugue*. I lie

on the bed, I sup the song.

I haven't spoken yet, can go

a whole month without a mouth.

In the bathroom, I sing.

Hymn until lather fills my mouth. Here, I mourn

the morning before the bird. I know this morning like

I have known all mornings. I, too, like

how they look like hope. But God,

I hoard too much night.

Mayowa Oyewale writes poetry from Ile-Ife, Nigeria, where he currently studies Literature-in-English at Obafemi Awolowo University. A poetry reader at *Chestnut Review*, he Instagrams @mayowaoyewale__

Silence: Our New Language By Najeeb Yusuf Ubandiya

God has a photograph of this:
We survive years of wilderness.

A man from the neighbourhood
Keeps us acquaintance,
With guns at [both] hands—
Aimed at the tunnels of our nostrils.

Silence is our new language,
Our weeps fly as idioms and phrases
Round the deafened ears of the world—
In shape of teardrops
While mother nature laughs at us

Coughing up the dust in her mouth;
Another multi-coloured wind sweeps in.

Najeeb Yusuf Ubandiya is a young poet from Nigeria. He is a loner who writes to find out what he thinks and feels—about himself and the world around him—and to keep his

purpose awake and breathing. His works have appeared in Ngiga Review and Blue Marble Review.

On loving red By Sarah Cavar

Red thoughts thick with a steamghost sizzle
Prego bubble bursts in time
with stovetop midnights. We stuck
our heads & hands in drive
-through holes in hopes
in gas-stove smoke alight
in summer-houses, made of helium
we are laughter over flame. Melt
into sand between her sofa-cracks
a cherry bowl amid our legs.
Return to red, or so it seems: one single bowl
of suckled pits.

Sarah Cavar is a PhD student, writer, and critically Mad transgender-about-town, and serves as Managing Editor at Stone of Madness Press. Author of two chapbooks, *A HOLE WALKED IN* (Sword & Kettle Press) and *THE DREAM JOURNALS* (giallo lit), they have also had work in *Bitch Magazine*, *Electric Literature*, *The Offing*, *Luna Luna*

Magazine, Superstition Review, and elsewhere. Cavar navel-gazes at cavar.club and tweets @cavarsarah.

take one two or three times a day as needed By Amy Wolstenholme

it's so easy to say

i'm so lost

the phrase slips out when i'm alone

in waiting rooms or by the lake,

i don't understand the reflection of my face

in the reception window or in the water,

i'm so lost

is not the same as

i don't know where i am

i know i sit in a blue chair or on green grass,

i know the bend of my legs,

i know each inescapable breath of this little body, but

the receptionist pops out to say

go through

and i've already gone without knowing,

i'm by the lake in waiting rooms,

staring at my own face and wondering

i'm so lost,
is not the same as
this can't be real

but it's close

the door of the doctor's room
holds a name I don't know, and

there's no pill that says

i know you
and you're found

Amy Wolstenholme is a scientist by day and a poet by night, originally from the beautiful Jurassic Coast. Whether slicing up a genome or carving out a stanza, her work comes from a place of awe and love for the natural world. Her recent works can also be found in Visual Verse, Crow & Cross Keys and in several places on the Young Poets Network. She can be found at [@AmyWolstenholm3](https://twitter.com/AmyWolstenholm3) on Twitter.

Our Hometown By Christian Ash

In our hometown there were places--Real places: like the Taco Bell Burger King McDonald's trifecta, where if we went late enough we could sometimes see the employees lighting up and smoking underage under parking lot streetlights; and the beat-up *other* Walgreens, where a big can of Arnold Palmer and a family size bag of those pretzels bites with the peanut butter inside only cost two seventy-nine in exact change; and the church/daycare parking lot where we used to play four-square and had our own ass handed to us again and again by merciless middle school boys who found puberty early and used it to cherry bomb that motherfucker so hard we didn't have a cold chance

in hell; and that secret bike trail that wasn't really secret and is now an apartment complex haunted by the souls of Baja Blast-drinking sixteen-year-old jackasses pulling wheelies on their ghostly 12-speeds; and the old basketball court that stood next to the high school until orcish men wielding hard-hats and jackhammers came and tore it up to build a brick building with no windows and no doors, that black asphalt and triple-rimmed hoop now long, long gone—the faded white three-point arc and games of twenty-one existing only in memory like the taste of a root beer float; and let's not forget the football bleachers so stereotypical I don't need to remind you they had a specified section solely for the hopeless souls of pep band kids with braces and baritones, ADHD and saxophone reeds, converse kicks and splintery drumsticks, lonely oboes and sheet music with penciled-in quotes from Seneca, etc., etc.—those bleachers underneath which the virginites of many were (supposedly) lost, along with something else we didn't even know we had but now we miss it like those Scooby-Doo fruit snacks that turned out to be too good for reality; and of course that hill behind the Honeywell smokestack, where once on an October midnight before the end of the world we licked cheap McDonald's ice cream cones in the backseat of a beater, and for the first time saw our lives as bildungsromans building up to this exact moment, saw the honey-colored spirit egress not just with the smoke of Marlboros or blunts or bonfires, but with each new and frosting exhalation.

