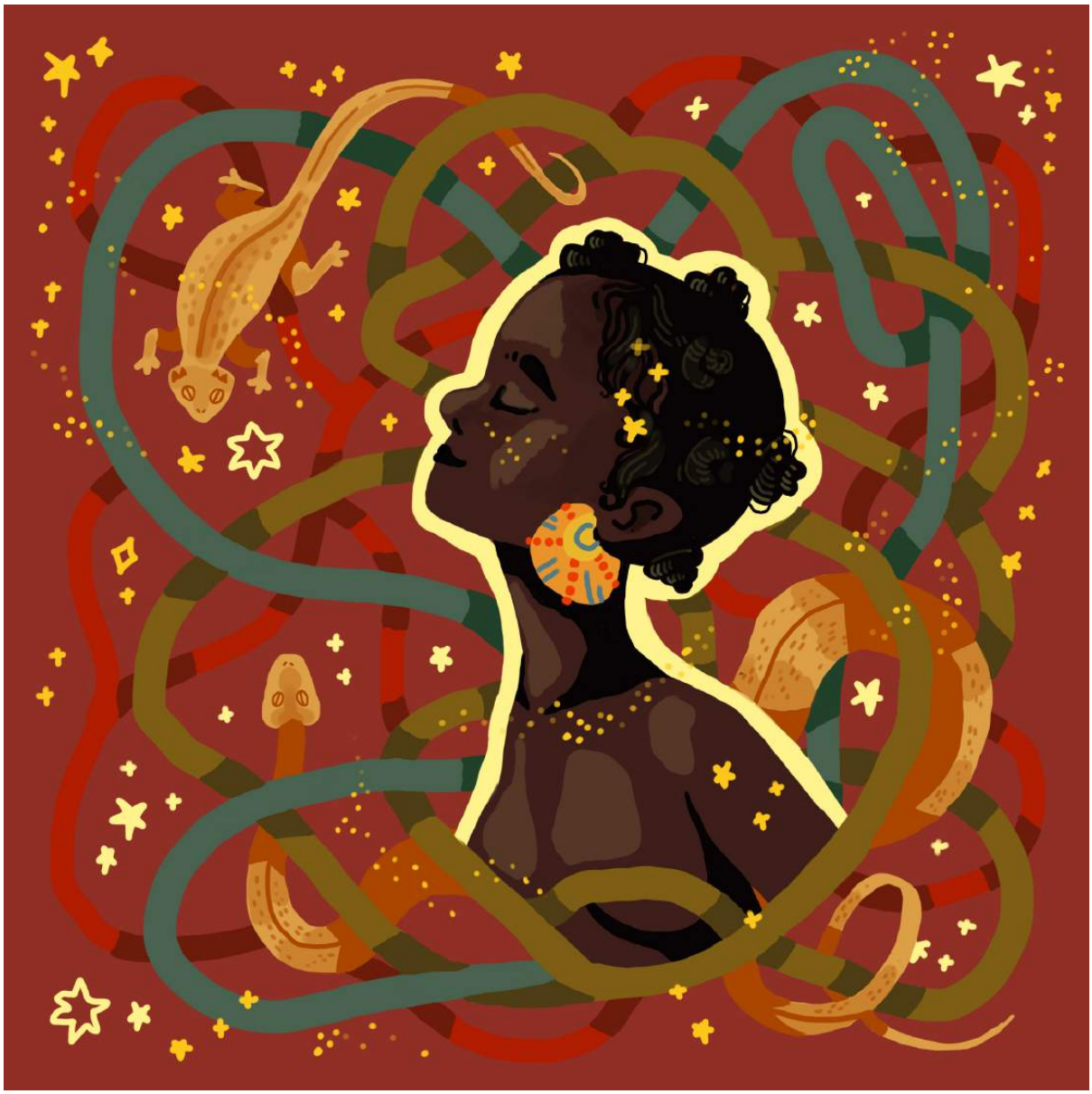
September 2020
Issue 19



Girl Dreaming

Editor's Note By Molly Hill

September 2020

Editor's Note:

Dear Readers and Writers,

A bit of an update and a review:

We've been an online literary journal for five years! And we're celebrating with our first in-print anthology, due out in January of 2021. It was a challenge to distill so many great submissions into our first book, and the narrowing down process was difficult. We're hoping this will be the first of many, and will provide details for ordering and availability when the time comes.

In the meantime, we're proud to present our Fall/September 2020 issue, and we welcome back our returning editors as well as some new ones, who will help us review submissions throughout the school year. We have a rotating group of editors and sometimes have openings. If you have an interest in helping us read and review submissions, send an email to editorbluemarblereview@gmail.com, and we'll discuss.

We continue to accept submissions on our website: www.bluemarblereview.com and welcome creative work that fits our guidelines:

Poetry: Any and all forms, max of 3 per submission

Non-fiction: This includes, book reviews, personal essays, and travel stories all with a max of 1500 words. We do publish the occasional school research paper as well.

Fiction: Short stories, or flash, experimental, hybrid—1500 words max, not more than 3 of these per submission.

ART: Send us a jpeg—4 pieces max

We *try* to respond in 4-6 weeks to all submissions, meaning this is our goal…. sometimes we're much speedier, and others slower, but we do try to keep our writers informed. You can always email to check on how we're doing with the queue.

We're here for questions, and we're as always grateful for the grant givers, the cheerleaders, and our student writers who keep us hopeful and optimistic during this time of Covid uncertainty. Thank you all, and enjoy the issue!

Molly Hill
Editor

Poetry

Meanwhile, I Wish I Were a Garden By Sarah Prtichard-Smith

Spring breaks in like a shallow inhale. Where have we been all this time?
Meanwhile, I've learned that all change stems from pain.
Since, I've felt everything for you.

I collect these, between tears and laughter. "That's okay. And this is what I don't need."
Each day an archaic parallel, like a glass shard held up to the sun. Like a celebration.
I really wish I were a garden. I wish you could see that in me,

all silly and deep, with my hands under your sweatshirt. pink buds sway reduced
to their essences, next morning I wish I were a garden. concrete can't collect the rain.
and nature's so selfish and innocent. we know even death
can awaken us, sometimes. But I'll find some place other to meet you.

Sarah Pritchard-Smith lives and works in Vienna, Austria, where she is currently taking a gap year after finishing high school. She loves theatre and acting, reading, and spending time outdoors. For her, writing is a way to channel her experiences and emotions honestly and an attempt to make something beautiful out of any situation.

---

jiangxi By Jeffrey Xu

time unmade the dense of me, undressed me a
silk-spun mutable. in another orphaned alley, i dropped
my grandmother's vase on the jaundiced ground, so the
vendors took me for a poor child, sold me duck tongue &
bear bile for free. said *make this your own*, shoved a curdled
strip into my unwashed hands, said *you want to eat don't you*
hungry thing in knotted hemiola, raked of rhythm. i affirmed the
affliction, put the cacked flesh to my lips, its pronged end
glistening porcelain, making a sentenceless host of my grainy|
skins. *hungry do not die hungry do not die* i parted my mouth
like a sea — pretended to unname everything, savored the slow
flaying of my twin corpse, the strike of its slow-roast shaft. in the bad
manners i've relearned i tried to whisper, my piecemeal mouth full of bones.
    nothing came out.,

水

when i was young, mama told me that everyone had a relationship
    with the ocean. so she prayed alone in proverb, rippled *abba* between

soothsayer teeth, left me chewing cardboard & plastic in the living room. waif
    like an animal corpse. so she welled marah & elim for new salvation, that i,

might take the dissonance of mopeds for birdsongs. on rainy days like this i
    smear pizza grease on yellow shirts, print the crimson splatter like a dying in

me. drench it in saltless tears. here lies the polyester nation, its tag carving
    forgotten promise. here i've learned to mechanize product, sever the hands that

made it. when i fought with pink-faced boys, silt became my blood, heritage my
    hymnal. called it cleansing at day. annihilation at night. tear by tear the veiled

moon swallows stars' almond eyes, wordless. i foam envy for fishnets as mouths in my dinghy,
gnawing on my desecrated carbonate shell, the tides metastatic. at home i set fire to the monolid
        cancer, drain my skins of their shrapneled silence. wordless.

水

this is where the boys turned red, they said. mountain by mountain, they wove through the bony forest, choked & porous, their molotov gazes abandoning. i stick my lips to history's wet bosom & sour its condensed milk, splash it against my palate in an ebbless flow. at the museum my father points to a picture of his grandfather, says *he was one of them*. says it like an untaken prize. *all i can see is a boy without a home*, i say. *don't you understand china was his the nation was his belonging* he pierces syllables like bayonets in monochrome montage, makes the country all a man owned. these days he doesn't realize that the world goes the other way around, drowning him *undead unlit sunless*
    everything wells inside him — the telephone siphons his verb & adjective, strangles consonants midair, their bounds amorphous. *but yes i silent i a good son bring honor to my family* he clasps his canon m5, makes an angel of the godless soldier, & i cannot help but picture its mouths as open wounds boring bright holes

through my sticky chest.

水

good evening kiss. under streetlamps boys run wide-mouthed, bend over azaleas, their stomachs rubbery & stagnant. father lets me lead our way back to the apartment building, tells me *this is home your home my home no not was it is* so i try to be quiet, burrow my tongue in its wet-marketed exigencies, pocket it like a mother of pearl

beneath the monotone

beating summer's garlic breath still flutters still spits still

begets me in its bloodborne language blows its kiss raw & angular thrashes like a

latent riptide, throttles me unfleshed unspun

unfinished

— but in my butterfly cityscape the ocean
remains moonless, splits wounds out of
ochre skies, draws dust & dew from the
great gash of heaven where another warrior
brandishes his fiery sword, arrives at the nameless
hour, takes penance for poverty, poverty for hunger, calls

me his own *son sunless son*
red guard son temple-tethered son sick son temple dental —

& the barefoot boys still cartwheel in their baby-shadows, teething
heaven's blameless tears like little whetstones, making mirrors of
their lanugo eyes

sea by sea
wave by wave

never knowing how to say goodbye.

Jeffrey Xu recently discovered his passion for creative writing. When he isn't busily typing away on a Google Doc, he can be found playing the piano or devouring chocolate. He is the founder of The Catalitic Journal and attends Livingston High School in New Jersey. He loves exploring and promoting the interdisciplinary connection between S.T.E.M. and the humanities!

Nameless By R. C. Davis

I'm digging
        underneath
the crab apple tree by our old house
with only my fingers. Searching
for the shiniest signs
        of my boyhood. I don't
want to think too hard
about what would have been different.
If we were to swallow down this story
        and start again.

I don't sign any name
on the birthday card I hand
to Mom. I don't know how
        to call myself her son
and say 'I love you' all while
sitting across from her
in the living room.

I mean, some days I think
that maybe transphobia will be gone
in say, fifty years.
I mean,
considering the trajectory
  of things. Let's trace
the graph of then to now
in permanent marker. Let's
soak to our knees in kiddie pool optimism.

This morning,
I say my name over
  and over again
until it fits the cavern
of my mouth. Some
people speak of transition
as a sliding glass door
between two separate selves:
  a boy and a girl
drawing stars with the grease
from their fingers.
    I'm trying
to say that I'm not any
  different now,
or that I am.

I try not to think about
my future as a man like a tree
without roots. I'm chewing
optimism to the core

        until its seeds scrape
the roof of my mouth.
Let's wash our hands
        in possibility
until each finger
drowns in its own wrinkles.

        Look, I'm trying
to tell a story
about the grandson
not in family photos. I'm trying
        to smile against
the span of all this future
without showing any
of my teeth.

