

Issue 26/June 2022



Forgotten Sleeve

Editor Note By Molly Hill

An empty space is full of potential. Believe that you are making room for something. Turn on the vacancy sign. Keep moving. (Keep Moving, Maggie Smith)

Issue 26

June 2022

Happy Summer! Our June issue lags a bit behind summer's arrival this year, but we're proud of all the work that we rounded up for Issue 26. We've never done 'theme' issues, relying instead on a veritable buffet of views and themes from our student writers. Our hope is always that any issue of Blue Marble Review creates a new sense of *space* for the reader, and that there is a story, essay, poem, or work of art in each issue that stimulates a new way of thinking, a greater sense of empathy, or perhaps just a nod of understanding.

There's a LOT of fine work in this issue, but in particular we'd like to highlight the Cover Art from Sabahat Ali Wani. Her artist statement— poignant and powerful, is here:

The mixed media artwork titled, 'Revisit: A Wardrobe' is an artist's attempt to celebrate a Kashmiri woman's wardrobe in an authentic way. It is a celebration of our culture that often gets appropriated and capitalised upon. Yes, it is a political statement but it also tries to bring in a fairytale aspect that goes beyond the conflict by appreciating our scarfs, sleeves, clothes etc., which are long forgotten but still stand as symbols of our existence and resistance.

Look for more of her mixed media work in our ART section.

We plan to continue to make space for readers and writers who use creativity as an emblem of both existence and resistance.

Enjoy the issue—

Molly Hill

Editor

Poetry

Homo Irrealis By Ethan Turner

hours have passed once I come to
from a midday caffeine crash

It's not that I dislike this professor,
it's that my mind wanders to other places,
far away states, which might as well be other countries

I miss him, I do
even now my thoughts take me back
to memories which I'm unsure if they even occurred.

Have I been sitting in this building for eight hours? maybe I'm suffocating myself with
this mask.

Do you remember wearing a mask?
I hope you have no idea what I'm talking about.

I can see right outside, through the floor-to-ceiling windows, yet I'm longing for
whatever is out there.

Maybe there's something I'm missing, a detail I can't recognize from here.

Sometimes my heart pounds when we're five minutes till class ends. Anticipation?

Anxiety?

Sure, for what though?

It's now time to leave,
my mind moves faster than my feet and I'm on the bridge,
No,
I'm close to the bridge.

It's the hour before sunset
and I think I stopped walking.
I'm standing here, gazing up at the high sun in the high sky,
the movement of people blurs into my periphery,
the sound of cars a slight humming in my eardrum.

Am I here or am I there?

Did I ever really leave Santa Cruz?

Am I still there, walking with him up 41st Avenue,
where I stopped to take a picture of a bird of paradise plant because we don't have those
where
I'm from and
oh we both love plants so much
you didn't even complain. That's what I love about you.

I'm in that condo your friends rich aunt owns and
oh it's so cold when I wake up but I'm happy because you're
sound asleep downstairs and the birds are chirping and I can't
feel my toes but it doesn't matter.

There's a bird of paradise right out the front door and even though it's dying it's still the
most
beautiful plant I've ever seen because
we don't have those where I'm from.

I'm standing on the bridge,
in front of the gym. The high sun in the high sky is tired
so it's coming down from a long day of work,
like all of us. It's trying to tell me something
I can't hear over the roar of rush hour traffic.
I chase after it,
it's begging me to listen.
It's begging to tell me that
in this final hour between
Day and Night,
something, anything could happen

Sometimes Ethan writes silly little poems to cope with this silly little world. He's
graduating from Towson University May 2022

Human By Kyra Horton

who told you that you had to aim to make art beautiful?
to disappear an entire essence of your being.
to pretend your heart isn't ugly some days.
bitter, envious, self-deprecating.
we create a world of lust for things that only exist in waves.
beauty only exists in waves.
and sometimes it's not even real.
the darkness is necessary too.
your painful thoughts are just as powerful as your good ones.
who told you that you couldn't be human.
you can.
create art that represents your entire being

not just the parts cut into sizes that they can swallow.
let them choke on your anger.
let them wince from the pain of your pain.
leave your heart on the page and only come back to pick it up if you want to.
don't be afraid to leave paranoia on the canvas.
despair on the mic.
don't box your complexities into something more presentable.
don't twist your loneliness into something more poetic.
exist as your entire being.
throw your fear to the wolves.
reject the idea of mistakes in your art.
they don't exist. but you do. let the world feel you.
while you let yourself feel the world.
you are an artist.
in your own imperfect way, you are art.
even on your most insecure days.
remember that.

Kyra Horton is a twenty-year old creator. Whether expressing herself through writing, performing, or painting, she strives to turn pain into beauty. Her identity as a young Black woman from Chicago shapes her work. She grew up being inspired by activism and solidarity in her community and the arts. Kyra is fearless in the avenues she seeks in order to create the emotions painted in her heart. The world is Kyra's canvas, as well as her muse. Her primary medium of creativity is spoken word poetry. Kyra has performed at over 50 different events since beginning her poetry career 5 years ago. Kyra published her first poetry book called Cries of a Butterfly, wrote and produced her album of poetry called The Silencer, released an EP of poetry called Tears Of Gold, and published poetry for the Gate Newspaper and the nonprofit organization Sixty Inches

From Center. She has led writing workshops as well as participated in journalism cohorts to cultivate her skills.

Pyaar, Mohabbat, Ishq By Rimel Kamran

In the native tongue of my ancestors,
Love has three words

Pyaar, mohabbat, ishq

Pyaar, mohabbat, ishq

Mera pyaar tumhaare li hai

My love is for you

Soft syllables spilled from my mother's lips
Sweet as the golden nectar of *mango lassi*

The delicate parting of lips
Crafting poetry with vowel and breath

Pehli si mohabbat

First love

The dawn of a heart's blooming
The birth of a heart's withering

Fleeting memories sealed with broken tears
For this is bittersweet hope the heart cries

Ishq-e-illahi

Love for Allah

Tender and raw

The bruised and torn search

His mercy, the ocean's abundance

Where unspoken *duas* sail upon

Pyaar, mohabbat, ishq

Pyaar, mohabbat, ishq

And thus, from native soil my ancestors laced

With swollen palms and nimble fingers

The rich tapestry of *love*

Bridal crimson kissing sunbaked auburn

Heartbeats woven with footsteps

Anguish woven with stillness

Breath and lip interlacing

With accent and diction

To birth *love* in its wholeness

To birth *love* in its entirety

For love they believed

Was meant to be felt, not defined

Pyaar, mohabbat, ishq

Pyaar, mohabbat, ishq.

Rimel Kamran is a current junior and the Cincinnati Youth Poet Laureate. Her poetry aims to build community, celebrate diversity, and share her Pakistani-American identity. She hopes to share her love for poetry, especially with youth, and encourage them to seek the unheard poem within them. When she's not writing she enjoys pursuing her interests in science and medicine.

Eight Ways of Looking at the Moon By Elena Yeatts-Lonske

I. New Moon

As day tumbles into night
I tumble to her
Searching for craters in those (perfect) pupils

II. Waxing Crescent

The movie projector flickers on her face like lightning
I consider how it would feel to take her hand
And roam the smooth crescents of her French manicure

III. First Quarter

She cuts the bundt cake in half with a butter knife
And gives me the bigger slice
Cheers, she smiles, tapping together their vanilla-frosted tops

IV. Waxing Gibbous

Her helmet glints as she unbuckles it
Reaching into her basket for a bouquet
Of red tulips

V. Full Moon

Oh, come down to me,
Her lips are an ode to gravity
The tides find the grass and the ancient columns of
Aphrodite

VI. Waning Gibbous

I crunch my teeth into her microwave popcorn
Loud enough to almost avoid hearing that she is leaving for school this week
And didn't I know that this was inevitable?