And now when we find ourselves back in our hometown, it's just a town that used to be home

Christian Ash was born and raised in suburban Minnesota, and currently attends Gustavus Adolphus College. In 2020, his fiction and poetry received awards as part of

the Lawrence Owen Prizes in Creative Writing. Additionally, his work has been published in Kaleidzine Magazine and Firethorne Literary and Graphic Magazine.

2050 By Lydia Hessel-Robinson

Maeve traipses home, sweat pouring down her back. March wasn't this warm when Mommy was a girl. No,— soft, cold flakes of snow blanketed the ground. At least, that's what Mommy said.

Past the playground, children who don't get a future. Past the two saplings. They never last; why does the city bother anymore? People drive under solar panels, coming home from jobs that are supposed to save the environment. But everybody will die within twenty years. Those jobs came too late. At least, that's what the scientists said.

She doesn't have any ambitions. Nothing matters if the water is going to swallow her whole. Or maybe she'll shrivel up like a sun-dried tomato. At least she has twenty years to find her final words. There, that's an ambition.

Her battered house leans on a useless little hill. She swings the swollen door open, watermarks higher each year. It's a growth chart just like the one Mommy keeps for her. The water grows faster.

Mommy drags in the groceries, wearing her Yale shirt as if a fancy degree will protect her. She wants Maeve to attend Yale, but how can she if Connecticut drowned years ago?

"Maeve, a little help."

Into the garage, heave bags to the kitchen. 75% recycled material, one bag brags. Oh, that's the minimum, retorts another. 84%, how's that! Food is stocked, one more week

to live in Dumpster World. Maybe Maeve can find a clean planet all for herself. Ambition number two.

The sun disappears, a breeze kicks up. Mommy frowns.

“That’s weird. Storms weren’t predicted today.”

Maeve shivers. *The storms are more often these days*, Maeve overheard Daddy say one night. *What will we do when the house floods? Where will we go?*

Now the rain patters on the windows. It’s almost pleasant, except for Daddy’s words creeping up behind Maeve, ready to pounce if she gets too comfortable.

The rain turns into a tantrum. Dying trees lash the house, people duck through doors, and the wind howls. It’s never this bad. Mommy and Daddy hold Maeve close when she crawls into their bed that night.

In the morning, there is no sun, only wind and rain. The next day, too, and the next. Maeve stays upstairs because downstairs is a swimming pool.

On day six, no power.

Day ten, nothing to eat.

Day thirteen, no Mommy. No Daddy. *It wasn’t twenty years, scientists. It wasn’t twenty years.* She’s alone, words half-said, lost in water before she could finish.

Lydia Hessel-Robinson is a high school freshman in the Philadelphia area. Her work has previously been published in *Philadelphia Stories, Jr.*, and *Cricket* magazine. She also loves to read and competes in horseback riding.

Kinship Corolla By Camilla Cal

Bryan's foot floors the gas. We're sailing through the desolate two a.m. Turnpike, his Corolla packed to the brim with friendship and feeling. The five of us know we're going too fast, that the 90 miles per hour lightning freedom could be extinguished with a simple pothole. I say "slow down" but really, I mean "don't let this ever end."

It's Valentine's Day.

I was falling asleep on a twin size mattress in Natalie and Nicole's dorm room, the space where I spent the majority of my freshman year. I lay at the foot of Natalie's bed; we were crumpled together from the weight of the day. Alexa, my roommate, hunched over at a desk, typing her way through assignments. Nicole played music from her bed across the room. We were all close enough that if we stretched out our arms, we could probably interlock fingers. A pinky promise was always only a reach away.

My phone rings. It's Bryan, another part of our dorm family. He's breathless, his voice muffled by the connection or his despair. I'm half-awake but I make out words that sound like "boyfriend" and "cheater" and "break up." I sit straight up when I hear "Gainesville, RIGHT NOW."

I don't remember what my first thought was, probably something along the lines of *it's MIDNIGHT, Gainesville is two hours away, and oh God I have class tomorrow*. But those thoughts weren't important, because one rose above the rest, tore its way from brain to throat to mouth to phone:

"You're not doing this alone."

That's how we end up strapped into Bryan's college Corolla's crumb-filled seats leading us to the demise of a two-year relationship. Co-pilots navigating our friend through heartbreak.

I'm sitting in the front seat diligently skipping any song that mentions love or happiness or commitment or feelings or boyfriends that cheat using dating apps, which is to say that mostly we listened to our own voices offering advice and promises that things will get better. I watch the speedometer needle move higher and higher and I want to say what we're all thinking:

This probably isn't worth dying for.