R.C. Davis is a high school junior from Oak Park, Illinois. He is a 2019 winner of the Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awards and has work forthcoming in Driftwood Press Literary Magazine and 3Elements Review.

Something that Isn't a Mistake By J. Kincaid Beal

When my hands slipped from their tired grasp around my mind,
They fell into your hands
Think: dreambrain, and fish tongue.
You are not a violent nothing, or a peaceful river, or a noon past purple sleep.
You are not my everything, or my darling love, or the pinnacle of my ceramic anxiety
We met in government class, where we sat in the back folding origami cranes
You are boy, think: beautiful
Synonyms include- scaly, frightening, loveworthy, crime scene, personalized thank you card

Synonyms do not include- perfect, angel, center, whole.
You will never be my home, or my air
But I will let you hold my hand as we run under awnings through the rain
My body broke when i fractured under the pressure of holding up the sky
It did not turn me into diamonds
It left lines on my legs that are not tattoos, or constellations, or anything beautiful
You will not make me less broken, but you tend to make me laugh
I do not wish to be crystalized, or sautéed, or tangled
And I don't want my tangled nothings to suffocate you
What do you miss?
Replacement isn't an option, but small togethers and soft violet glances are
Remembering something fondly is not the same thing as wanting it back.
And, I know you have some hard rememberings
And, I have shoulders. And caramel cinnamon ice cream, and yellow blankets
And we can be two wholes, together
our own little anythings,
with linked pinkies and quiet plans

J Kincaid-Beal is a 10th grade student at Community High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She is a writer, an activist, and a baker, and has several works of poetry and journalism up on *The Communicator* website. She was a semi-finalist in 2019 Washtenaw County youth poetry slam.

Three Black Nights in the USA By Sophia Rose Smith

Soon the sun-backed stars
Focus into view. My mother,

The pull of clean day,
Packed away into suitcases.

Night shuffles its shoulders
Into place and headlocks

Our city, fractured only by
Blazes and broken glass

Embedded in thoughts
Shouldering rubber bullets;

They are blurred by
Haze, my eyes windshield

Wipers clotted with
Rain. I find myself

Searching past the scornfully
Strewn media posts,

Diving down beneath
The epitaphs of sooted

Screens. Names remain
Sloshed around in

Buckets brimming with
Apologies, embracing the

Hallowed hashtag as though
Clinging to words will

Bring divine meaning.
So many expect the world

To be anointed by this
Bruised oil, for the sins

Of history to be forever
Purged– today,

These three black
Nights have shone

Their darkness on
The world, concentrated

Into slick puddles.
Their names still

Ride in with the
Rolling waves,

Flow out with the
Ebbing tide:

Arbery.

Taylor.

Floyd.

Sophia Rose Smith is the People Editor for her high school's newspaper, The MVHS Oracle, and the Editor-in-Chief of Binsey Poplar Press. When she's not writing, she spends her time volunteering as a docent for her local history museum, practicing calligraphy, and drinking too much earl grey tea. Her writing has been recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, California Federation of Chaparral Poets, and Schola Cantorum's poetry-to-music program, among others.

Sestina About Ear Piercings By Aakriti Karun

What is a girl who has not bled
thrice through her punctured skin? Hear
me when I say that bullet holes
hurt less than the needle, though the flesh
taken is the same. The animal
will not hesitate to choose its pleasure over pain. A girl

is not so lucky. What is a girl
who has not leaked salt and blood
to worship the flesh of a man?
A man once held a gun to my ear,
told me to count back from three, punctured my flesh
at two. My mouth made a small hole

and he popped a whole
piece of candy through my lips. To be a girl

is to learn to love your flesh
as you lose it. I sat on his lap afterwards as I bled,
his fingers soft in my mouth. My ears
were white hot centres of pain. I was trembling like an animal.

But what is a girl who has foregone these animal
pains. To be a girl is to be a hellhole
in your own flesh, loving and leaving your body as your ear
gnaws into itself. For days afterwards, the girl
refuses to be touched, she sobs each time they try. To bleed
can be a gesture of sacrifice or murder, but the flesh

taken is the same. & what is a girl who was not purest that day? Fleshed
out, blood and pus dripping from her like an animal?
Whose mothers do not hold her down as she bleeds,
clasping her mouth shut when the hole
is made? Whose hands will not hold down other girls,
as the bullet burrows into the raw flesh of the ear?

What is a girl who has not pierced her ear.
Who has been selfish with her flesh,
holding onto it, as if it is hers. Doesn't she know, to be a girl
is always a tragedy that ends with an animal
piercing through her girlhood. To be whole
is to have nothing with you that's worth keeping. To have bled

it all out. Here is an ear. Pierce it like an animal.
The flesh lost is the same, be it needles or bullet holes.
Remember: to have been a girl is always to have been bled.

Aakriti is a writer based in India. A Dorothy West Scholar, she has been recognised by the Adroit Prizes for Prose. Her work is forthcoming or has previously appeared in Cobalt Review, Ruminate, GHLL, Salmon Creek Journal and elsewhere.

The Devouring By Luci Kirlin

I flash canines in grins
and spin, pointing at dragonflies
bird cries swing in trees, brash
and in the sky, clouds clash
my tongue tastes of moss
and the ocean in my stomach churls wry
I bite my freckles, as my head goes cross
my skin goes numb, at a loss

the world is too much
there is too much air
the sky could pop
and I wouldn't care
eyes burrowed in brains
dark brow furrowed
canines bright
all my body pure light
no care for the sky's endless night

I would be only power
the pious would cower

as my being
self-devours

Luci Kirlin is from California. Luci is a high school student who enjoys creative writing and more specifically poetry. She has written poems since a young age and has recently been published in online and school magazines.

Curls By Nicaulis Mercedes

Curls intertwine each other in small and powerful ringlets
Too powerful for others to understand
And too complicated for some to love
Its moisturized by heavens private pool
It grows like a weed
And thickens up like gumbo
It falls to my knees but shrinks up like a cloud
It dries up like a desert
And tangles up like vines
It isn't a distraction or a boulder
It's the stunning view
It's the garden of eden
Others see it as bad
And some see it as good
Curls are a gift
Curls are a crown
They must be cherished
No matter how thick or loose

No matter how short or long
Its power and grace are underrated
its volume and definition are rarely discussed
Every single miniscule ringlet
No matter how small
No matter how thick
Makes up a beautiful galaxy
think about how every small curl
makes up your amazingly thick hair
No matter how amazingly short you chop it
Its power still remains
It might take long to grow
But it's alright because the most beautiful of things take time
Take care of it
Be patient
Protect it
It's a plant
It's a crown
It's a garden
It's your garden of eden
Don't compare it to taller trees
Don't compare it to looser flowers
Don't compare it to longer vines
Or even to someone else's garden
Because it's yours to water
It's your tree of life
It's your crown
And It's an incomparable prize

Nicaulis Mercedes is a junior at Fordham High School for the Arts with a deep passion for creative writing and art. One of her biggest insecurities used to be her hair, but once she started reading poetry and creative pieces from people like her, she no longer felt like an outcast,since there were people out there just like her who beautifully described her features. Therefore, she decided to do the same for other teenage girls. So far in her creative journey she's founded an online literary magazine called *Journals of Color* for teenagers in her community, will soon be published in an anthology titled *Inside Me*, has written the script for an off Broadway play titled *Hidden Truths* for Roundabout Theatre, and was topical winner of a national high-school poetry contest. She is thrilled to have work published in Blue Marble Review!

---

welcome to the happy valley By Corey Boren
(an ode to Utah County)

take me to the land
of fry sauce
and funeral potatoes.

take me back
to mountain cradles,
unsteady weather,
sashaying cottonwood trees,

take me down skinny streets
where all the houses look the same,
matching church steeples
on every corner.

let's head to the crusty burger king
on timpanogos highway

where i made my first $8.50—

when the high school kid
tells you the icee machine is broken
and gives too many quarters,
i'll smile and know
that some things never change.

drive me to the sticky-shoe theater
on main street (you don't
want to know where it got its name),
let's get overpriced popcorn
and suckers for two.

take me to magpie city,
algae-infested lakes,
year-round construction
and roadkill,

take me where people are polite,
until they aren't.
until i mention my transgender girlfriend
or my fascination with tarot cards.

let's cruise down the highway,
passing tacky logos on buildings
and letters above foothills,

let's breathe in the polluted air,
try not to get sidelined by the texting drivers,

let's count the billboards addressing our state's opioid addiction.

let's park at the pond,
and trick ducks with pebbles,
and watch the sun get enveloped by
the greenery.
as it does,
maybe i'll mention that time
i asked you
if you thought i'd ever leave,

and you laughed,
and said,
"i think you'll stay here forever."

Corey J. Boren is a junior at Utah Valley University with an unabashed passion for pop music and Oreos. He loves storytelling through both poetry and prose forms, and has been previously published in Touchstones, Warp & Weave, and Riggwelter. When not writing, he'll be found ranting about obscure historical events and drawing bad doodles in expensive sketchbooks. To see more of his work, visit @coreyjborenpoetry on Instagram or @BorenPoetry on Twitter.

Erasure By Neha Saggi

When did my culture become cool?
I must have missed the moment it happened
Because I was preoccupied with erasing it.

When I hear them marvel at the beauty of Indian sculpture
I remember my six-year-old self
staring in the bathroom mirror during break
because they asked why I did not have blue skin too.

When I see the line outside the trendy Indian restaurant
I remember my seven-year-old self
watching a girl spit out my lunch on the cafeteria table
and frantically wipe the turmeric off her fingers.

When they tell me foreign accents are beautiful
I remember my eight-year-old self
practicing words like “pizza” and “can’t” in the mirror
so that my “funny” accent wouldn’t accidentally escape.

When I smell the incense in their salons
I remember my nine-year-old self
sneaking into my mother’s bathroom to steal her perfume
because a boy told me I smelled like a campfire.

When I listen to them rave about Bollywood songs
I remember my ten-year-old self
hearing my parents turn off their bhajans one morning
because the neighbors were uncomfortable.

When I help them plan looks for music festivals
I remember my eleven-year-old self
pleading with my mom to take off her bindi
because all the kids were pointing at it.

When they get their “henna” done at Six Flags
I remember my twelve-year-old self
deciding not to wear sandals to school
because classmates mocked my mehndi with brown markers.

When they swoon over Priyanka Chopra’s wedding attire
I remember my thirteen-year-old self
begging my mother to take down her Facebook post
because kids were laughing at my shalwar.

When they invite me to their hot yoga classes
I remember my fourteen-year-old self
dreading mindfulness every morning
because everyone laughed at the word “namaste.”

When they praise the beauty of my language
I remember my fifteen-year-old self
snapping at my parents to speak in English on the phone
because a man in the store was glaring at them.

When they marvel at the complexity of Hinduism,
I remember my sixteen-year-old self
avoiding the stares from my classmates
because I ignored the girl who said “so what caste are *you*?”

My seventeen-year-old self is left confused,
Because I erased myself for them.
Why is my culture only beautiful when I’ve already lost it?

Neha Saggi is a senior at the University School of Nashville in Nashville, Tennessee. In her free time, she enjoys activism, tennis, music, and quality time with family and friends.