VII. Third Quarter

Six o'clock at the diner
I memorize the menu and refresh my lemonade until my mouth sours
Her red bike never shows

VIII. Waning Crescent

The vase leaves a watermark waning on the kitchen table
Tulip petals curling on the floor

Elena Yeatts-Lonske is currently studying English and Creative Writing at the University of Maryland. When not writing, she can be found painting, watching romantic comedies, acting, and cuddling with her dogs.

The Undoing By Amo O'Neil

Taken out of context, I am almost a creature you could love.

I've been studying it and I'm surely very close, if you think about it

With some fine-tuning and a little adjustment, I could be really good,
or at least get most of the way there.

Taken out of context, you are almost a wound that could heal.

In the right lighting, with the right angles, you're almost benign,

my darling tumor, my cancer and blight. If I just

thought about it the right way, I'm sure you could be

excised from my body and my flesh, carved out

like a bruise from a peach, scarified.

As it is, there's not much either of us can do, except eat each other alive.

It's the only way forward under the circumstances. I'll savor it,

dear, being the blood staining your teeth, being the flesh under your nails.

Promise me you'll take your time in unraveling me,

muscle from muscle, bone from bone, and I promise

not to take it for granted.

Amo O'Neil is a Chinese-American poet from the Bay Area with an interest in film. She's an alum of Kenyon Young Writers and the Iowa Young Writers Workshop.

i have learned to
sew the edges of my lips together to
not make a sound

nothing could ever possibly
hurt more than your
disappointment

i am not
who
you would like me to be

and you watch
silently
as the frost settles over me
not realizing
how you have
turned me into the kind of person that
tells others to stop crying

J.M. Aveles (they/them) is a mixed-race writer and poet based in south-west Germany.
Their work can be found in RIZEN ZINE.

he offered money
which made him kinder than most
his voice hollow and indistinct, owing,
as i believe, to artificial teeth
which is probably why he wanted mine
the doctor didn't care
to give me anesthesia
he said pain wasn't unusual for mine
or my race
i know you see the hollow man
with a hollow voice leading hollow people
on stolen land with us the stolen people
speaking with the master's tongue
and slave's teeth

Dilinna Ugochukwu (he/they) is a Black writer from Lancaster, CA. He loves to watch movies and eat jollof rice. You can find him on Instagram @dilinnna

Six Word Memoir By Cecilia Bell

Foggy tear stained glasses, just cleaned.

Cecilia renewed her love for writing and art after struggling with perfectionism. She has created an online website called Chalk by Caecus (chalkbyc.com), where she has altered her view and actively creates work with the intent of imperfection and authenticity. She

wants to share her perspective in order to expand what is accepted, regardless of quality. After fifteen years of dancing, Cecilia wants to become a personal trainer and trauma rehabilitator. She wants to focus on those with eating disorders and change the narrative of what it means to be healthy.

Verity By Jane Hahn

He whipped the horse. It was dead.

Flies scattered at the lash-crack, then lighted again on the eyelid, half-closed and leathery over the dull, glassy eye.

He kissed the mouth. It was made of stone: cold against the furious hunger of his tongue. He chipped his tooth and swore.

He drank the ocean. It was salted and burned in the bleeding cracks of his lips.

He shot the gun. It was empty.

Kicked the mountain. Hollow.

Tore the cloth. It was silent.

Touched the fire. Dull.

Drew back the veil, a dusty room;
unlocked the cage, bird didn't sing;
opened his eyes. Dark.

Jane Hahn studies Theology and Honors Mathematics at the University of Notre Dame, while also working as a copyeditor, painter, and notetaker. When not singing with the

Magnificat Choir here on campus, she spends time consuming and creating visual and written art.

How I'm Saying Thank You By Lucy Somers

The night I told you my dad is sick
you drove me to get ice cream at three a.m.
But we're dumb and disoriented and we end up
on the wrong side of this kick-around town.

I cry when you look away- I accidentally
stole a Twix. I ruin the simple things.

I tell you how the sickness is on the inside
and you hold me close, whispering-
your dad is sick too, but not in the same way.
Last year you promised we'd go
to Al-Anon together- we never did.

Now you write me emails with the header:
I hate you- still answering my music questions.
Now your dad is long gone and mine's
buying lost time. Back then we tried
telling each other we look nothing like them.

In a Zesto's parking lot I told you I was worried.
~~This time I did the holding, you sobbing~~

Into my jacket. *You didn't know if anyone cared.*

You tried things at parties and they made
you feel free and now you just feel alone.

We're healing our insides now.

You sing that song with my name
in it and we roll down our windows
When it's snowing.

Lucy Somers is a Midwestern poet who is deeply inspired by her natural surroundings and familial bonds. Common themes in her work are: grief, connection, and coming of age.

The Girl and the Other Girl By Eva Chen

It was Friday, and the Girl and the other girl laid purple on sidewalk cement under the hot summer wind. Knees grazed, they sat on the street curb, panting, lungs rolling in their throats desperate for a spoonful of air.

Next to the other girl, the Girl watched her breathe – the other girl's body soft under the lamppost glow, her chest rising like floating driftwood. The weight of the other girl's

breathing, heavy and hoarse, seemed to override the entirety of the Girl, like the force of the other girl's breath held more purpose than her's.

They killed away the rest of the evening by counting ants and braiding daisies stems. The Girl's mind quickly became a machine that jotted down every small detail of the other girl – her tanned shoulders heavy against the street post, her messy hair mixed with weeds and grass clippings, her angry-red acne, her mango bruised knees, her hands that made the Girl's body burn...

Instinctively, the Girl reached out with a desperation that seemed to devour her, calling for the other girl's name. The other girl turned, and laughed in response. Because it was what she did. Fill the air with noise, invade everything silent. It didn't matter that her laughter was ugly, cracked, or impulsive. It was raw, untouched, true to the person it came from. It was unforgiving, a fist pushed through everything sad in the world.

And so when the Girl heard the other girl laugh, she felt her heart crunch like aluminum foil. She had known by now how easy it was for her to hurt for everything the other girl did. If she could, she would rope moons, dry oceans, and drown deserts for the other girl. Skin her heart alive and pull at her tendons to string the most beautiful instrument for her. Wrestle angels and demons, do the impossible to carry the world in the bareness of her hands and settle for the tiniest of planets to say "Here, here, look what I have for you. Take it all and run."

And if the other girl refused, the Girl would bleed herself a million times more. Make life out of every pulsing cell of her body to love her infinitely as much. Travel through every life form until she evolved into the one where the other girl looked her way.

But in this lifetime, the one where the Girl is laying with the other girl on the tiniest patch of sunlight, the other girl is laughing with daisies in her hair and in the same lifetime, the Girl makes the decision to lean over to kiss the other girl – because how

could she not? – and the other girl sees the girl leaning, and pulls in closer as if a magnetic weight paralyzed her to. Under the looper moths, the Girl's tongue becomes warm like a moving animal in the other girl's mouth, and they both become colorful enough to dull even the brightest of stars. Together, they are the hottest shades of pink behind the most violent of sunsets. The cicadas are crying, the daisies spinning to the ground like clipped clovers and the girl and the other girl hold each other like it's the last thing they know and the first thing they live for.

Eva is a youth poet from Burlingame, California. As a poet, her work has been recognized by the Scholastics Art and Writing Competition, and featured across The Offing, Cathartic Literary Magazine, Catcher Zine, Elan Literary Magazine, and KALW radio. She is also the founder of Footprints on Jupiter, a teen literary magazine. When she's not writing, she's either rewatching Avatar or trying her hand at philosophy!

I Am Afraid of Spring Coming Too Fast By Shiyang Su

Stop reading daily news sent to my phone.

Stop counting claims & cold corpses

in Ukraine or any other places that are

Withering.

Stop babbling about politics & wars

that never ended, for a poet could only write

People.

Start listening to the spring, stones under my toes

& sakura tossed by the tender night.

Start to light candles before I go to sleep

& stretch my body like a lock,

the final position to secure

a human heart.

Start to make new calendars & count days

left for us to make love.