Just six months ago, we were all strangers to each other. Random roommates at the mercy of a university's algorithm. But now I know that Alexa throws up when she eats too much at Chili's, and I know that Natalie can't go outside without socks on, and I know that Nicole has always wanted to dye her hair red, and I know that right now Bryan needs us.

I look around at the broken, beautiful group of people hurling through the highway with me and I choose not to say anything at all because the windows are rolled down, the wind slaps our cheeks, and the laughter at how ridiculous this all is bruises our ribcages. And in this brief, gloriously electrifying coming-of-age moment, I think, maybe, just maybe— *this is worth dying for.*

We wait outside a Gainesville apartment for a while, feeling the energy of the night in our chests. To pass the time, we tell jokes, yawn, kick through the empty water bottles at our feet. And then Bryan comes back, silently crawls into the backseat of the car; his body collapsing into the safety of friendship. It's quiet for a second, and then he begins sobbing into my friends' laps. There's nothing left for us here. Natalie takes the wheel, Alexa rubs his back in careful circles, Nicole runs her fingers through his hair. This time, I do say the thing we're all thinking: "Let's go home."

Camila Cal (she/her) was born in Montevideo, Uruguay and lives in the U.S. She attends the University of Central Florida where she studies creative writing and journalism. Her experience as an immigrant and first-generation student inspires her to write creative nonfiction that others may relate to. Her work has been published in UCF's literary magazine The Cypress Dome, and Ghost Heart Literary Journal's Chambers issue. Find her on Instagram at @camivcal and at Twitter at @camivcal!

Sunrise on the Lake By Amelia Dufour

I awoke to the sound of my whimpering pup. He wasn't supposed to sleep with my sister and I, yet when he had fallen asleep in my arms, I seemed to have drifted off with him. He little ball of white fluff was pawing at the door in need of a bathroom break. The house was silent as I slipped out of my room and down the stairs to the door. We stepped outside; the yard covered in a blanket of darkness. The dew of the grass covered my bare feet as I pattered around the lawn. The air was brisk and would have chilled me to the bone if there had been any wind, luckily it was a quiet morning. The only lingering sounds were the swaying of the trees, and the rippling of the lake. The fresh morning woke me up and filled me with a blissful energy. I carefully made my way down to the dock for reasons I do not know. I sat with my dog on my lap and my feet in the peaceful water as I silently observed the wildlife. I should have been startled when my aunt sat beside me, yet I just greeted her with a quiet *good morning*, and a smile. We sat on the dock munching on Cheerios, swishing our feet as the cool water curled around our ankles. While listening to the loons, the sky began to wake. Ablaze with color it was sunrise, the never-ending sky above lit up with colors of deep red, fiery orange, a rich purple, and a shimmering gold.

A morning sunrise

Just the tree of us

Enjoying the warmth of family.

Amelia Dufour is a high school freshman from Massachusetts. She has been published in both the Blue Marble Review and in Teen Ink. She uses her writing to express herself and hopes that others can seek comfort in her writings about many topics ranging from family to the global pandemic. In her free time, she enjoys reading, being with friends, and acting in school musicals.

Stranger Things By Beau Heese



Goodbye Stranger

All seems right in the world for friends Mike, Will, Dustin, and Lucas. Their biggest concerns involve avoiding local bullies, Dungeons and Dragons, and participating in their school audio visual club. But things quickly take a turn for the worst when Will goes missing. And it seems that the only way to save him might be through a mysterious new girl who barely speaks. This is the problem presented in the Duffer brothers new show *Stranger Things*.

The Duffer brothers absolutely nailed the secondary characters in the series. Viewers will enjoy watching the change and growth of the flawed Steve Harrington, caring Nancy

Wheeler, and shy Jonathan Byers, played by Joe Keery, Natalia Dyer, and Charlie Heaton respectively. The story simply cannot exist without them.

Another feature of this series is the relatable main characters. Viewers will have no problem relating to the quiet Eleven (Millie Bobby Brown), humorous Dustin (Gaten Matarazzo), meek Will (Noah Schnapp), and determined Lucas (Caleb McLaughlin). Viewers will especially love their 'leader' of sorts Mike Wheeler (Finn Wolfhard). Younger viewers will especially enjoy these characters.

The special effects presented in this show both visually and audibly, are absolutely amazing, and the monsters presented in the series are quite realistic. It's like you're really there, in the upside down. And the growl of the demogorgon still sends shivers down my spine!

This show also has the length to keep people interested. Made up of three seasons of about eight one hour long episodes, viewers will be hooked early and will most certainly stick around until the end of the series. And with a fourth season well on the way, the fan base is through the roof.