Touching the Universe By Sarah Mohammed

Say sugar. Say lamplight.
Say heartbeat. Hush. Fire.
Glass. Firelight plays across
your face, gold skittering
past what we know to be
true. The press of cheekbone
to jaw, straight bridge of
nose. All those hard lines
but soft angles. Pretend
we do not hold each other
close to remember we are
alive. Pretend when we are
together we are not turning
away from our own hidden
shadows, locked tight
beneath our bodies.
Pretend our warmth
does not seep into the cracks
of the universe, setting us
on fire. We have turned over
too many stones looking
for ourselves. There is
no place left for us
to hide. Now, we press

ourselves together just
to remember what it
feels like to be whole.
You pry me open
with your thumbs. I hold
you like the sun, the star
so fragile it lights our
world. We undo
the golden threads of
the earth until they lay in
our palms, bright streaks
of possibility.

Sarah Fathima Mohammed is a Muslim-American emerging writer and high schooler from the San Francisco Bay Area. She has been recognized by the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers and the National Poetry Quarterly. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Canvas Literary Journal*, *Rattle*, *Girls Right the World*, *The Rising Phoenix Review*, *Apprentice Writer*, *The Heritage Review*, and elsewhere. When she is not writing, she serves as managing editor for *The Aurora Review*, reads for *Polyphony Lit*, and enjoys archery.

---

predation By Iris Yu

all I remember of that summer
is acrid storm on tongue, and

anxiety. funny how I thought diffidence
would make me more likeable; funny how

I thought filling myself with water and
watermelon would make me more

loveable. as if bony wrists
and empty hands could catch

your eye, without breaking—or with.
funny how the snail thinks itself safe

before the light swallows it up; watch how
the anglerfish contorts itself around prey,

manipulative til the end, and feasts.
funny how I bite down on nothing.

Iris Yu is a Chinese-American student from Ohio. Her work is forthcoming or published in Sine Theta, The Heritage Review, and the Pulitzer Center. She is an alumna of the Sewanee Young Writers' Conference ('19) and the Iowa Young Writers' Studio ('20).

Telling stories or Teeth By Sascha Nastasi-Feinburg

it’s March fourteenth and my hair is unbrushed
i used to have a friend with cream cheese hair
sour, scallion free
she drank lots of water (the recommended amount)
sharp little teeth
when she left (i knew she would)
i still thought of her
wore her shirts, wore her faces’ shapes
later i wonder
if she still wears mine
i won’t ask (isn’t likely)
later than later
she writes
asks for one of my teeth
a big one, please
(how could i write back?)
march fifteenth i send it (a big one from way back)
you’re welcome i say into
the ziplock bag (wish i had a tiny jar)
march sixteenth i worry
that it’s disintegrated somehow, rotten already
march seventeenth my tongue reaches back
to the gap where she lives
i’m sorry, i’ve lied, i’ll admit
it’s still March fourteenth and my hair is unbrushed

Sascha Nastasi-Feinburg is a high school senior, actress, and (newly) a writer from New York City. She received a Gold Key for her humor piece from the Scholastic Art and

Writing Awards. In her free time, she enjoys snuggling her Pekingese, Don Corleone.

*this splendid poem was previously published in the Spring Issue of *Against the Current*, the literary magazine of the Professional Children's School

Fiction

A Spiritual Meal By Ava Ratcliff

When I enter the restaurant, it's empty. Electric lights buzz faintly, illuminating scaly leather seats. An unidentifiable pop song tinkles out from some deep recess, alluding to rooms undiscovered. A waitress stands guard at the door. I long for the familiarity of hotel room service, for truffle risotto and banana splits.

It is my last night in Paris. In theory, I am in the city to write my Great American Novel in cafés on the Seine. In reality, I eat alone in my hotel room for almost every meal, binge-read Joan Didion, and ride the ferris wheel in the Tuileries Garden three times a day. Every night after dinner, I call my father back in Richmond. I listen dutifully as he gives recommendations for the next day. I nod as he talks, pretending to take notes and saying things like "Of course, I've always preferred Rubens to Titian," and "Today, I saw someone ordering coffee with milk. I almost called the police." One night, to prove to him I was interacting with people besides hotel staff and ferris wheel attendants, I made up a story involving six Brazilians, a nightclub, and a private driver.

Tonight, I am at the restaurant Le Twickenham. My father frequented the place when he was a student in Paris in the 80s, pretending to be Ernest Hemingway or James Joyce or whoever for two years before returning to a corporate job which he never left. He recommended Le Twick (as he called it) for the wine, adding that he could not remember anything else.

The hawkish waitress intercepts me at the door immediately. “Une,” I say dumbly, hoping she will get my message.

She smiles in the way only waitresses can. Polite, at least on the surface. Even with the empty restaurant, she gives me the table next to the door and maître d. Cold wind slithers through the door frame. I keep my jacket on.

Off the crinkly plastic menu, I order six oysters from Brittany and a bottle of the restaurant’s cheapest wine. I feel like a stereotype. I feel like my father.

The wine is terrible, but strong. The oysters are rusty. I peer at myself reflected in their smooth, white emptiness. I imagine myself inside a pearly void, floating in eggy mucus, some anonymous person pulling me into being.

During the meal, I resist the urge to pick up my copy of *Blue Nights*, which I am reading for the third time. The first time I finished it, I tried buying a new book at Shakespeare & Co. but the place was too crowded with preppy Hemingway wannabes for me to even think of literature. Tonight, instead of reading, I decide to think of my father.

It is difficult because I didn’t have a particularly traumatic childhood. My father did all the things fathers are supposed to do, like take me on insufferable fishing trips with hidden moral lessons when we came back empty-handed, and pretend I was a great ballerina even when I was in the back row during every recital. Everything was normal. Since I began college, even our usual fights had been quickly smoothed over by regular cash deposits. I am here in Paris thanks to one such deposit. I’m sure there is some moral lesson about spending your parents’ money bumming around Europe but I haven’t learned it yet, nor do I have any desire to.

My oysters are finished. I signal for the waitress. She blinks at me from her perch at the corner of the bar. The colored liquors behind her appear like stained glass, her glare

almost saintly. “More?” She asks, walking over and crisply fanning menus out in front of me.

“Do you have dessert?”

She pushes forward a peeling red pamphlet with photos of miscellaneous, equally terrible looking microwavable desserts. I choose strawberry cheesecake because my dad loves it. Had he ever ordered the same thing?

It arrives, predictably gelatinous, congealed strawberries leaking syrup across the plate. As I eat, I can’t stop thinking about my dad. I think of our house in Richmond with the wraparound porch. I think of our cat, Sammy. I think of the ski trip to Grenoble I took last week at his suggestion. I think of the obnoxiously healthy foods he insists on stocking in our fridge. I think of the sugars and fats and preservatives I am eating. I feel the strawberries clotting my blood into syrup. I imagine my heart rotting, sugar pouring out the valves. I imagined little maggots, small like risotto, squirming through the ventricles.

Bile rises in my throat. I am done with the cheesecake. Something rumbles through my stomach, like a beast awakening. I stand up, wine-drunkenness rolling across my vision. “Oú trouvent les toilettes?” I hear myself ask the waitress. She points left and I see myself walking, the music growing louder with every step. Past the empty tables is a serpentine staircase with a red SALLE DE BAIN placard on the top step. Letters twist across the sign, pirouetting into each other.

To ground myself as I begin the descent, I hold the iron railing. It undulates under my grip. The music is growing louder. The thing is rising in my throat.

At the end of the staircase, there is a small black door. The music seems to be coming from inside. I grip the doorknob. I have never felt anything so cold in my life. I want to rub

my cheek against the metal, moving it back and forth until split skin reveals pulpy flesh. I want to pull myself open, cleanse myself of the thing inside me.

Stumbling inside the bathroom, I grope for the light switch, illuminating a small bulb in the center of the room. A toilet sits demurely in one corner, a sink with a grimy mirror reflecting its image in another. The music booms, jostling against my thoughts. The rumble is getting louder, swelling into rhythmic hissing.

I feel the vomit rise in my throat. My head is going to explode. I hunch over the sink, mouth agape. I can't breathe. The thing is at the top of my throat. My jaw is detaching from my skull. I am dying. I am going to die. One day they will find me in the bathroom of Le Twick, a pile of shiny white bones.

I look at myself in the mirror. From behind my teeth, I see a set of slitted eyes. I gag and suddenly the thing is out past my teeth, its tail flicking against my lips. Through lidded eyes, a snake looks up at me from the sink. Its mouth is open, music pouring from the gap. I try to listen to it, but it is nothing I have ever heard before.

The ground shifts. I am floating, drawn towards the pearly toilet bowl. I want to curl myself up inside the emptiness until I am nothing more than a speck of brightness. My father will discover a new daughter, a chain-smoking Parisian writer, and I will be content circling through Paris, rising above the city, wrapping my fingers around the hot, white lights until I am just ash, drifting peacefully into the Seine.

Something scratches against my eardrum. Water swirls down the drain. My void tilts. I blink.

"Would you like the check?" The waitress stands in front of me, grimacing and tapping her check pad impatiently. I am sitting in my chair by the door, staring at the line of

waiting people curling outside. The restaurant is full, music replaced by lilting voices. An empty plate of cheesecake looked up at me.

“Yes. I’ll pay in cash,” I said weakly.

~~~

That night, I call my father. He is sitting in his study, grading student papers. I hear Sammy purring across his lap. “Tell me about your last day in Paris.”

“I saw more Impressionists and worked on my novel,” I say, “ And went to dinner at the Twick, like you recommended.”

“How was the wine?” I decide to be honest. “Spiritual,” I begin.

Ava Ratcliff is a senior at Phillips Academy Andover. A graduate of the Iowa Young Writers Studio, her work has appeared in Chronogram Magazine and New Moon Girls Magazine, among others. She enjoys travel, reading, and visiting museums. Find her on Twitter at bookreviewsava.

Man Eater By Melissa Kerman

Umberto’s cooks the juiciest veal cutlet in the entire city. You know this because you’ve eaten veal cutlet at every Italian restaurant in the entire city. You’ve given second chances; with the sand-haired boy two weeks ago you revisited Butera’s and then
~~~

Pomodorino with the freckled boy last week, but at both places the dish still tasted like copper. As you sipped your third glass of Merlot and feasted on cold garlic bread, you realized *this* is why you stick with what you know won't disappoint.

At 7:50 you peer over your steering wheel as your date shuffles toward the restaurant. He had offered to pick you up, but you told him you live far so you'd meet him instead. It's safer this way. Your date fiddles with his bomber jacket collar. His posture rivals the Hunchback and although you're parked yards away, you can tell he's not six feet tall like his profile claims. Maybe five ten, at most. Strike one.

What else is he lying about?

You unlock your phone, pausing to recall which dating app you two matched on. Ah, yes. Now you remember. You open his profile. You conduct your research in the days prior, but it's useful to brush up that evening. *Looking for a smart girl to make dumb decisions with.* Not your first encounter with that tagline, but you prefer a cliched bio over an exhaustive info dump and the photos are what determine your swipe's direction, anyway. In the first, he wears khakis and a Serengeti National Park shirt. Two monkeys perch atop his shoulders. After a quick Google search, you learned that last summer he worked as a safari guide in Tanzania. You hope he isn't a vegan; you dated one of those once. The whole dinner the guy eyed your plate with a look one reserves for clogged toilets.

In his second photo he dons a tuxedo; he links arms with a girl in a wedding dress who's a female version of him. According to his social media, he and his twin sister studied at the same university, and her husband was his fraternity brother. You stalked the sister's page, too. She's an equestrian and graduated from the top veterinary program in the country. She reminds you of the girls your foster mother urged you to emulate, but those girls pelted you with brown paper bags in the cafeteria.

Your phone buzzes. *Just arrived. Let me know when you're here* 🙂 He can wait a couple minutes. You switch back to his profile. The third photo is a selfie. He's handsome in an obvious way, chiseled jaw and eyes like a verdant countryside. He looks like a hybrid of seven other guys you dated, but what earned him your right swipe was his hair. You only date blonds.