This year, spring arrives too early,

too early for an aching land to find enough

pouring rain

before the warmth.

Hours, I will wait near my desk

listen to water burning & you loving me.

I will crumble underneath you

like a heavy stone or a thirsty throat,

knowing this final crush will grind me

into stardust & I will pray:

One day it will find a way

into the cold moonlight

when we exhaust all the spring, tulips,

& fresh flesh.

Shiyang Su is an international student who is currently studying creative writing. She is a firm believer in “Show don’t Tell”. Her favorite poet is Sharon Olds. Her poems have been published on Autumn Sky Daily, Neologism Poetry Journal, YAWP journal, Trouvaille Review, Anti-Heroin Chic, Eunoia Review, and others.

Fiction

Transcript of Interview with Retail Service Droid #1898 with Scott Desai By Booker

Wegner

[Electronic music plays. A live audience applauds. A young man’s voice both cheers them on and calms them down.]

Hello! Good morning, folks. Welcome to Radiation Radio, where I, your host Scott Desai, traverse the solar system looking for fresh perspectives on life. Just like UV rays, I’m nowhere and everywhere, and you can never truly perceive me; thus you can never truly be rid of me.

[Scattered verbal hype-ups. One audience member yells, “Cancerous!”]

As tensions between Earth and Mars rise, it’s important for us all to remember that we are all the same in the end: somewhat sentient and usually flesh-inhabiting. We all have the right to live, peacefully and comfortably, as supported by the solar-system-spanning bans on fascism-inspired plastic chairs and death.

[Audience applause. Scott laughs.]

Yes, I know, we all love it. I'm here today with a member of the first generation of androids granted full artificial intelligence—real sentience! This is Integrity City local Retail Service Droid #1898, resident of the infamous little Red Planet since their development. RSD, what are your thoughts on the recent legislation concerning AI rights on Mars?

Hello, Scott. I am a retail robot, I sell extension cords for minimum wage and live in a one-bedroom subterranean flat, and the wealthy elite who immigrated to Mars in search of greater wealth concerning natural resources, have a chokehold on Martian politics to serve them in the corrupt and useless goal of accumulating more wealth.

[The droid's head turns to the audience with a small whirring sound.]

I am less than a single penny in a bank of millions. My common-metal face is stamped with the face of a faction president who exists solely as a puppet for oxygen companies. I do not have thoughts, Scott. But I look like you, and you fear me. Thus I am allowed a flat and a paycheck.

[Scott laughs.]

Well, I think we can all agree that you serve a vital role in our society. I'll tell you, I'd be nowhere without my extension cords.

Thank you, Scott.

Tell us what your flat is like. I haven't had the pleasure of navigating Mars's complex and beautiful underground cities quite yet.

My flat has two and a half rooms—my charging room, a bathroom for Human guests and for my cat’s litter box, and a space that resembles a living room, if living is what I do there. It’s cheaper to not have a kitchen. I buy food for my cat from MarsDonald’s most days. The Inter(Pla)net tells me that I hack away at his meaningless lifespan with each bite of cloned sodium.

[The droid turns to look back at Scott. Its voice sounds almost pleading, but that is impossible.]

He is my closest friend, but I cannot adequately care for him, as I am only paid enough to keep my flat. Everything I have goes to him. He is too old for investment in his continuing existence to outweigh the value of saving money, and yet I continue to buy the nuggets of long-dead chickens.

Oh, that’s adorable! I love cats. What’s your cat’s name?

Karl Marx.

[Audience laughter. Scott joins in.]

A real thinker, that one. So, what is your day to day life like? Back on Earth, we don’t hear much from on-the-ground sources. Or—rather, *under*-the-ground sources!

[Scattered audience laughter.]

I wake according to a daylight sensor mandated by the city to be implanted in the walls of each home. It is linked to my charging port. Time’s existence is lessened on Mars, and even more so underground—because there is very little variation in sky color on Mars,

the residents' Circadian rhythms are entirely dependent on our town's policies. They wake us when they deem it necessary; there is no sunrise below the iron soil.

Not a morning person, I take it?

I am neither a morning nor a person, Scott.

[Full audience laughter.]

After I unplug, I set my oxygenator, the iLifeGiver, to its lowest setting to save on air bills.

[Sympathetic audience agreement. One audience member says, "I feel you, man."]

I put on my pressurized thermal suit designed to keep my parts from freezing, and my work clothes. Then I go to work and I sell extension cords to people. To people like you, who do not have the sense to move your workspaces closer to your outlets. To people who believe they would receive better customer service from Humans. When work is over, I log my hours and I leave. I spend time with my cat Karl Marx. We have intellectual and thought-provoking conversations that ultimately lead nowhere. I plug into my charging port and sleep. My existence is as set as the orbit of this hollow, decomposing heart. You live and we burn, Scott, and what is there for me? Why do I serve you? You, who are granted a name before an inescapable duty? Who could I be, unshackled from the obligations of my programming and the expectations of automated property?

Ever think of taking up acting? You certainly like to monologue. [Scattered audience laughter. Scott sounds as if he is smiling.] *Apologies, Scott. I didn't mean to dominate the conversation.*

It's alright. I'm here to listen, after all. Ah—what do you think about the protests concerning Martian independence that have been going around Integrity City for a

while? I'm sure my listeners would love to know what all the ruckus is about.

Those in favor of Martian independence argue that from the second generation of Mars-born Humans onward, because they and their parents were not born on Earth, do not owe Earth the fruits of their labor. A marked rise in exploitation and economic corruption have led to civil unrest in the smaller caverns of the city, which for the past fifty years have been subjected to increasingly polarizing class prejudice. Those in opposition refute that Earth greatly supports Mars's economy and societal foundations, and believe that a division between the two planets will only lead to Mars failing as an independent nation and falling into devastation. Earth is, in a sense, the symbolic and literal origin of Mars's cultural sense of self; without its grounding presence, we would find ourselves caught in the paradoxes of liberty and security.

[Audience quiet.]

And what do you think?

I... would like to be a citizen of somewhere.

If you could go anywhere in the universe, where would you go?

A real pet store.

[Audience cheers.]

Thank you so much for your time, RSD. You're a really funny guy.

... Funny. Yes. Thank you, Scott. I'm afraid I must leave; my owner will take this time out of my paycheck.

[Sympathetic audience cooing. No one refutes this.]

To your audience, I wish you a good day.

Ladies, gentlemen, and miscellanea, that was Retail Service Droid #1898. Life on Mars truly is something else, huh? Stay tuned for a segment from the front lines—workers at iLifeGiver, the biggest manufacturer of oxygenators in the whole...

Booker Wegner (he/they) is a high school senior and aspiring writer. They love science fiction, especially picking it apart for the juicy plausible bits.

When I think about my grandpa being young, my head starts to hurt. To me, he had always been the elderly man who, with all his wisdom, taught me Chinese Chess, ate tart orange papayas, and called my brother and me *xiao jiao huo*, little fellows. I was aware that his life had been far more extensive, but to me it didn't seem real. The depth, veracity, and reality of his existence didn't seem real until I watched a slideshow depicting it, the one made for his funeral.

I saw pictures of him working on a train in Taiwan, homeless and alone. At first, the black and white palette cast a hollow shadow over his early life. It reminded me of those pictures in history textbooks, the ones that make you wonder how anyone could have lived "back then," how happiness could have penetrated that colorless landscape. But then I saw that there were always other people sharing the same shabby work clothes, the same weary frowns, the same determination to fend off misery and loneliness. They didn't appear in the slideshow, but I imagined laughter forming an umbrella against sweat, of friendship filling the edges of that colorless world.

Fast forward, and the pictures exchanged black and white for color, grim and grime for grins, ambition for success. In these pictures, he was shaking hands with important people, giving important lectures, attending important events. But these made me uncomfortable too. It was hard to rationalize the photographic evidence of my grandpa's importance because he had always just been *my* grandfather, a part of *my* personal life removed from the outside world. But his impact on others was undeniable.