Audiences of all ages will fall in love with this series. Younger fans will enjoy the relatable characters. Teens will love the fear and the drama that this program brings to the table. Older viewers will be attracted by the nostalgia of the series. In short, *Stranger Things* is great for anyone who can handle the fear.

Viewers, readers, I urge you to watch this series. I assure you that you will fall in love with the dark plot, fun characters, and great special effects. Just be careful, once started it may be impossible to stop.

Beau Heese is a seventh-grade student from Saint Patrick Catholic School in Rolla, Missouri. He wrestles, does taekwondo, and also likes to play the drums. Beau also loves to read, which inspires him to write.

The bell at the top of the door rang as Henry strolled into the butcher shop, a white-walled, white-tiled establishment. Behind the glass display case, chunks of pig, cow, and chicken lay like fleshy fallen Dominos. Bridget stood behind the counter, scribbling an order on a ledger. A relatively short woman with brown hair tied into a ponytail, she wore glasses and her hazel eyes flitted between the display case and her ledger. With a deep breath, Henry gave himself a pep talk. *You are Henry Bartholomew Williams, and you are going to tell this woman how you feel.*

“Bridget,” Henry said.

Looking up from her ledger, Bridget adjusted her name tag and said, “Hello, can I help you?”

“Bridge, listen, I need to be quick. My name is Henry Bartholomew Williams. I’ve been coming here for some time now. I don’t even eat meat. I just came here to see you. I threw all that pork away. It was such a waste, but it was worth it.” Feeling his arm tingle, he knew he had to continue. “I’m a vegetarian. It was worth seeing you each day and getting look at you from a distance.”

Then what consisted of his bicep shriveled, and Henry glanced down and saw that his arm had transformed into a duck wing. The left side of his shirt tore open as the wing grew, sprouting pristine feathers with a beautiful blue stripe, only it was larger than a duck’s wing—it was a human-sized wing.

Bridget’s face slowly transformed into that of a woman witnessing a man’s arm change into a duck’s wing.

“Oh my god,” she said.

“Bridget, Bridget, eyes up here,” he said, pointing at his face. “I’ve got to get through this. I’ve been watching you and trying to get the courage to come talk to you, and I think I’ve

finally gathered the courage. I like you. You are the most beautiful woman I have ever encountered in my entire life. I've watched you greet customers, and while you get a little annoyed with the little kids, overall, you are kind and funny and ..."

His other arm morphed into an identical duck wing. Bridget dropped her ledger and it clanked on the floor.

"Wha ... What is happening? Are you okay?"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, don't worry about it. It's the magical realism, Bridge. Google it later but not right now. What I'm trying to say is that I think I love you. No, I'm hopelessly in love with you. I want to spend every single moment of my life with you. I want to have children with you. I already bought the four-French door refrigerator in stainless steel, and you can have the whole bottom drawer for all your meats. I want to grow old with you and complain about our aching joints together."

His tennis shoes sprang off his body, revealing two large orange webbed duck feet.

"Is this some sort of prank? Am I being recorded?" she asked. She took off her cap and hastily smoothed her hair down, her eyes glancing around for cameras. Then she glanced back at the man who was turning into a duck. At the sight of his feet and wings, she contemplated pinching herself. Despite the feathers and duck feet, he had a strong jawline and adorable wavy brown hair. She'd worked at this butcher shop for three years, and he was the first man to ever hit on her.

"Bridget," he continued getting down on one knee. "I know this is fast, but would you do me the honor of becoming my girlfriend?" He clasped the tips of his wings together in supplication.

Bridget stared at him blankly as his mouth and nose transformed into a long, large duckbill, and his eyes shrank back into the sides of his head, which suddenly became

covered with metallic green feathers.

She paused, staring at this seventy-percent duck, thirty-percent man creature, and weighed her alternatives. She could live alone for the rest of her life or consider what this man was offering her right now.

“I don’t even know you. How old are you? Are you employed? Do you live with your mother?”

“Bridget, I don’t have that much time, but I’m 32 years old. Yes, I’m employed, marketing, and no, I live in an apartment. I also spend my free time raising money for charities like St. Jude and Make-A-Wish. I cook a delicious mushroom cheese quiche. Make me happy by flying off into the sunset with me.”

Bridget eyed Henry with suspicion. Was he telling the truth? And even if he wasn’t, what was life anyways but a series of choices until eventual death? Wasn’t life too short to give up a man who would literally turn into a duck for you? She thought of Alfred Lord Tennyson “Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.”

Taking off her apron, she said, “Okay, Duck Man, let’s go.” And she slid over the counter and embraced her feathered lover, and they flew out the door together.

Abby Yuan is a rising senior at Dougherty Valley High School. She’s an animal lover who intends to one day become a veterinarian. In her free time, she likes to bake cakes, write stories, and argue with her brother and father over scientific theories.