You had a great love once. That man was your sun. The air you breathed. The blood in your veins. You still gaze at the photos under your mattress. He was perfect. You still sleep in his old football t-shirts and replay his voicemails like a lullaby; you imagine his velvet voice transcending your recordings and asking for you back. You conjure him so vividly — from his shaggy blond hair to the birthmark on his left cheek — it feels like he's there. As if he never left. Some mornings you think it was all a bad dream. But then you remember you're forbidden to contact him and have no information how.

The moon hovers in your rear-view mirror. Crescent tonight. *Awesome, be there in 5* you text back. Punctuation smiley faces aren't your thing. Not that it matters what your thing is, because your thing can be whatever you want. *You* can be whatever you want, and men can't perform the ubiquitous pre-date social media autopsy because you don't exist on social media. You haven't since The Breakup. The only truth your dates have is your first name, and that's all you ever give.

Who will you be tonight?

Certainly not an orphan. Or a stalker. A threat. Sociopath. Whatever else the restraining order pegs you as. You usually curate your life based around that of your date's, so perhaps tonight you will be a twin. You've always wanted an identical sister. You two could've pranked all the kids in your foster home. Maybe tonight you'll have a pet snake. Last week you had two pet squirrels and a hedgehog.

You adjust the ruby heart dangling from your neck, the last Valentine's Day gift from your love. Sometimes you incorporate it into your fictitious life. You've said you inherited the necklace from your baroness great grandmother; your father is a jeweler and he created it for your sixteenth birthday; it was a souvenir from vacation in Aruba; you found it in a Manhattan taxicab at 3AM. Tonight you'll say you bought matching necklaces while you and your twin studied abroad in Greece.

You hop out of your car and saunter to the restaurant. Your date is probably waiting for your arrival at the bar, debating whether he should go for a handshake or a hug. People are predictable. The host will escort you two to the table and he'll start with small talk, either a comment about the weather or he'll inquire about your day. That'll be the segue into asking if you worked and if so what do you do, to if you went to school and if so where and what did you study, to your long-term goals to your hobbies to if you're watching any shows on Netflix.

When he speaks, you will listen. You will ask questions. He will feel seen. He will feel heard. Your charm will mesmerize him like a child at Fourth of July fireworks. He'll be so enamored he won't even have thought about sleeping with you, and when he walks you to your car, he'll say it's been a while since he felt this excited after a first date. You'll blush, and when he asks to see you again, you'll tell him you'd like that.

But that's the last he will hear from you again.

Just walked in you text as you enter, spotting his blond hair at the dim bar. You chirp his name and he turns. His eyes light up like a fresh lamp bulb. He walks in your direction, smiling shyly when he approaches.

"Hi," you say, beaming. "I'm thrilled to meet you."

Melissa Kerman is a writer living in New York. You can follow her on Instagram @melissakerman

---

Daisyville Has a New Pilot By Livvy Krakower

1.

Charlie's the new kid in the class and boy, does he stand out. It's not that he's funky lookin' with a crooked smile or poofy hair. Nah. He looks pretty normal. It's just that he's new, and we never had a new kid before. I live in a small town, ya see, one that you can't even find on the maps. Try, I dare you! Look up "Daisyville, Tennessee" and nothin' will pop up. So when you go through middle school knowing who ya cheat off of, who ya avoid, and who ya befriend, and then some new kid shows up with only a month of 8th grade left, what are ya supposed to think of him? And he don't talk like us either. He talks all fancy cuz he's from Connecticut. He just sits in the back of the classroom reading all these books with real small print so we don't talk to him and he don't try to talk to us. But today was different. Cuz while Mr. Smith was writing some dumb Shakespeare lines on the chalkboard and blabbin' his mouth about comparing a chick to a summa's day, Charlie stood up and threw the sharpest paper airplane at his head. Hit him right smack dead on his bald spot. And I'll tell ya, Charlie wasn't the new kid anymore. He was a god.

2.

My Grandpa Eugene was the greatest paper airplane maker in the world. He traveled to London, China, and even Australia showing people how to master the art of paper

airplanes. He was going to teach me how to make a folded piece of freedom this Tuesday. Grandpa Eugene was going to fly down to our new house from Japan, but not all planes are as sturdy as his paper airplanes. The principal called me down; the sound of "ooooos" from my classmates followed me as the secretary brought me into his office. I should've known something was wrong when he called me "son" and offered me a piece of caramel. The principal said I could go home early if I wanted to, but what would I do back at the house? I would just end up sitting in front of the glass cabinet that held some of Grandpa's greatest work, and think about how we would never need to expand the showcase; that those are all the paper airplanes Grandpa Eugene would ever make. I walked back into English class and Mr. Smith was teaching us Sonnet 18, but I learned that last year. So instead of listening, I folded last night's homework, mimicking Grandpa's motions. There is a certain feeling that takes over your body when you are finally able to fly the perfect paper airplane. I don't know if I could even explain it in words; Grandpa Eugene probably could. You feel it in your fingertips and surprisingly also in your left big toe. I released it and *wow*. I was aiming for the trash but hey, I'll have time to work on my craft during detention.

3.

Nobody thought a tree could fly, but look at me go. I'm soaring.

Livvy Krakower is a high school senior from New Jersey. She has been previously published in Jewish Women of Words, The Writers Circle Journal, and others.

Yu for Euphoria By Alex Zhang

The front door swung open as if blown by a strong wind, and Grandma barged in, lugging a steel cage the size of her torso. Inside, a yellow cockatiel with orange-spotted cheeks and gray plumage stood on a wooden rod. Setting the cage on the kitchen table, Grandma cooed at it.

She had been acting strangely for months. Just last week, I was surprised by a stray dog sniffing at the refrigerator. For some inexplicable reason, Grandma had let it in, and I was the one who had to coax it out the front door.

Grandma called out in Chinese, “Look at the present I got you.”

Unable to feign disinterest, I walked over to examine the bird.

“What’s it for?”

“I thought you needed a pet. You look so bored.”

The bird squeaked, and I bent down to look at it through the bars. It was the size of a lemon and twitched at me with confused eyes.

From her shopping bag, Grandma pulled out a bag of birdseed and tossed it to me. I fumbled with it as if receiving an unwanted prize from a claw machine.

“Feed this to him every day and put fresh newspapers on the bottom of his cage so he doesn’t die.”

I would have rather had a new phone. Or a new bicycle. Or a bar of soap. But as I watched Grandma clap the dust off her shoes, I envisioned her journey from the conglomerate pet shop that smelled like sawdust to the bus stop with the dropping-

covered bench. I imagined her awkward descent down the steep bus-steps and her trek through crowded intersections and past the barking bulldog in Mr. Miller's yard on the way back to the neighborhood. Could I refuse such dedication?

Carrying the cage to my room, I passed by an oil painting of Mount Lu entrenched in white clouds, a towering reminder of Grandma's childhood. It was one of the few things she brought over from her old Nanjing apartment, where the paint flaked off the walls. I set the cage on my desk, which overlooked the generic suburban neighborhood. I could fit the bird onto my bookshelf, but my science fiction books and treasured volleyball trophies would have to be removed.

I gave him toys: colorful wiffle balls and some Lego pieces. I gingerly offered him the birdseed. He plunged his beak into the hill of nourishment and nibbled. I named him Yu for euphoria because he squawked all evening.

A few weeks later, I came home from school and found Yu out of his cage, roosting on Grandma's lap. Some balled-up tissues lay on the sofa, and a documentary on China displayed on the flatscreen. An open container of Haw Flakes lay on the coffee table along with an unfinished Sudoku puzzle. Our TV was twice as wide as Grandma's old-style television in her tiny apartment back in Nanjing. The camera panned over the mystifying Shilin Stone Forest. I was about to make a remark when I heard raspy breathing. Grandma's cheeks were watery and her eyes red.

"Are you sick? Is everything okay?" That sounded like what an adult was supposed to ask.

Grandma replied, "Ni ke yi ba niao fang zhou ma?" *Can you put the bird away?*

She placed Yu onto my fingers, and I carried him into my room. Seeing her cry was bizarre, as if I were watching her soul slipping down her face. I placed Yu inside the cage and listened until the crying had stopped.

That evening, Yu squawked continually in my room. Somewhere in my neighborhood, a kid was taking up the flute, and their unearthly screeches combined with Yu's shrieking to create an ear-aching symphony. I tried to focus on my calculus homework, but the screaming noise was an auditory wound.

I stopped my pen. It was one of the queer things I didn't normally notice: the sounds in my house. Before Grandma came, I'd blast my classical music on the Bluetooth speaker or watch old TV shows. But now I gave Grandma full reign of the television and wore headphones so she could nap undisturbed. During those days, noise came from my computer and Grandma's television. Aside from the barest of communication for necessities, there was little organic sound besides that coming from Yu.

Unable to concentrate on homework, I carried Yu on my fingers to the backyard. The clouds had dissipated, and the dying orange sunset reflected off the windows. Standing in the shady spot next to the magnolia tree, I listened as Yu chirped incessantly just as he did on the first night. His food was provided for him, his shelter was given to him, his protection from predators was assured, and his only job was to sing.

Grandma's window was open, but the flowery curtains were drawn. A phone rang, and Grandma's voice sounded. I barely listened: "Alex loves the bird …. It chirps all day," but she soon digressed into her aching joints, the lack of stinky tofu in San Jose, and the cost of noodles at Ranch 99.

"It's too calm and quiet here. Back home, I could hear the cars, the motorcycles, and the noisy people. If I walk to the park and sit, I maybe see one, two cars, and one person walking a dog. It's like being on an island waiting to die. Every day, I get up, watch TV, eat, and sleep."

I knew she was a different person in Nanjing. She liked the country and fishing barefoot for freshwater eels. Now, she was a foreigner dropped into my living room. I almost felt

guilty for her life like a prison inmate.

Just then, Yu leapt off my hand and flew through the two palm trees and into the sky. "Yu!" I called, while my mind scrambled to figure out how I had forgotten that birds' wings grow back. He soared the updrafts and disappeared over the suburban houses. I dashed out the gate and out of my cul-de-sac until I reached the road, where the rush hour traffic flowed like the impassable Yellow River. My last sight of Yu was the setting sun glinting off his gray tail feathers as he flew over the six-lane road. It was the time of the year when it was still winter but close to spring. He could wither in the cold, unable to find food or shelter. Or he'd be eaten by some cat, I was sure.

When I told Grandma that Yu flew off, she scolded me, "Birds have wings! Did you think it would just sit there on your hand?! It protected you from bad luck, and now your luck has flown away."

I stood there, not knowing whether to accuse her of wonky superstition or to apologize.

She handed me three twenty-dollar bills and said, "Buy a new bird on your own. But wait until you're older, more responsible. It'll bring your luck back."

"Okay," I said. I didn't tell her that I didn't want another bird, but I accepted the money, knowing I'd probably spend it on a used basketball hoop.

That night, Grandma caused a huge uproar with my parents.

"Who's going to take care of you in China? Did we spend months getting you a Green Card just so you could tour America and go back home?" my mom bellowed.

They had had the same argument many times before. And on each occasion, I would pretend to continue my homework at my desk, or peruse a novel on the couch, staring at

the black letters, but not reading.

I interjected suddenly, without the wave of boldness that I had been hoping for, “You get home every night, and you only see her sleeping, but don’t you know how bored she is? Could you watch TV on a couch every single day until you die?”

With grudging support from my parents, Grandma left the following month. She was received at the airport by relatives and returned to her old life in China.