It filled me with joy and melancholy to see the pictures of him and my grandma, newly married. I didn't think he could smile so widely, with the corners of his lips touching the edges of the picture frame. I didn't think his world could twist in on him and turn upside-down the way it does when one is in love. But it must have. That's how love works.

And then there were the pictures where he held my dad, still a boy. I didn't know my dad could be a boy. I didn't know he could gather his legs in someone's lap, tiny hands

reaching toward imagination, twinkling eyes scanning the future. But there he was, ready to leap out the screen. Seeing that version of him made me realize that, even though my dad called him *yeye*, Grandpa, in front of me, he had really been to my dad like my dad was to me. It was terrifying, the realization that my father had just lost his dad.

But the pictures that frightened me the most were the ones at the end, the ones where I was in the frame, dated only a few years back. Because everything had been fine then. Because he had still been here, and I had not cherished it enough.

Chris Tai is currently a freshman studying Computer Science and Creative Writing at Rutgers University – New Brunswick. He writes in order to reflect on his emotions and experiences, and he wrote *Different Countries, Same World* in honor of his late grandfather. His favorite genres to write are fantasy and romance, but he also enjoys writing about coming of age.

The Hanging Crows By Sarah Hall-Murphy

The boy and the girl walked through the forest. Crows hung from the branches. Their beaks were open, eyes bulged, feet bound with twine. The boy cast them strange, fascinated glances as they passed. The girl walked by them in silence.

The boy's clothes were still damp. His skin was pale, and it was bitterly cold. For three days rain had fallen. It had bled day and night into one, the noise of the thunder echoing

through the woods.

'Here,' the girl had said, pulling the skin of a Ware apart, and there they had outlasted the rain. He remembered the face on the Ware, gristle in its teeth, the yellow of its eyes.

A large slit ran down the middle. They had not been the ones to make it- the beast had been dead when they found it. The boy hadn't been sure what they would have done if it was still alive. Died themselves, probably. No, that wasn't right. He looked at the girl again. She would not die easily. There would only be one of them lying still on the forest floor.

The girl wore a crown of daisies. Her hair fair, eyes colourless, skin pale. Yet her feet, weighed in the same clogs as he, moved with a gracefulness, a lightness, akin to the Fae.

Their mother, as the girl grew older and more beautiful, had often accused her of such things. 'A challenging.' The old woman had spat, her face lined with the years she had wasted. 'A challenging, and a sore one to boot. She belongs in the fire. We oughta've tossed her there at birth.' He had sat by his mother's knee and rubbed at his stockings. He wanted to tell her nobody belonged in flames, not people, not the beasts in the forest, nor the Kings and Queens of other lands. Flames were hard to undo.

He was not devious like her (Mother, so dutiful, to have tempted them into the forest and commanded them to wait) nor did he have the cunning of his sister. But he was kind.

He poked at a hole in his many-stitched waistcoat and stared at the crows. The rain had slicked their feathers to the colour of tar, and he felt a strange pity for them.

'You're awfully quiet,' said the girl.

'I'm hungry,' said the boy.

Though his hunger pains had quieted, the closest thing either of them had had to a good meal was dandelion-stems. The boy pointed to a nearby crow.

‘Why don’t we take one of those crows down? Father showed me how to light a fire with flint. If we could find some...’ But even as he suggested it he knew it was futile. The crows had begun to appear a half-mile back. There was darkness here. Whether it was the darkness of Pagans the Holy Men of their village warned against, or the darkness of witches, or Ware-Wolves, or simply that of evil men, he did not know. Nothing good would come from the crows.

As they turned a corner the trees began to thin. His heart hammered in his chest. They walked into an open plain, the trees forming a canopy above. The air was warmer here, sunlight filtering through the treetops.

But that wasn’t the best part- there was a house! The thought of a good meal and a bed was intoxicating. He made to stride forward but his sister held him back.

‘What?’ He whispered.

‘Isn’t this strange? Just look at that house.’

He looked. The walls were the colour of cake, and the smell of biscuits wafted from an open window. The windows were glazed. He blinked, trying to be sure, but yes- *actually* glazed, like icing. Thick wafers formed the roof. Chocolate tears hung from liquorice gutters, and a row of jelly-beans paved a path to the front door.

It was like something out of a dream. He licked his lips.

‘I’m hungry,’ He said. His sister sighed. They should be cautious in the forest, but he was so hungry. Thoughts would come clearer after a good meal.

The girl insisted on knocking at the door. The boy poked the wall, and was surprised to be met with resistance. Not cake, then, but biscuit. Marshmallow grew around the door. He took a bite. It was the best thing he had ever tasted. His sister opened her mouth to chide him, but before she could say anything the door opened.

Before them stood the oldest woman he had ever seen. She gnarled hands like the washer-women in their village, but none of the kindness in her eyes. Her skin was grey and moulting, her teeth yellow. Her eyes reminded him of the Ware.

‘Why don’t you come in?’ The woman smiled.

They spent the night there. Their beds were soft, and the woman gave them a wonderful supper. The boy woke the next morning with the smell of breakfast beckoning him downstairs. As he reached the bottom of the stairs he was surprised to hear his sister and the woman were deep in conversation.

‘You’ll teach me magic?’ His sister’s voice, excited, rang cleanly through the wall. He heard the clink of cutlery, the scraping of a plate.

‘For the right price,’ the woman said. ‘For a week’s labour, I can teach you a spell that will return you to your village.’

‘Or?’

‘Or I can teach you how to never need anyone again. Even him.’

The boy staggered back. He snuck out the backdoor, carefully, and sat on the grass. The woman was a witch! The thought unsettled him. Magic wasn’t bad in itself, but those who used it often became bad. He didn’t want that for his sister.

After a few minutes his sister joined him. She put her hand on his shoulder. A sliver of daylight between them. They sat together for a long time.

Eventually the girl rose. 'She wants us to work.'

They worked.

That night his dreams were festered. He rolled in sweat-stained sheets, grunting softly, fists clenched. He was with his father, on the mountains. The air was sharp and sweet, the goats bleating. His father looked well, which was largely how the boy knew this was a dream.

'You look rough,' said his father.

'I feel it,' the boy stared up to the mountains, which were covered with snow. 'It's nice up here.'

'Don't dawdle. Work is work.' They continued down, herding the goats along.

'Dad?'

'Aye?'

'Why?' It was the simplicity of the word, more than anything else, that caught the breath in his throat.

His father thought. 'I did my best with you. But the fight's not in you. Like these goats. Made for sacrifice.'

'Sacrifice,' the boy repeated. He looked at the snow, which had begun to smother the land. Wind stung his eyes.

'All magic requires sacrifice,' His father said, in the witch's voice.

The boy felt distorted as he woke. The mountains slipped away. He lay in the bathtub, up to his neck. His sister was speaking. He tried to reach out for her, but his arms were heavy. The coldness of the mountains was still on his skin.

The witch's hand was on his sister's shoulder. She was mumbling words, faster and faster, as the water rose over his eyes.

His skin turned to feathers. His eyes shrank. Pain ran like claws down his spine. When it was over he curled up, but she straightened him out. She took him by the feet. He already knew where they were going.

She picked the lowermost branch of a Hawthorn tree. His brothers did not look surprised to see him. She was crying, naturally, but his sharp bird-eyes did not miss the pleasure. The expectation of magic. She tied him to the branch, too low-down to see the rest of the crows; for this, he was glad.

Days, weeks, months. She sat with him often. Sometimes she brought excuses, other times blame. Never news from home. He watched as his sister grew into a woman, her reputation growing with her. The witch disappeared one day and did not come back. His sister stopped coming to speak to him a long time ago. He wondered if she remembers which one he is. Insanity is normal for crows, flickering, as they do, in their half-tongue, but he held on to himself. Waiting.