A few years later, Grandma passed away in my aunt’s apartment in Nanjing. I often thought about her after she left, imagining she had settled back into her pleasant past life, talking to local market owners, going eel fishing with her neighbor, and falling asleep in a familiar bed in a familiar country.

The evening after we burned spirit money for Grandma, I was playing basketball in my driveway when I thought I saw Yu sitting in a tree across the street. It probably wasn’t him. The bird was plumper with shiny black eyes and smooth plumage. But the same orange spots dotted his cheeks. I cautiously approached him, but by the time I got to the tree, he had flown away. His chirping stayed with me as I went inside.

That night, I left my window open and thought about Grandma. I wondered if she received our money and what she would do with it.

Alex Zhang is a sixteen-year-old who lives in San Jose and attends Lynbrook High School. He loves reading novels, manga, poetry, and just about any piece of writing.

Someday he hopes to write a novel about an alcoholic man trapped in a post-apocalyptic world struggling to find meaning in his life (it's a work in progress).

Subway Wall Prophesiers By B.L. Dansereau

So, this is what happened. People started, I don't know, disappearing, I guess is what you'd call it. You can't say dissolving, because that'd be slower. You can't say melting, because there's nothing left after they go. You can't say dying, because there's no body. My brother Warren called it deleting. The universe was deleting people; it was a computer, we were files. No saving, no backup, no recovery.

No one knows who the first to go was. There were rumors on the internet. Small threads on smaller forums. Comments on conspiracy sites. We all remember though when that news anchor, the pretty one—the chick with the, uh, the blonde hair and the botoxed lips? —got deleted live. One second there, the next, gone. Her clothes stayed in the air for a frame and then dropped, like that coyote that runs off a cliff and hangs in the air for second before he falls. Like that.

At first, we all thought it was a big joke. The slowest news week with the anchors trying to up their ratings with absolutely anything. Movie magic. The best CGI effects. But it wasn't. Later, they tried to slow down the frames to analyze the deletion. They couldn't get the cameras to go slow enough, or maybe it was just that fast.

Then more people were deleted. And more. Then it was a blame game for a while—Russia, China, North Korea, ISIS was using some new high-tech warfare. Then it was some sort of plague: a biological thing, a chemical thing, a physics thing. Then, as everything got crazier, as people got desperate, it was the aliens, ghosts, God.

For a while, it didn't affect me, you know? Some anchor in some big city disappeared? Some ambassador overseas? A bunch of kids across the world? Just a bunch of randoms.

It didn't come in waves. Cities didn't disappear at once. There weren't symptoms. It's just random.

Then in my physics class at Galfrey High, my friend Freddie, a pretty girl with all these beads in her braids got deleted in front of me. For a fraction of a second, her beads hovered in the air, and then came loudly crashing down on my desk, and then rolled, clattering on the floor. Everyone started screaming, except me. Any scream of mine was stuck in my throat like a sock, choking me.

Warren, my parents—no one knew who to talk to me about it. Warren had asked me afterwards what it had been like, in the tone he got when he called me a pearl-clutching bitch and pretended to dump my Ativan in the toilet. When he saw the next deletion at his basketball practice, he came home and apologized. Novel.

Dad tried to keep our spirits up, trying to talk up studying, career fairs, college apps. Mom shouted, "Just shut up! Shut up! There's nothing left here! There's nothing left!"

Warren reached a hand under the table to grab my wrist, fumbling along at my pulse until he grabbed my hand and squeezed hard like he was trying to shatter it.

People in town seemed to stop showing up—trying to run somewhere, anywhere, even though everywhere seemed to have this inexplicable plague. Or they just got deleted. Mom stopped driving and Dad started staying home. Warren said it was because Dad didn't want Mom to be alone.

The world got quiet. Cars stopped rumbling because people stopped driving. Planes stopped flying for fear of deleted pilots. Radios replaced their music with a running requiem and a list of the newly deleted and a series of experts talking about everything we don't know.

Mom stopped getting out of bed and Dad and Warren tried to compensate. Funny how the apocalypse ended up making Warren nicer.

Warren made a list once of all the people he knew in town. His best friend Ricky, his favorite teachers, all the kids on the sports teams, a bunch of old people around. More than half the names were crossed out. My name was at the top: *Jamie*, in his chicken scratch, He caught me sitting on the floor of our room, just clutching the list in my hand like a misshapen pearl. He just gently pried it out and refolded it along its creases slipping it into his back pocket.

I stole his bike and then came back alone. Added thirty names and crossed out twenty-seven. One of them was my psychiatrist's.

I overheard Dad tell Warren one night: "You have to be strong."

"Of course."

"No," Dad said, voice ragged, "You gotta be strong, War, because your mom—"

"Is she—?"

"No, but I need you to be ready for anything, okay? For Jamie."

"What about Jamie?"

"Your mom and I, at any time, we could—"

"No. No, we're not talking about this."

I didn't say anything and hadn't in a while.

Warren was driving us home from the de facto last school day in March, listening to a biophysicist theorize the atoms making up people were just flying apart, saying, “The velocity of the force pulling apart—,” when she got deleted on air. Warren swallowed, turned off the radio, and put in a CD to sing along to.

We came home to our father’s apron on the kitchen floor, a boiled over pot on the stove, and a shattered mug in the living room.

Warren stopped in the foyer.

He sniffed hard, just once, and said as brightly as he could, “I’ll make dinner then.”

I knew how it must’ve happened. I’d seen more deletions by then than I have fingers and toes. I couldn’t say anything, not even for Warren. I haven’t talked much since Freddie, Todd, Richie, everyone really. There’s not much else to say. Not much to feel, either, except a little sick.

I just kept editing Warren’s list, imagined him saying, “This isn’t Schadenfreude, this is just masochism.”

I heard Warren cry at night, in his bed across the room. I’d never heard him cry before. I wondered if I should call him a pearl-clutching broken bird or offer him an Ativan. There wasn’t really an etiquette for this. He cried the next day, too, and the next, and begged me to say something, anything. All my words had been scooped out. My vocal chords had been extracted and became the crossed out names on creased and faded notebook paper.

Warren grabbed my hand and made me look at him in the dark. “Everything’ll be okay.”

Two days later, I woke up and Warren wasn't in his bed. I collapsed on the floor, shrieking so long and so loud, I think I might have spittled blood from vocal hemorrhage.

"Jamie! Jamie, are you alright?!"

"You were gone." The first thing I've said in weeks. "You were gone and I was alone."

"I had to get food," he said, and he's crying again. That night Warren slept with me, back to back. I looked over every now and again to make sure he's still there. I slept even less.

Eventually we went outside and walked along the empty streets of our little town. There's a car crashed into a house, and another burned down. The wind howled in the quiet, screeching and pulling at us, the world wondering where all her people went. *I don't know*, I wanted to tell her. No one knows. The shelves of the half-looted stores were half-empty and the air smelt rotten like the dead.

Warren couldn't stand the silence. The world became too quiet for him. He sang all the songs he remembered and read aloud all the books he found even when he's upstairs, cleaning for no one. Maybe it's to remind me he's still there. Maybe it's to remind himself.

Months passed, days blurring together.

We watched a meteor shower in August and Warren tried to goad me into wishing on a star. He broke into a deleted neighbor's house and stole his wine. We're too young to drink, but we're drunk. "We can't die because we're young," Warren sang. He whispered in my ear as the meteoroids fly, "I don't want the world to delete us."

It's not a secret, I didn't say. But no one says it even though it's true. That was true about a lot of things, before. Before.

"I'm sorry, Jamie," he says in the heat, voice cracked and hoarse. I don't know what he's sorry for and I can't ask. My words, like all the people, have been deleted. Backspaced. Undone.

Warren's even clingier than usual as we crawled into bed, grabbing at my hands, my back, my chest and pressing himself as close as he can against me. I felt his heart pounding and his heavy breathing against my neck. He smelt like wine and Dad's cologne. He nuzzled my neck and didn't say, "Goodnight."

When I woke up, I already knew.

B.L. Dansereau is a recent graduate from Johns Hopkins University with a bachelors in archaeology and a minor in classics, which makes her highly qualified to make fun of Indiana Jones, give impassioned speeches about the British Museum needing to repatriate all of its stolen artifacts, and watch vinegar dissolve mud off of quartz. She is a queer, disabled young woman with a fluffy fat cat named Echo, who is named for the nymph but joyously tries to repeat everything she says in meows. She writes to engage wholeheartedly with what it means to be human, which is also the same reason she entered archaeology at all – the Neanderthal who lost her bracelet on a mountainside in Portugal 30,000 years ago had a life and a wild story to tell that she desperately wanted to hear. B.L. has had one poem published in Lagan Poetry Press, and was, a lifetime ago, recognized by Scholastic Art & Writing.

bedtime By Maya Epstein

Want to hear a story, baby girl? M'kay, I'll tell you a story.

I've had my first love. It's odd to think, because it was never something I looked for, never something I saw, never anything I'll have again. Only something I knew in hindsight. He had wrinkles around his eyes when he smiled, and freckles in the summer. He was always steady, clear, shallow-water blue. I met him when we were eight and loved him until we were sixteen. I met him when his mama was pregnant with his youngest sister; you're in the fourth grade now. Nine-years-old. I hope you know how excited he was to trace your little baby hands. To love your little baby lashes.

I never told him. He never told me. We didn't have to, because we just knew, baby. We never kissed in the school yard, or held hands under desks, or touched at all. Just talked, talk, talking. You learn the smallest things with (for) your first love. You go out of your way to find out the middle names of everyone in their family. Connor. Patricia. You want to know what they're thinking, all the time, what wishes and thoughts and sorrows are spooling 'round their thrumming little heart. You think, they're the most beautiful thing you ever saw. And they are, baby, they really are. Until the next beautiful thing.

The summer sun sets behind a powdered sky, and you see the same moon. You talk well into the night, when he's in dust-red Utah and you're here, and you're both exhausted, but you'll stay up for always if it means you get to keep talking. You won't realize how fast always runs out. Don't let it run out, baby girl. Don't let it take your shine.

And something else happens, too.

Loves don't begin or end in a moment. Loves are timelines without dates. Everything is ebb. Everything is flow.

You won't ever really fall out of love with him, or her, or them, just learn to love someone else in a different way. You'll feel guilty about that, but it's okay. You never love the same way; it – the loving, the unloving – morphs each time, into its own lovely, pained shape. And you won't be able to look each other in the eye anymore, because if you do, you might see that lovely, pained shape tucked away in the greener side, pooling beneath a mirrored pupil. And you've worked so hard and long not to see that shape. An aching long time, baby.

And trust me, you'll both wanna talk afterwards, when it's ended, but you're not sure what that means. Ended. *Ended.* How can something end when it never really began? You want to ask him. Her. Them.

But fear'll hold your tongue tight and whisper untrue truths, and so a not quite something fizzles out into a not quite nothing. That will be with you forever. Beautiful, and sad, and it all really depends on what forever means to you.

He's taller than me, now, baby girl. He's stronger, and smarter, and he's loved more and hurt more; you can see it in the way he holds his shoulders. Taut. Tense. Collar bones and cotton. You see? How his writing's a little narrower, his beautiful mind, a little broader, and the world's a little scarier. The wrinkles around his eyes (steady, clear, blue) are deeper, now.

I smooth them with my thumbs, just like this, baby girl; they melt into the miles of his skin. You feel it? Let it (me[us]) go, I whisper. Go to sleep. I hum (him, you, me, us) a lullaby; he wraps us in stardust. And in the nighttime, we fly away to where the remembered things go.

It's quiet there.

Maya is a past tap dance princess, present book monster, and future movie maker. She believes radical empathy and pumpkin bread can heal the world.

At the Race By Luke Power

"This is the biggest racing event this side of the Carrowniskey river, you know."

I sipped the pint and pushed it into my jacket, protecting it against the wind and sand and sea spray. I processed Kieran's words as he watched another line of dark spots grow into small horses and then into big horses. There was sand in my left eye. "Are there other racing events this side of the Carrowniskey river?"

Kieran shivered and I watched him try and get a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket with stiff fingers. Summer in Ireland was when the rain became slightly warmer. That didn't hold true for the west coast.

"No," he said at last. "That's the Carrowniskey river there, and there's really nothing else this side of it."

He turned a sunglasses-clad head and thrust his pint at me. I tried to get both hands inside my jacket for warmth, but the drinks were even colder than the wind.

Kieran walked down the stones away from the beach. "I'm going to get beer. You watch our place. It's in high demand."

I watched the horses thunder past where I stood with the crowd on the rocks and decided this was the worst lads' holiday idea ever. The others had disappeared. I looked around, but all I could see were adults wearing thick-soled boots and caps and Regatta jackets, and kids with damp candy floss and tall ice-creams.

Kieran came tramping back in his yellow Converse shoes and skinny chinos. “Drink up,” he said. “Quick. These’re freezing the fucking hands off me.”

I downed what was left of my cup and put it on the ground and returned his. He handed me a fresh one. It was cold, frosted.

He shoved his hands into his jacket pocket and pulled out two dockets. “Here,” he said, handing me one. “I put down two bets on Lightning Bolt. Twenty quid.”

“Which one is Lightning Bolt?”

“No idea. Here they come now, though.”

The horses were led into a small ring where the jockeys mounted and people could judge where to leave their money. I squinted at the leaflet with the horse, jockey and owner names, and the corresponding numbers. I glanced three times to be sure I was right.

“It’s that tiny one there,” I said.

Kieran looked offended. “No, it’s not.”

“Number eight. It is.”

“That’s a pony.”

“True enough.”

“Why the fuck is there a pony racing against all those?”

“Why did you put money on it?”

“I didn’t know it was a fucking pony, did I?”

He was upset. I watched the jockey mount our Lightning Bolt, brown with four white socks, small but full of a restless energy. Kieran got upset easily since June. Local men and women eyed the horses and headed for the bookies, who roared and shouted, spittle flying in their fervour and excitement for the day’s gaming. My eye was really starting to hurt.

“Come on,” I said. “Let’s head for the shore. They’ll be starting soon.”

We stood right up at the front, tripping and spilling most of our pints on the way down and nearly stepping on a dog with three legs and a lacey collar. The barriers were cold, our hands sticking to the steel.

“Look,” said Kieran. “She’s already behind, and they haven’t even got to the starting mark.”

“She’s saving her energy.”

“Fucking pony.”

It was a 1.5km race and the starting mark was way down the far end of the beach. Kieran was shaking and he’d put the sunglasses back on. I thought about the kind of friendship where I could put a hand on his arm and comfort him.

The speakers through which the commentator’s voice emerged crackled and broke into little pieces in the sea air. The crowd judged the races on excitement rather than any distinguishable words.

“They’ve started,” I said.

He said nothing, his gaze fixed on the little brown and black specks. The commentator spoke a mile a minute. The crowd grew agitated and animated.

“Here they come.”

“She hasn’t a hope,” he said, his voice devastated.

A woman behind us suddenly shouted, “Here she comes! Katie is in fourth; John, would you look!”

She had good eyes. I examined the leaflet with one eye. *Lightning Bolt. Jockey: Katie McNally.*

Kieran suddenly lurched at the barrier. “Jesus Christ, that’s our horse.”

And so it was. Number eight. Her legs were shorter than any horse there but she was a little brown and white flash as she moved into third place, past a big black gelding.

“Fuck, Nate! That’s our horse.” Kieran thrust a fist into the air, the fist with the pint. We were showered with booze. “Come on, Lightning Bolt! Come on!”

The locals cheered at his endorsement. She was a local girl, then.

Kieran turned to me, his sunglasses slipping off and his eyes wild beneath them. “She wants it, Nate. She wants it more than any of them. She wants it so bad she’ll tear up that beach to take it.”

Even as he was talking, she slipped into second place. He let out a wordless whoop. His excitement was infectious.

“That’s it, Lightning Bolt!” I heard myself scream. She would do it. She was so close to taking it that I could taste it.

And just like that, the black gelding slipped past her. The crowd groans their dismay, the commentator shouts, and just like that, the race ended.

Kieran stood pressed against the barrier.

I tried to put a positive spin on it. “She came third. We nearly made a few quid.”

“Did you see that?” he asked, and there was a strange look on his face.

“Yeah.”

“Have you ever wanted anything that badly?”

I considered it. “I don’t know. Maybe.”

“I have,” he said, smiling suddenly. “I think I have.”

Behind us, the woman wept with pride for her triumphant daughter. She was flying, John. Our girl was flying.

Luke Power is a writer living and studying in Galway, on the west coast of Ireland. His work has appeared and is forthcoming in ROPES, Sonder, The Ogham Stone, Dodging the Rain, Perhappened, and Vox Galvia.

Nonfiction

Forget By Yuwei Dou

I fell in love the first time at sixteen years old. I met him on the beach in Los Angeles while I was on a journalism field trip. It was my third year in America, and I still had not quite assimilated into California student life. At school, some girls laughed at me because of my Chinese accent and said things like, “You speak English? You understand what we say? Your English is so bad.” They didn’t want to pair up with me in group projects and told others not to choose me. They said during a practice presentation once, “You shouldn’t have come here for high school. It’s too hard for you. How are you going to do the presentation?!”

At lunch time, most kids avoided me. In freshman year, I spent a month having lunch near the restroom. I’d sit there in the hallway, eating my homemade dumplings, thinking about what I should do to change my accent. The Asian American girls would sometimes pass me and roll their eyes, judging my clothes: “Why does she wear hoodies in summer?” I’m sure they thought I couldn’t understand them. I stayed in the corner, looking at them with no facial expressions or words. They would laugh and leave. I took my backpack and tried to cover the hoodie I was wearing. But it just did not work.

Every time I saw cute couples hanging out together in the hallways, I felt jealous. They sat together every day under the freshmen tree, smiled at each other and hugged. When it was rainy, the boys pulled their coats over the girls. In the education system in China where I grew up, the only thing students could do is study. Girls and boys, especially girls, were expected to avoid relationships in high school and college, keep their noses in the mountains of books and test tubes, but quickly get married after they graduate. During this journalism trip, all the girls had boyfriends back home. Some boyfriends were athletes, others budding scientists, others on the robotics team. At night, the girls would go out to the hallways and Facetime them. And I was always the one staying in the hotel room alone, turning on the television to the international Chinese news.

Our journalism class was staying at the hotel near Santa Monica Beach, where the roller coaster and the Ferris wheel lit up the sky at night. One evening, at the golden hour of sunset, I sat out on the hotel chairs with my leopard print sunglasses watching the sun go down. That was when I saw the glow shining on his body. All I remember now was his face. He walked directly toward me and handed me a cup of pineapple juice. It was around six o'clock in the evening, when many people had started to go back to their hotels. He took off his sunglasses, and I realized who he was.

I knew him from childhood, and our families were long-time business partners. We went to middle school at the same time, but at different schools back in Beijing. I remembered his mushroom cut back then, but my own goal to get first place in academics at my school made me pay no attention to him. Studies were my life back then. I would stay up all night and not even eat for ten hours just to study. I often stayed in the classroom after the school closed with other classmates so we could finish studying before finals.

He looked at me and smiled. He had just gotten out of the water, and the sun reflected on his abs. As a young woman who had never been in love, I thought he looked like a movie star. "Hi, pretty girl" was the first sentence out of his mouth. I should have known then.

"Aren't you Rusal?" I asked, ignoring his greeting. I could tell he was surprised that I didn't respond with giggles. "I know who you are," I told him.

"Of course, I'm pretty sure I'm the cutest boy around here."

It was really weird, the words that came out of his mouth because I knew him when he was still in primary school, when he cried near the basketball court because the teachers took his ball. But he was cute, and my stomach was full of a sudden crush and some jealousy because I was the only single girl on the journalism team. So, I smiled at him and said his last name. "Rusal, right?"

“What are you doing here in Los Angeles?” he asked.

I told him I was at journalism camp, and asked what he was doing here. “I’m on school break. I live here in Beverly Hills now and go to Sierra Canyon High School.”

The next day, he picked me up at the hotel in his dad’s Lamborghini and took me to Disneyland. I wore green shorts, a black crop top, pearl earrings, and a shell necklace, which I broke and lost in the park. I should have realized that that was a sign. But in a place like Disneyland, all the air around me felt sweet and romantic. On Mickey’s Fun Wheel, he held my hand, and we looked through the wire grate windows out at the scenery. I never thought the manmade lake could be so pretty. It was gold, with blue, flowing and shining like glitter wallpaper. I looked at Rusal, and he looked at me, and suddenly, we kissed. I’d never kissed a boy before, but it felt safe that he was someone I knew from childhood, from my homeland where people ate moon cakes to celebrate, where they understood that the Money God controlled wealth, where they believed in good luck charms like the color red, and bad luck like the number four.

I felt the door in my heart that I’d locked had suddenly opened. The next evening, we sat on the beach together, the wind of the night blowing on my face, and he put his hands around my shoulder. We looked at the stars in the sky, bright and charming, like a Hollywood romance. He told me to close my eyes, and when I opened them, there was a ring on my finger. “What’s this? What’s this for?” I asked him.

“It’s my grandmother’s ring. Now, it’s yours.” He kept his charming smile on his face. I looked at the ring, made of gold. In the middle, there was a turquoise-colored jade. From the experience of living with my grandmother, who loved jade, I could tell it was expensive and meaningful. In my culture, jade means “Forever love.”

In between my journalism camp activities, we spent time together. Over the next few days, we swam in the pool, ate eggs benedict on the balcony, and watched Kung Fu

Panda. We promised to love each other forever like the white cranes that mate for life. We promised we would never ever break up. We talked about marriage and future plans. We talked about China and the food we missed from home. If I hadn't known him since I was five years old, I wouldn't have believed what he said.

When my journalism trip ended, I flew back to my town in Northern California. On May 20th, Valentine's Day in China, I posted his photos on my WeChat and Instagram, and I said, "I love you so, forever," followed by a heart emoji. He responded, "You are my girl forever."

At that time, I began to feel good about myself for the first time. I saw myself as successful in all I did: schoolwork, writing, music. With all the efforts I put into becoming skilled at my passions, I had begun to receive what I wanted—acceptance to a journalism summer program, first place in a music competition, the slow but certain publication of my stories in American literary journals. I was back to the girl who I was in China—the girl people believed in before I'd come to America. Now I was a successful young woman who had a boyfriend who loved me so much that he gave me his grandmother's ring as a promise.

Three months after this relationship started, I received a photo on my phone. In the image, Rusal was in a hotel room hugging a young woman who had long blonde hair and Kardashian makeup. There was red lipstick on his neck. A friend of his had sent the photo to me as "a favor," so I wouldn't keep trusting Rusal. Apparently, Rusal had become a player of love.

For two months, I couldn't get away from the image. It was my first relationship, and I experienced this terrible loss. I suffered different levels of sadness that involved the consumption of cheesecake, popcorn chicken, and cup noodles. All the shining points and achievements in my life felt suddenly wiped out. I started to question myself. Maybe I wasn't good enough? Maybe I didn't have the right body shape? Maybe my nails were

the wrong color? It was foolish but it was also like a death, the first of many deaths that I was sure to experience in my whole life. They came to me all at once, and I was like the single flower in the grassland, suddenly wind blows, I was swinging but I still stood there and stayed strong.