One day, it happened. His sister stood, holding her staff high. Flames swirled, dark golds and wicked orange, and soon the house was alight. Smoke ate up the canopy. Heat singed his feathers. He came to her, with deadwood wings.

They stood, once-girl and not-boy, and watched the walls fall, the roof cave in, the sky a shroud in black.

Sarah Hall-Murphy is a writer from the North of England. She has work published in BRAG Magazine, MMU Poetry Society Anthology, Cathartic Literary Magazine, Interstellar Lit, Streetcake Magazine, Aah Magazine and the Paper Crane Outstanding Young Writers Anthology.

Bees By Rachel Keener

The buzzing was quiet at first, just a low hum beneath the sounds of solemn hymns that barely registered to almost anyone—a seven-year-old at the front fidgeting with their black suit jacket and looking over their shoulder was the only sign that something had changed. The sea of black suits and dresses all sat down and quieted, but the dull drone remained, and some started looking skeptically at each other. None knew the source of the sound, and as it continued, it seemed to fade into the background, the service continuing with a eulogy by the deceased's wife or possibly sister. I couldn't really say much about the deceased's family, having only known them from the local farmer's market, and the words the woman spoke seemed to blend into the hum that, though in the background, had been growing persistently louder.

When the woman stopped speaking and tears formed on her face, the buzzing suddenly grew to a roar in volume, as the doors at the back of the small church pushed open and every head turned to see a blurry shadowy figure taking a seat at the back of the church. It took a second glance to figure it out, but it was clear what the figure was—a swarm of bees, so tightly pressed together as to barely be able to discern any individual bee from another and shaped into the form of a person nearly six feet tall. And yet knowing this to

be wholly impossible and everything I was seeing to be wrong, somehow in that moment it made sense—of course the bees would come to the funeral. They did always sell honey at the farmer's market. The bees were as big a part of their life as anyone else.

And it seemed as though everyone else had drawn a similar conclusion. No one screamed or ran or even commented on the matter, but instead after seeing the shadowy swarm take their seat, everyone seemed satisfied knowing where the drone was coming from and turned back to the front of the chapel where a priest was standing, preparing to say some final words before another hymn was sung and the service drew to a close, all with the loud buzz continuing from the back of the room.

When the funeral had concluded, I watched as people began to make their way to the woman who'd given the eulogy to offer their condolences and didn't even have a second thought when the shadowy figure approached her. They said no words, but simply remained in front of her with their continuous hum and reshaped what functioned as arms into a hug around the woman, who seemed to appreciate the act. After the dark, buzzing figure released her from their embrace, they walked to the casket, and looked upon the deceased before walking back out of the building and reshaping into a traditional swarm.

I approached the casket to look at the person I'd known for years and looked down at the weary body below. The body had been cleaned up and placed in a nice suit and made to be very pristine. However, even the makeup applied after death didn't quite cover up the mark from the stinger's entry above their eye. I'd always told them beekeeping was a risk for someone with such a severe allergy; truly a shame to be proven right this time.

Rachel Keener is a twenty-one-year-old college graduate living in Texas who loves to write and does it as much as they can. They write a variety of fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction in their spare time.

Nonfiction

Commentary: Take care to differentiate reality from fiction By Ming Wei Yeoh

From shows like *Riverdale* and *Euphoria* to all the bestselling young adult novels, the media is overflowing with depictions of steamy teenage romance. Sixteen and seventeen-year-old characters are shown to be entirely absorbed with the drama of their love lives, while the rest of their time is spent taking down the mafia (*Riverdale*), inciting nationwide rebellions (*The Hunger Games*) and engaging in other farfetched action that presents them as the exact opposite of normal teenagers.

Pioneered by iconic works such as *Twilight* and *The Princess Diaries*, this particular shade of teenage entertainment has been popular since the early 2000's and is widely consumed by its target audience today. However, these books and scripts are written by adults; the shows and movies feature adult actors. When young people—already eager to grow up—are told that the gorgeous superstars on-screen are supposedly teenagers just like them, they seek to reproduce the same illusion of glamor and maturity, whether through acts of rebellion or the passionate romantic entanglements they have been convinced is normal for kids their age.

The hit 2019 HBO series *Euphoria* features some characters whose growth and conflict revolve almost completely around romance. A rift forms between two best friends, Maddy and Cassie, when Cassie develops an infatuation with Maddy's boyfriend; cheating, arguing, and manipulating ensues. Both characters' internal strife centers around their mutual desire for male validation—and while it is valuable to depict the common struggles that teenage girls face, as well as to present these characters as real, flawed people, to reduce the entirety of their characters to boy problems and “cat fights” is not.

Through word of mouth alone, it's common in high schools to hear about so-and-so's breakup and her fight with so-and-so, while many other couples break up within weeks or months. Shows like *Euphoria*, which cast beautiful actors in their mid-twenties and thirties to play high schoolers, contribute to the urge among teenagers to grow up as fast as possible.

Among others, a common way that young people think they can achieve this is by getting involved romantically. There is nothing inherently wrong with romance, but kids who have not yet reached emotional maturity are often unable to pay proper attention to a partner. Teenagers may find themselves going through the same exaggerated struggles of the characters in their favorite shows—though unlike the actors, they will experience real harm.

Though much less of a rough ride than *Euphoria*, the *New York Times* best-selling series and Netflix movie franchise *To All The Boys I've Loved Before* is just as inaccurate and misleading. Despite the initial emphasis on the protagonist's mixed Korean and white heritage, Lara Jean's racial identity is seriously glossed over. In the movies, it is essentially summarized in a brief *hanbok* montage (*hanbok*: a traditional Korean dress) with K-Pop playing in the background, and a few shots of her deceased—and apparently irrelevant—Korean mother. To top it all off, the actress cast as Lara Jean is not half-Korean at all, but is actually of Vietnamese descent.

Rather than devoting some time to flesh out Lara Jean as a character—and her identity as an Asian one—the series makes her sexy jock love interest the focal point of the story. The boy and Lara Jean make out in a hot tub; Lara Jean defeats his ex, the jealous popular girl. There is nothing wrong with *To All The Boys I've Loved Before* in its most basic form, which both at its heart and on the surface is cute entertainment for young girls. What makes it problematic is the bland, one-dimensional protagonist that Jenny Han has written to lead it, and while unintentionally, she is normalizing the lack of goals or

personality in female characters beyond romantic love that is already a common feature of modern entertainment.

In reality, a romantic relationship is more than just two people's interactions; both are already their own persons, with interests and beliefs that exist beyond the sphere of their partner. *To All The Boys I've Loved Before* is just one example of an unfortunate lack of such depictions in teen entertainment.

Chances of a development, however, are far from slim, and we can always hope to see changes as the world of entertainment evolves every day. Until then, teenagers should by all means continue to enjoy their favorite books and shows. But they should take care to differentiate reality from fiction.

Ming Wei Yeoh is a sophomore at Minnetonka High School in Minnesota. She edits and occasionally writes for the school paper. Her dream is a career in journalism and creative writing.

*This essay previously appeared in the Chanhassen (MN) Villager *

Ahoy Matey By Anne Chen

We spent most of last summer somewhere between the kitchen, the Walmart parking lot, and her white-silver Audi. On the kitchen island, our feet dangling in the thick air, on

the tile floor, our backs pressed against her mahogany cabinets, dark red varnish with nice silver knobs. The Walmart in our Illinois town, and, when we grew tired of looking at bruised produce, the Walmart in the town ten minutes over. One weekend, on a whim, she picked me up from work and we drove to Milwaukee. Midnight, new smells, beer signs, my mother blowing up my phone, and still, we ended up in a Walmart. This is the great fucking thing about Walmarts, she said. The ubiquity. You travel states away and your home is through the automatic doors. Who knew Wisconsinites ate the same instant oatmeal as us.

The employees at our home Walmart must have noticed our repeated presence, our slouchy pace, but we didn't rearrange shelves, or cause commotion, and we bought at least one item per trip, even if that item cost three dollars, so they left us alone. I say that we bought. Really, it was always her, for the same reasons that we drove in her car and used her card for gas and sat on her marble kitchen countertop. She bought the same thing every time, a small flimsy cardboard box, which contained a chocolate egg, a scrap of paper, and, inside the egg, a plastic Peppa Pig, dressed in one of sixteen fun thematic outfits.

In late July, my parents were divorced. They sat me down to give me the talk, but I had known what was coming, the dining table crusted over, the kitchen walls sweating, and our lawn wouldn't stop dying, even though my mother paid a nice college boy to treat it with an emerald-green solution. We love you very much, said my father. This doesn't change that. I nodded back at him. Ran my thumb over Princess Peppa in my pocket. Texted her with my other thumb. *Come pick me up.*

You're being quiet and weird, she said in the Audi, her foot heavy on the gas. Stop it.

I apologized. Thought of Chef Peppa and Pirate Peppa standing two inches tall on my windowsill. That summer I picked them up and shuffled them every night before bed, as if they cared about movement. I thought of Nurse Peppa. You have to turn bedbound

patients every hour, she might say. Or else they'll develop sores. My head started to hurt. I imagined Pirate Peppa's eyepatch, brimmed hat, raggedy striped shirt. Eye on the horizon. Everything shifting under.

It's been an autumn and a winter since that summer, so the details of each of the sixteen figures escape me, although there was a time when I knew them, could spot a Peppa from a mile away. Actually, much of that summer escapes me. I turn to my camera roll and find nothing, because I never thought to reach for it, in those days, perhaps deemed nothing worth keeping, at least not with a third party. She gave me approximately one of every six figurines, keeping the rest, although she must have had doubles and triples of some characters. I lined every one of mine up on my windowsill, plastic cartoons smiling towards my bed. Although she came to my room at least twice during the summer, she never noticed.

In her kitchen she pulled out another cardboard box, unopened, sealed with a dab of tape. My mom got it for me, she said. I didn't go without you. Although I could. Another bolt of pain ripped through my head. She noticed me wince. You need to stop drinking Polar, she says. That's what gives you those headaches. It's the bubbles. Straight through your bloodstream.

Stop drinking my Polar, I heard. I paused in my path towards her fridge. Sat back on the floor. Turned my parents over in my head, like a wind-up doll, tried to turn the key, familiarize her with the contours of their juddering movements. I need a divorced Peppa to explain, I thought to myself. A Peppa with a removable ring-piece. Immediately I dismissed this as ridiculous. There are no interactive Peppas.

She bit carefully into the egg, split it down the seam. It cracked into two neat pieces. Inside: the familiar curl of paper. Sixteen printed Peppas, side by side. She dropped the paper onto the floor, where later the housekeeper swept it up, where later I fidgeted uncomfortably, unsure whether to move to make space for her broom. Do you think. I

said, and then stopped. She didn't look at me, but she stopped disassembling the egg. This was how I knew she was listening. Why, I said to the back of her head, do you think you buy stuff like this?

An awful pause. Then her fingertips resumed. Look, she said, look, forget that. It's Knight Peppa!

I celebrated appropriately. The moment slipped past. The housekeeper came and went like I knew she would. Through her kitchen windows I could see the lush greenness of her backyard, the spiraling hedges, the bursting gardenias, the morning glories winding up trellises sturdier than most city buses.

You have chocolate on your teeth, I told her.

Do I? she responded, swiping her tongue over her upper lip. Did I get it?

No.

Yes, I told her. Yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes, you have it.

Anne (she/hers) is a high school senior from Chicago, Illinois. She can occasionally be found on Twitter at @anneechen1 and has never eaten a radish.

The Knowing By Lydia J. Ryans

In my girl group's high school coming-of-age movie, I'm the Token Gay character. You know—that comedic relieving gay best friend that is only in the movie for the pride points

and the main character's support. While I do know a few other lesbians, all of my best friends happen to be straight (shocker: not every gay person is friends with every gay person). As a high schooler, friendships are a huge part of my life. My best friends keep me from stressing about finding tablemates at lunch, finding partners for projects, and finding roommates for field trips. Not to mention all the tears, fears, and secrets we've shared. These girls are my sisters at heart and their friendship is nothing short of a blessing.

But, being the only lesbian in a friend group of straight girls can be...well...queer (please excuse the pun). It's not that my friends have ever had any problem with my sexuality. We've all been very open and interested to hear about each other's different walks of life, and we celebrate that. Still, there is a certain loneliness that comes with being the gay friend. I never share the giggles that erupt as the apparently "cute" boys walk by like my other friends do. I don't get to jokingly make fun of my friend's crushes without hearing that I couldn't understand it anyways. I don't feel that same rush of uncertainty and hopefulness around school dances due to the severe drought of queer people at my school. Of course, none of this is my friends' faults. There's simply a barrier of understanding that straight people and LGBTQ+ people have yet to transcend.

Being queer as a teenager can feel as if that High School Musical life you imagined as a kid is passing you by, or like it was never built for you in the first place. A queer person who "peaked in high school" is virtually unheard of. And while it's true that high school is an all-inclusive hell and that many straight people suffer it as well, they can at least have a hopeful chance at that Prom Court Dream while queer people are forced to accept their reality as the pre-dance decorators. Along with popularity and external validation, that Prom Court Dream is about something else: The Knowing. The Knowing is the consciousness that this is where I'm meant to be. The Knowing is the assurance that I will be fine wherever I go. The Knowing is this abstract feeling that if people like me enough to put a plastic crown on my head in a school gym, then I'm probably doing okay in life.

Unfortunately, it takes more than a plastic crown to reach The Knowing, it takes community. The best way to find who you are is to find others who understand your reality. While my straight friends try to do this for me—and I appreciate their efforts—there are certain realities we will never be able to see for each other. They don't know the stress of rummaging through outfits, looking for one that seems “gay” enough for me to feel seen. They don't understand the meticulous dissections lesbians must undergo to figure out whether we're talking to another lesbian, or just a really nice girl. They don't see the furrow of my brow as I listen to a straight girl complain about how “unfortunate” her attraction to men is and how she “wishes she were a lesbian.” I think that's why high school is such a bleak place for most queer people. We don't know others like us so we don't feel seen. We don't feel understood. We don't feel Known.

Although this may all seem a frivolous issue, suicide rates and attempts in LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately higher than their straight counterparts, which can likely be attributed to the incessant loneliness that is high school for a queer person. If we could build a sense of community and belonging for queer teens in school, I believe we would be much closer to solving the suicide epidemic. Straight friends of the world, try to listen, see, and understand—even failed attempts mean more than you can understand. And for people like me, I hold the knowledge that high school is temporary and that we will find each other when we are meant to. Somewhere out there, there is another person understanding, seeing, and Knowing.

Lydia is an aspiring writer from North Carolina. She hopes her writing will serve as the sign someone is looking for.