But a few months later, I found myself on the award stage again, this time for playing zither. One young woman came up to me afterwards and said, “You played with such a true heart and real feelings.”

I realized then that I hadn’t lost anything. Nothing but some self-confidence, trust, and pride. Sure, my young heart had been broken, but I was still myself, and I had gained a story

As a freshman at University of Iowa majoring in creative writing and musical theater, Yuwei is a creative writer, musical theater actress, journalist, page editor, and professional Chinese Zither player. She is actively involved in school and enjoys joining the community. Yuwei is a professional Chinese Zither player, a 21-string traditional Chinese Instrument for almost 2000 years old, which she has done since the age of four and already passed Level 10 at 11 years old. She enjoys doing competitions and won first place in the National Chinese Zither Competition from 2009 to 2016. She also writes her own zither pieces included: Summer; That year, that river; Childhood; Homeland grassland, Homeland river, etc. As a member of the High School Music Collaborative and the leader of PLAY Chinese Ensemble, Yuwei enjoys using music to share the joy and happiness with other people in the community. Yuwei is a creative writer, even though English is her second language and she just came to America 3 years ago, she has already won the Scholastic Writing Contest, Bay Area Book Festival Writing

Competition, and the Tri-Valley High School Writing Competition as the only double winner. She got the scholarship to study Creative Writing in CSSSA in the summer of 2019. She is also the page editor of Amador Valley Journalism class. She always tries her best to make the school and the Pleasanton Unified School District better as a leader in LINK, an active member in Pleasanton SIAC and a student representative in LCAC and DCLC. In her free time, she enjoys listening to music, reading books and cycling.

Intimacy in an Era of Social Distancing By Aditi Desai

When I think of my mother, I can picture her eyes smiling at our guests — from familiar relatives and friends to newly acquainted coworkers. Her eyes would be curved into bent crescents, creased at the edges like wrinkled grapes. Below her eyes, I see a quick dash of rose blush blended with brown concealer as if her face were a palette of diverse pigments. Just a few minutes ago, she was getting ready for the guests. I like watching her; I like seeing her paint on her freshly washed skin like an artist in-the-making, seeing the twinges of excitement for the night ahead spearheading her rapid movements.

I think about the mantra my mother preached to me, her only daughter*: A good hostess will array wine like bowling pins, clear shelves of clutter, and braid lights across the staircase — do whatever it takes to make the house tidy. A good hostess will cook with an apron made of metal armor, ready to mold stif dough into delicacies. An excellent hostess will make herself presentable because she is the first one to unlock the door and greet guests.*

Indians are notoriously known for "over preparing" most things — for flashy, five day weddings, feet-touching for blessings, soft bread piled into guests' plates. We're known for our hospitality. We're known for shamelessly sending our guests home with bundles of leftover curry packaged in secure tupperware, for giving a hug rather than a handshake when sealing a business deal. For my family, hospitality is a way to help those who cannot be helped. My father used to ask me what I would do to help a king. Would I bring him a jeweled crown or elegant, aromatic meals? None of the above; the king already has all of that, I would respond. Exactly, my father continued, but you could

invite him to your house as you would a guest, listen to him speak about his experiences, and make him feel comfortable. You can always give your presence and open ears to even the richest.

As firm believers in the "guests are God" dogma, my family makes no shortages in inviting guests to our home. Weekends are booked from morning till sundown with my brother and I put on tidying duty while my parents finish hovering over stovetops. Initially, I didn't understand why my parents would race around the house hours prior to extended-family dinners just to rearrange couch pillows or spray vanilla-scented air freshener in the basement. The guests aren't even going to see the basement, I would reason. However, over the years, I, like my parents, have memorized the precise geometry of dining room placemats and silverware. During family dinners, I've learned to take my seat at the table after everyone else has. My parents have trained me to lead small, polite conversations with guests, to smile at their jokes, and to pick up their dirtied napkins. I've learned to not question the imbalance of power between a houseguest and host, apologize if guests are unhappy, and meet their initial hesitation with a dutiful embrace. My people, my family, despite not working in the hospitality industry, are masters of service and caretaking.

When New Jersey enforced a mandated lockdown in early April, my family was not worried about not being able to host events or dinners. Although disappointed, they understood that health and safety rank above hospitality. Yet, although my parents were able to put my mother's newly purchased dinner placemats into storage, they felt a much deeper remorse when shutting customers out of our family-owned wine shop. Since allowing customers to explore the shop and interact with employees is so central to their business, my family has found closing doors to be particularly painful.

How well do you know your customers? I'm sure they're doing alright, I tried speaking to my father as he stared down at his curry one night during dinner. He paused, as if recalling a previous moment: *I may not stand shoulder to shoulder with them — I'm across the counter*

whenever I see them, he chuckled. *But, I know that Ms. Neiley picks up her order every night at 7 P.M; Joseph from the downtown train station always stops in to ask about sale items before lunch. I know that Christine from the hair salon complained about our slow delivery, so we tried to get her wine delivered quickly. I know that the boys soccer team comes to our shop first during their annual holiday fundraiser because they know we always offer candy*. I was taken back by my father's specific descriptions of distinct customers. I assumed his interactions to be momentary, fleeting glances, a quick exchange of dollar bills, followed by a brief, dim smile. Yet, his relationships with customers were like spontaneous friendships, crafted with care and concern. As a skilled host, he showed his customers the same warmth and companionship he did to friends and family.

Now, with lockdown rules slowly easing, my parents grin as they get back into the wine shop and watch customers approach, one by one, six feet apart, some wearing bandannas around the lower half of their faces and others voices muffled by surgical masks. Routine customers make their way towards the dimly lit wine shop and pick orders up from a table which leans against the doorway. They smile with their eyes, just as my mother does, as they wait in the short line.

On the shop's glass window, my father hangs up a sign which reinforces social distancing and curb-side pick up regulations. He winces as he finishes taping the sign; the rules about maintaining physical distance are an inherent antithesis to the Indian ideal of hospitality, which encourages us to bring people closer and nearer to us. Distancing is a ritual we still aren't comfortable with. My parents have traded natural, over-the-counter conversations with customers for momentary glances and weak hand waves. It is a bitter juxtaposition, yet one which reminds us of the community we have built through the wine shop and our hospitality mantra. Routine customers are loyal; they are undoubtedly present in the line outside the shop each day when they don't have to be. Out of the corner of my eye, I spot Christine waiting patiently as she tugs on her loose ponytail. Behind her, Ms. Neily is paging through a HomeGoods furniture manual with a

ballpoint pen in hand. These customers choose to support my parents' business and reciprocate their companionship, their hospitality, even in times like this.

Aditi Desai is a first-year student at Princeton University looking to study Neuroscience and Health Policy. She loves to read investigative journalism pieces which touch on the complexities of human health and mental wellbeing. Furthermore, she enjoys writing, running, hiking, and spending time outdoors!

A Mind of Its Own By Adele Peng

It is only 5 PM but I already know with certainty that the day will end not in a period or exclamation point, but a sigh. I stare with wide-eyed dismay at the disarray of papers upon my desk. 3.8. 63%. 1490/1600. 10^{th} place. $50,000 per year. The clock in my heart is sprinting at twice the speed of the one on the wall; my hand, frantically trying to maintain pace. My mind stumbles into dark labyrinths, only to meet with dead ends and closed doors; thoughts tangle themselves into Gordian knots. Logic disintegrates. *What is the integral of tan(x)? How much energy is dissipated by friction? What is the optimum annealing temperature for PCR?* My mind is shrieking, screaming. *I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.* Pain saturates my veins as a cold fear drenches me, until slowly, a paralysis grips my muscles up from my toes until all that remains moving is the rapid quivering of my pencil, my cramped fingers begging me to

Stop.

My shaking mind slows. Somehow, somewhere, it finds an unlocked door amidst the pitch-blackness. It takes a while of groping around before my fumbling fingers find a

doorknob and twist it open. Beyond it, I am greeted by a flood of light. I lift my face to embrace the sunshine, to allow myself to imagine—

What if?

I picture before me a sunset. The sky is awash with color— the sun bleeds scarlet, trailing in its wake bright oranges, warm yellows. Along the horizon, it peeks out from behind the silhouette skeletons of trees throwing their wild, flickering shadows across a wide expanse of grass. I stand, in the midst of a field, a field with no end, no limits, no boundaries. Surrounding me stand acres upon acres of shoulder-length grasses swaying their heads to the rhythm of the breeze, stretching in all directions a patchwork quilt made of all different variant shades of ochres, of umbers, of greens, illuminated by the orange light of the dying sun. As the last rays of its brightness fade first into soft lavender, indigos and ultramarines, finally into darkness, it scatters its ashes in the form of stars. I can see, in my mind's eye, a resurrection, for the next day the sun will, like a phoenix, rebirth from the very ashes that mark its grave. The next day dawns a new day, a naked and innocent child untouched by the stress of the past.

In this world within my mind, I am content. I spend many a day setting my easel on the banks of a small babbling brook. Shadows flicker, bright stars blinking in and out of existence against the darkness of the stream. Time evaporates as the clouds drift by, as transient as my thoughts. The day wanders away as my paintbrush strolls across the canvas, light and springy on its toes. Birds take flight, mere specks wiggling like tadpoles across the cerulean sky. In this place, no worries exist. It is here where I am completely immune, completely invincible to doubt, to negativity, to the stubborn chains which have clung to me for so long, weighing me down. Here, the burdens of my past release their grip on their emaciated prisoner imprisoned too long in an inescapable reality. Nothing in the world could matter to me: I am completely carefree.

In this world in my mind, I am happy. I have left that world— I belong to another. There is no pain, no heartbreak, no death, no destruction, no desire, not even love. It is a world in which disease and famine have been cured and war abolished. I dwell in a small cottage by the brook. Each day, I am awakened by the chorus of birds, by the first few slanted rays of sunshine dancing across the floor. I can see my late grandfather, resurrected from the depths of his paralysis from Parkinson's. He sits across from me in a magnificent library, impressive for our small cottage, and sways back and forth on a rocking chair. My sleeves rolled up, I am beside a small wooden table, pondering the meaning of existence as I stare out an illuminated window, my hand gently pressing open a book upon its spine. From the other room I hear my sister echoing my heart with a tune bursting with exuberant joy and unrestricted hope. Many an hour I pick up the clarinet and admire its silvery keys glimmering in the sunlight. My fingers flit up and down the wooden holes as I breathe soul into the instrument, infusing into it a life which reverberates past the walls of my cottage and resonates for miles around. It is as though I am speaking to an old friend, one who also speaks through my mouth, as though I have never left his company. In my mind, he is immortalized as that forgiving old friend whom I have never neglected to a corner to accumulate dust even as others were prioritized above him.

I want to remain there, in this wonderful season of eternal spring.

But alas, I at last am forced return to that lonely reality.

It is my mind who forges these fateful chains of reality, but also my mind alone who can shatter them. It is a fatal error belonging not only to me but to our generation. We have bound ourselves to the unending yet meaningless pursuit of success, denied ourselves the right of taking refuge in our own minds, the time to respite, to lose our minds into that terrifying prospect and wilderness of reverie. We have all confined ourselves to numbers, simple delineations between right or wrong, to reality, as a result elbowing out the possibility of imagination. We have deemed daydreaming a delusion, a delirium

entertained only by the insane. We have rejected the childish immaturity of our youth out of fear that reality will disappoint expectation. And while these thoughts may be lies now, there is solace in knowing that perhaps there is still time yet to convert the fantasies of our dreams to reality.