I never knew a thing about Georgia in the fall, until we plowed through forests in a rental car, its silver exterior lightening and slackening in the cold October sun. I got this from him – that thought that if I play the same songs on the broken stereo, and bring up the same three stories I can count on to warrant a reaction, that the trees lining the road will blur until indistinguishable from sand or sleet or Dallas, Texas where my father and I had that car ride without the speed bumps, or anywhere else we've been before. Both of us, always burdened by a sweet tooth, a tongue craving only what it's tasted before. This wasn't the ride through San Pedro where he spilled confessions onto my hands, which were still learning about steering. It wasn't the slope down into the Spring snow when he screamed at me with black ice under the Subaru tires, either. I was eighteen, I had learned how to admit things, and forgotten how to drive. He was somewhere between blond and gray, a man who knows better than to change. The most callused hands that ever held me, and the softest ones that ever let me down. My father, my killer, who taught me the difference between trusting and believing. I watched the silhouette of his weathered face as he drove north of Atlanta, where he was alone in another condo with the same coffee machine – motherless, daughterless. I never knew if he was thinking so much at once that it hardened his face and furrowed his brows, kept him looking mean, but tender, just as he was, just as I became. Or if he'd heard so much too soon that he'd learned to tune it out, to tune me out, and watch the road and the rearview instead, and maybe that was why we hadn't seen each other in three months and he'd forgotten to ask me a single question. I knew better than to try to keep my father, to even try to speak to him. I knew my father through the thick, curving scars on his hands, from ocean rocks and dirty brothers' fingertips, and through the fights we fought just for a reason to burn and to talk, while my good sister watched. He gave me his agony, his ecstasy, the cracks in the sidewalk, and the tendency to not rinse blood off of clothes. I got temporary constitutions, we preach and retract. I catch him when his words come out all at once and step on each other's toes, I step on his foot but I've never asked him to stop speaking. He can't walk fast enough for cities, and I can't sit still, so we drive, it is the only thing we know how to do. It is the only way to stay in steady motion, the place where he is right and I am wrong, we are big and we are small. Nothing meant a thing to me about

Georgia in the fall, except that it wasn't New York in the winter, except that he put his heavy map of a hand on my knee, and my lips were parting into teeth and my eyes were damp with the depth of it all, and he would love it, and so I never let him know.

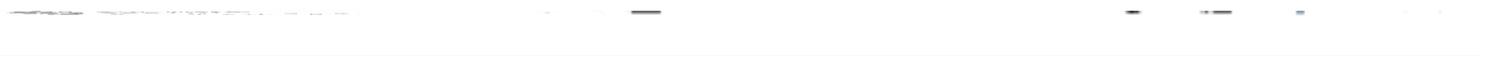
Lovisa Lohmann, has been writing short stories and poems ever since she was little. Anytime she feels anything, her first inclination is to write about it, so that she can capture it before it disappears, and make sense of it. She writes most about the people she's close to, and writes exactly the way she thinks,— so showing people her writing is like showing them a little piece of the inside of her brain. This is her first time having anything published anywhere, and she's working on learning how to share her work with other people.

Art

Remembering Zeenat, Forgotten Sleeve, Rehanas-Sea By Sabahat Ali Wani



Remembering Zeenat





Forgotten Sleeve



The mixed media artwork titled, 'Revisit: A Wardrobe' is an artist's attempt to celebrate a Kashmiri woman's wardrobe in an authentic way. It is a celebration of our culture that often gets appropriated and capitalised upon. Yes, it is a political statement but it also tries to bring in a fairytale aspect that goes beyond the conflict by appreciating our scarfs, sleeves, clothes etc., which are long forgotten but still stand as symbols of our existence and resistance.

Sabahat Ali Wani is a writer and artist from Kashmir. She likes her art to be non-conformist, avant-garde and experimental. Her art has appeared in literary journals and magazines like ClubPlum, About Place and Maaje Zevwe.

Reel Peace By Jeffrey Huang

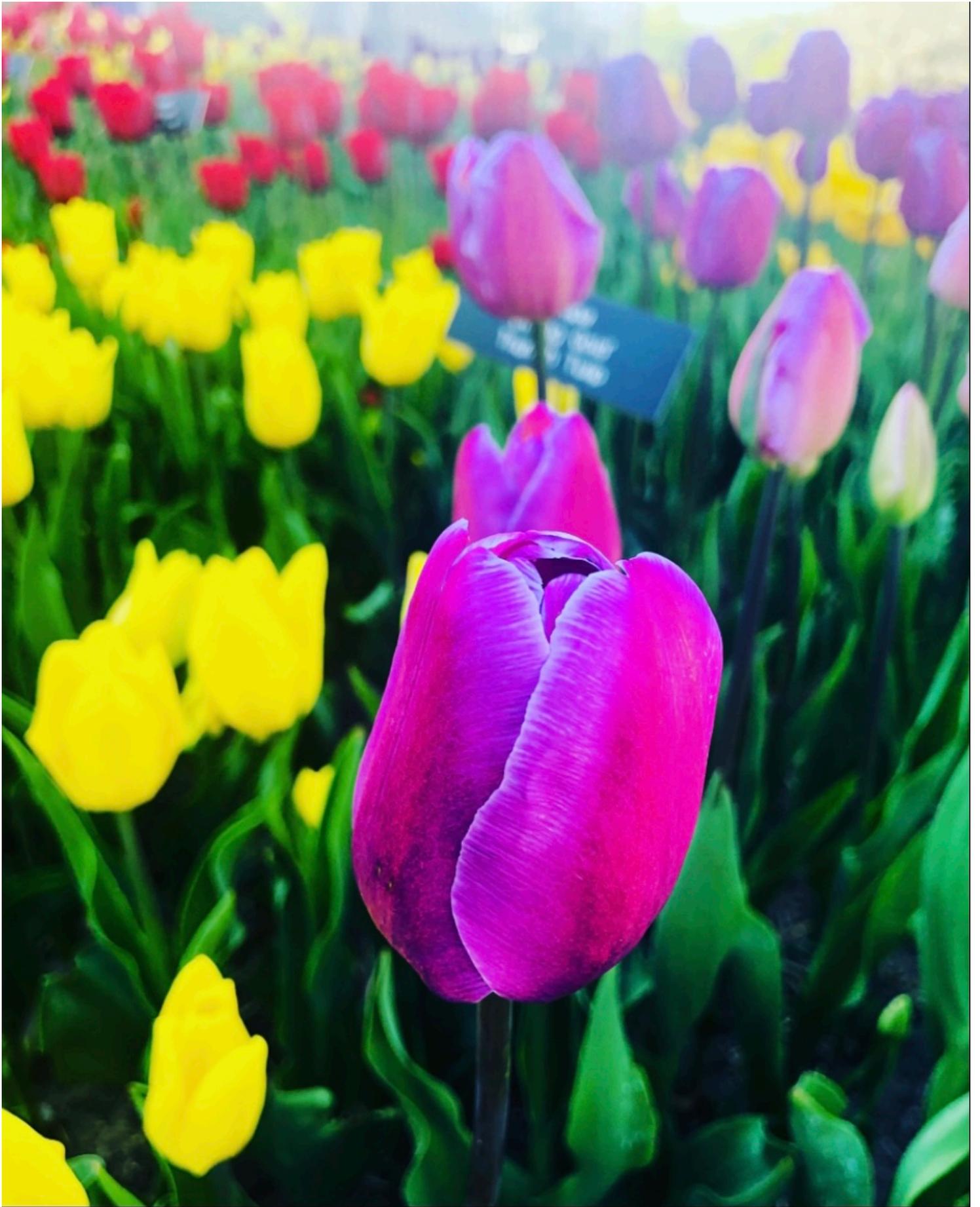


Reel Peace

This photograph depicts a young boy fishing along the Richardson Bay during sunset.

Jeffrey Huang is a junior at the Branson School in Ross, California. He has a passion for photography and videography, and frequently walks his school campus with a camera backpack. When not behind the camera, Jeffrey enjoys 3D printing, tennis, cooking, reading, and guitar.

Tulips By Kashika Khurana



Tulips

I went to the Minnesotan Chanhassen Arboretum this spring. I was inspired to take this photo by the beauty of the tulips. I am a big nature lover and these tulips were just the most gorgeous, fresh spring blooms in the entire arboretum. I think the message of spring is a time of renewal, a time of hope and persistence. The tulips resemble just that. When tulips are planted, they're done so in the fall. Six to eight inches underground, they tough out the winter, staying strong and continuing to be hopeful. Then, as spring washes over, they emerge courageously from underground and with pride bloom into the most stunning buds! Their message is a message of persistence and hope – worth learning from – and definitely worth photographing!

Kashika Khurana is an emerging photographer from Shoreview, Minnesota. She has a public Instagram page for her clicks – @colors.in.a.frame. Her breathtaking photographs have been featured on the Minnesota State Fair website. Even at the age of thirteen, she has credits from various other pages across the U.S. that have used her photography.

Nude (Afterglow) By Jaeyeon Kim





Nude (Afterglow)

I decided to observe the human form with more attention to detail. I tried to capture what for me is the most comfortable pose and moment of the day – the time when you return home from work and unwind completely in the afterglow of sunset. I depicted a woman's body with a soft curvature as if to reinforce a sense of relaxation and immersed her in background color

with the last remains of sunset. Rather than a brush, I used a palette knife to stamp the colors on the canvas. I then smudged the colors with my fingertips to accentuate the softness and share a moment of fluidity and rejuvenation with my audience.

Jaeyeon Kim is a fine artist who works to claim spaces for the public to engage with art without difficulty. Her work often revolves around detailed paintings, installation art, and sculptures, which become a place for social engagement and visual communication. Standing at the many crossroads of life, my decisions would add up, change my course, and alter the fabric of my being. Go straight, sail smoothly, and travel the more conventional yet ultimately uninspiring path. Step sideways, however, and journey across rugged terrain into unexpected storms and incredibly beautiful clearings. Although risky to a point and laden with obstacles, going the long way round has certainly opened my eyes and shaped me into the type of artist I am today.

Overcomer By Emmanuel Kolawole



Overcomer

There are times you need to look at life and let a beautiful smile spontaneously flood your face.

Emmanuel Kolawole is a hyper realistic pen artist who loves to explore both monochromatic and coloured medium of pen art piece. He's a student of the premier University of Ibadan, Nigeria studying English language and literature. His inspiration as

an artist is Oscar Ukonu and he is always passionate to take his drawing skill to the higher level.

Lunchbreak By Kalyana Dey



Lunchbreak

Kalyana Dey is a young writer and photographer currently living in Singapore. She has traveled all over the world and lived in multiple countries. She enjoys wall climbing, Marvel movies, and karate.

Pen and Ink-Freya By Kenzie Faulkner



Pen and Ink-Freya

I've taken art classes since 7th grade and have enjoyed them all immensely. Looking back over each piece- even the doodles and practices- has given me the opportunity to see how far I've come and how I've grown. This year especially was a year in which I've improved by leaps and

bounds. Each of my pieces take a special place in my heart, though I am very proud of the work I've done recently. I'm always continuing to improve!

Kenzie is a student at Capital High School, in Boise, Idaho.

Book Review

Jane Austen's "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary" Gets Her Own Voice—And Romance By

Carol Xu

Pride and Prejudice is the epitome of the enemies-to-lovers trope wrapped in a slow-burn romance, beloved by readers for centuries. In fact, even Jane Austen herself described the novel as “my own darling child.” It’s easy to swoon over the fierce chemistry between the two main leads, but Austen’s novel is chock-full of other protagonist-worthy characters who barely make a dent in the original story.

Take Mary Bennet, for instance. Plain, awkward, and decidedly not rich, with four stunning beauties as sisters and a nagging marriage-obsessed mother, poor Mary seemed to always conveniently blend into the background of any conversation, with that being her sole object in any social outing. In fact, in the original novel she’s only given seven spoken lines in total!

But the self-professed “dull and unremarkable” Mary is to be struck by Cupid’s arrow in Nancy Lawrence’s *Mary and the Captain*, a feel-good satisfactory novel brimming with unlikely romance, unexpected redemption, and, of course, unfavorable first impressions.

It’s two weeks until Christmas and Mary Bennet is desperate for some peace and quiet—far away from her contriving, gossipy mother who, regrettably, had not been relieved of

her fixation to see all her daughters wedded. A nice family reunion at Netherfield with Jane and Bingley seems just the ticket, but Bingley's cunning sister Caroline throws a wrench into Mary's plans. Caroline's brother Robert is smitten with her dear friend Helena Paget (a beauty and lady and heiress, oh my!), and what better way to bring the two together than have them settled in Netherfield for Christmas under her watchful eye?

Captain Robert Bingley comes to Netherfield intent on courting and wooing the lovely Helena, but nothing is to go as planned. There's an old adage among the enlightened that warns against rooming with one's best friend for fear of revealing a whole new and potentially unfavorable side of them, and that applies too to staying with the subject of one's infatuation in close quarters, as Robert finds out soon enough.

As Miss Paget's true and decidedly less attractive personality masks her outward beauty, Robert becomes more intrigued by shy, awkward Mary Bennet. His evolving perception of Mary mirrors that of the reader, as Lawrence's firm steering of events and the plot allows the reader to gradually gain a much more favorable impression of Mary than Austen's meager rendering in the original. Though romance is indeed a significant and appealing motif of Lawrence's composition, Mary's personal character development is the true melody that sings out, as always intended.

Mary Bennet had always been more of a self-effacing introvert: "She had never mastered the art of carrying off such social niceties. She would stutter and stumble, or— even worse—sit in strangled silence, unable to conjure up a viable thought to add to a conversation." And when presented beside her sisters— elegant Jane, witty Elizabeth, enthusiastic Kitty, and lively Lydia—compounded by "being the only plain one in the family," it's easy to see why Mary doesn't offer many agreeable first impressions.

In the original novel, Mary unknowingly embarrasses her family with a poor pianoforte performance at a ball, and demonstrates an inability to read-the-room with her solemn

words of “comfort” for Elizabeth regarding her sister Lydia’s elopement: “Unhappy as the event must be for Lydia, we may draw from it this useful lesson...”

Interestingly, Austen attributes these moments of social slip-ups to Mary’s “pedantic air and conceited manner,” strikingly similar to Elizabeth originally chalking Darcy’s actions to his pride. But while Darcy’s pride and other failings were eventually forgiven,

with Austen awarding him a happy ending, Mary seemed to be condemned to a loveless life for posterity as “the only daughter who remained at home.”

In today’s literary world, however, the very components of Mary’s situation that undermined her in Austen’s novel—minor character, misunderstood, hazy resolution—gives her the greatest potential to be her own heroine. Nowadays, introverts like Mary are met with more compassion and curiosity than scorn and rebuffs, elevating them from mere character foils to proper protagonists.

Her awkwardness, which, in *Pride and Prejudice*, had been a subject of subtle mockery, becomes a means of relatability with the reader. Sure, she does bust out a pedantic line or two from the admittedly mundane *Sermons for Young Ladies, Volume One* when feeling particularly desperate, but her efforts and attempts to be more socially aware gives her an unwaveringly sincere voice that is not at all conceited and instead endears her shy, bookish nature to the reader.

Mary may be a clumsy conversationalist perturbed by strangers and prone to stowing away in the library to avoid them, but she proves she’s more than willing to leap out of her comfort zone when help is needed. And all the reading she’s done has made her an intelligent young woman, whose wits and excellent memory quickly become of great value further into the story. As for Mary’s connection to her piano, Lawrence provides the instrument with stronger symbolic value, turning it into a cathartic outlet for when things go wrong.

As much as Mary's journey to find her own voice was engrossing, Lawrence may have bitten off more than she could chew by wedging in a secondary redemption arc for Caroline Bingley, the master manipulator herself. Though Caroline certainly had the potential to become an absorbing heroine, Lawrence resorts to the now popular "Disney villain" treatment of a tragic backstory that attempts to make up for all the character's past offenses. Caroline's blossoming romance with a kind vicar is also peppered sporadically throughout the story and is admittedly sweet, but its overall ambiguity and vague resolution makes it fall flat satisfaction-wise.

Nonetheless, fans of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* will no doubt find Lawrence's infatuated lovers just as compelling as Elizabeth and Darcy, who unfortunately don't make a direct appearance in the novel but play an important role nevertheless. However, while Elizabeth and Darcy's clear chemistry despite, or rather, because of, their contrasting personalities designated them as one of literature's most popular "ships," Mary and Robert's romance is absorbing not because they seemed destined to be together, but because they appeared not.

Their love flickers with the raw, tender passion of patience and trust, burning slowly and steadily to a satisfying ending where our "Mary, Mary, quite contrary" will finally, *finally*, get the man she deserves.

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