I look down at the unfinished paper clenched in my fist. *What is your dream college?*

I answer with a serene smile.

I don't know.

Adele Peng is an incoming freshman at Princeton University, where she plans to major in neuroscience. She is an avid biology enthusiast and aspiring visual artist/writer. She believes that love as we know it is nonexistent and has made peace with the fact. Find her at adelepeng.com and on Instagram @linaria17.

~This story was previously appeared in Threshold, the literary magazine from Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology. ~

Enough By Justice Hatcher

Writing, for me, is not easy. Is that a bad thing to admit? Whenever I picture a writer, I see two thin white hands: one curled around a cigarette, the other scribbling with a pen across their notebook— all of their thoughts pouring out of their heads and onto the paper instantly. Or sometimes I see my sister's wild excitement, the way she spills over

with her ideas and then runs off to write them down without hesitation. It is somehow harder to imagine my own brown hands hovering over the keyboard, willing the blank document to fill with words that are somehow immediately beautiful and perfect and necessary.

I started writing when I was five years old. My sister would spend hours in front of the large family computer, editing clunky WordArt titles for her stories. And I would watch as younger sisters do, with jealous admiration, until I decided that I would be a writer as well. As an origin story, it feels rather embarrassing. Writing wasn't a part of me naturally. I willed it to be so. Now whenever I sit down to write, my heart starts to beat too quickly and I have to stop. I hit the backspace key one too many times. If I manage to make it through a first draft, I check it over once, twice, and then a third time until it feels like I'm trying on somebody else's clothes that don't quite fit me right, and then I start to think that maybe that is what I have been doing since the beginning. Since I was five and jealous and hopeful.

When you are young, you do not have enough sense to be insecure. You are far too busy believing that because all of your thoughts are new to you, that they will be interesting to everyone else. I cannot recall a particular moment when someone read my work and said, "Hey, this bad," compelling me to hide all of my journals and pencils and files. I just grew up. I preoccupied myself with the things I could prove I was good at. An 'A' on an assignment was an indisputable fact. My confidence was hardly strong enough to stand as an opinion.

If I found anything I didn't like, I deleted it. I have lost so many pieces of myself this way.

It was either through God's grace, a glitch in Google Drive, or a combination of both that I was able to recover several stories I'd written in middle school. And I surprised myself by reading every plot hole, every poorly written scene, every shred of immature

dialogue with incomprehensible joy. All of them to an extent were poor imitations of stories I'd read, but they were mine. Isn't that good enough?

I am always seeming to answer this question when I write. Is my writing good enough? The question is incomplete. Good enough for who? I've circled around this a few times, attempting to answer if it is for myself, if it is for others. But it doesn't matter. It will never matter until I answer the real question that has sat in the back of my mind since even before I was hovering outside of the den doorway, quietly watching my older sister. Am *I* good enough? I believed it then. I was certainly capable of spelling words on the computer and constructing a simple story. I was even capable of creating those unappealing clunky WordArt titles. However, as I grew up, writing became less about the sheer capability and more about me. Were my thoughts and ideas worthy of being shared?

The only appropriate answer to this question, I feel, is nobody knows. But more importantly, who cares?

I didn't write those stories on Google Drive when I was in middle school because I saw myself as a literary genius with new and sensational ideas. I wrote because it was fun. Because it made me fill up with the same excitement as my older sister when I had stories rush in my head faster than I could type them. I wrote for me. And when I found those once lost pieces, it brought me the same overwhelming happiness. Because at that moment, I was good enough for myself.

This is how I write: I turn off all sounds and shut the door. I stretch my fingers after I've written a paragraph without stopping, breathe in and out as a way to congratulate myself. I was afraid to admit my insecurities with this art form, *my* art form, because I felt as if it could not rightfully belong to me. How could I be a writer who curls up at the mention of writing?

However, this thought too is incomplete. I am not at all appalled by the act of writing. It was simply that I could not stand to be a writer who wrote anything unimportant. I had not grown yet to realize that writing is a deeply personal, self-indulgent task. Which is just a nicer way to say that it is selfish. Nor had I realized that there was and is a great possibility of me never writing anything that mattered much to others. But also, that it is okay. It is okay to write something half-decent. It is okay to fail. It is okay to look back at something and cringe. It is okay to be imperfect. It is okay. It is okay. It is okay. And more importantly, it is enough.

Yes, a writer can be a deeply intellectual white man with a leather-bound journal and a nicotine addiction. But a writer can also be me: a black girl who has enough courage and humility to keep writing when it isn't easy until one day it is.

Justice Hatcher is from Jacksonville, Florida but now lives in Concord, North Carolina where she attends Cox Mill High School. Although she has yet not had her work published, she has always found her sanctuary in language. Since childhood, she has been an avid reader and writer but was unsure of how to share her creations. After receiving local recognition in middle school from the Cabarrus County Soil & Water Conservation for an essay contest, she began her journey of finding her voice, which she is now beginning to release.

Ramblings on a Bike Ride By Karma Abboud

It wasn't until I was nine years old that my dad finally let go of the handlebars. One second, his fingers were clasped so tight around mine they were turning white, and then

the next they were gone––and I thought, then, that *this* was flight, all fast and light and airy: A feeling that wound up in your chest like thread, and slowly unraveled the farther out you got. The faster. The older.

I had checked behind me then, grinned at the man a couple yards down the pavement; "Look, Dad! I'm moving all on my own! Look, Dad! Do you see me? Do you see?" Turning back and checking, I was looking at him with my eyes open wide, feeling the wind bite into my scalp, my weak little wings outstretched. He gave me two thumbs up, nodded back to the road. I turned, still smiling, and ran right into the car parked up ahead, my hands held out to block the fall.

That was the first time I saw pain: It was in the raw skin on my knees and hands, in the stars that swam into my eyes, in the throb of my shoulder where my body had met gravel. And my father was right behind me, holding out a hand and getting me to my feet. Be careful, he told me. Keep your head up or you'll fall back. Stay in your momentum.

And so a sore ten-year-old me climbed back onto that bike, with her shoulder bruised up and her knees skinned raw, the girl who wiped away a tear on the back of her hand and pumped her legs harder against the wind. A little of the flight had gone out of me, my hesitant wings drawn back. But there was my dad right behind me––farther out this time, still in sight.

I pedaled down the street, an eleven-year-old and her brand-new bike, and I rounded a corner and suddenly he was gone; stuck somewhere down in the middle of the road, trying to keep up with me. But he was getting old now, older than he was just a minute ago, and I could tell by the gray in his hair that he wasn't going to catch up any time soon. So I turned my head, and I kept on pedaling. Everything counted on it. Stay in your momentum.

I was getting too far and going too fast. That worried me a little, because at twelve I used to worry a lot, that maybe my wheels would freeze up, or I'd hit a branch in the road; I'd already fallen once today, and once was plenty enough for me. But I kept on pedaling anyway––what else was there for a girl on a bike to do? ––and pretty soon, the house was gone too, and somewhere a couple miles away Dad was heading back inside now, leaving my training wheels out for the garbage truck. Training wheels that had been screwed so tight to my bike before, it had seemed almost impossible my dad could undo them. But he worked magic with a screwdriver, my dad.

I decided then that I wanted to go to Rome, on my beat-up bike and everything. I loved the coast and I loved stories, stories my father sang to me about gods and soldiers and Renaissance, stories he kept bottled up inside himself, stories he swore he never had time to write, and––wait. Where had he gone again? Hadn't he just been *right* there? I shrugged off the uncertainty because I was thirteen, after all, and I was big enough to go on my own. You could see it in my voice, in my walk, in the newfound angles of my face: Maturity, fast-approaching.

Fourteen, and I had forgotten how my street looked. Fourteen, and my earbud wires got tangled up in the spokes of one wheel, but I got up after the fall, because the whole world was in reach. It blew out one tire, scraped up my knees, flecked a little blood into my teeth. None of it mattered as much as the coast. Not a single second. Fifteen, and the hum of another biker's wheels sounded behind me on the pavement. I held my earbuds in my hands and looked at him, and suddenly I was sixteen and I was in love, and I was certain that the world had it out for me, clutching my earbuds and clutching onto the back of his shirt as he sped away. Nothing personal, he told me as I wept. We're just on two different routes, you and me. You've got your eyes on Rome and I've got my hands in my pockets. Seventeen and I was mending from heartbreak, but the ocean was something that could be crossed in seconds. It didn't even matter anymore, now that I was eighteen and my bike had gotten so bruised up it couldn't stand itself upright on its two aired-out wheels, and so I kicked it aside and shrunk into the gulf, and there it was

waiting for me: Rome, in my sights. A little piece of the world, a little piece of Renaissance, in my hands. Someday, I would find my way back, I knew it––but it would not be on the beat-up bike I had once ridden, seven years ago, with my father clutching the handlebars. I realized, then, wading through the cypress trees, that I had left everything behind me some couple continents away.

And now I stood, five-foot-six at eighty-one, on the coast of it all. I touched the dead space between waves, saw my own face reflected back at me, and thought: *Sometimes I wish that I had fallen down more often, if only to make the trip just a little bit longer.*

Karma's literary journey began in the second grade with a twenty-page My Little Pony fanfiction. Throughout the years, her passion for ponies has declined considerably, but her love and exploration of writing has never ceased. She's now a high school freshman in Cleveland, Ohio, and has been penning short stories, poems, and novellas for nearly seven years––though this will be her first publication. When she isn't writing, she loves to cook, listen to music, and discuss Victorian literature.

The Road Not Taken, by Robert Frost-A Historical Perspective By David Lu

If you're one of the legions of high school students who have read Robert Frost's classic poem, "The Road Not Taken," you probably view it simply as a philosophical poem about making difficult decisions. Think again.

Many people are oblivious to the fascinating history behind this famous piece, involving the tale of two best friends that ultimately ends in one friend indirectly killing the other through this poem. Not quite what you were expecting, huh?

Here's the poem for a quick refresher:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Without any further research and on the initial reading, this poem doesn't seem particularly sophisticated. Put simply, it's about the poet's choice to take the less-worn road over a well-worn one, on a trip that he's taking. If a little bit of a metaphorical magic is mixed in, it then becomes about the choice the poet has made to make a unique decision, over a choice that the majority of people would have made, in an important moment on his journey of life.

However, a little research reveals that Frost dedicated this poem to Edward Thomas, who happened to be his best friend and to have also been a poet and an Englishman. The story behind that friendship sheds an entirely new light on this poem.

Hold on, I hear you questioning, *wasn't Frost an American poet? So how did he have an English bloke as his best* friend? Well, Frost began his journey as a poet while he was living in England, and returned to America shortly after the first World War.

Like any other best friends in the roaring 20's, Frost and Thomas took frequent nature walks, where they would admire the beautiful English landscape and try to identify interesting birds and other fauna and flora. During these walks, the friends would choose a path at random to venture down, and being the person that he was, Thomas would be constantly regretful of the paths that they missed out on and often blamed himself for not finding any particularly interesting birds (this strange obsession will be explained later). As Frost once said, Thomas was "a person, who, whichever road he went, would be sorry he didn't go the other."

On one particular walk, the pair were impeded by an aggressive gamekeeper wielding a shotgun. Frost, in true American fashion, bunched up his fists like a professional boxer and was fully prepared to start brawling with whacks and thwacks in a gun fight but ceased when he noticed Thomas hurrying away before the situation could escalate.

Afterwards, with Frost in the lead, the two friends marched to the gamekeeper's house. Frost banged on the door, verbally assaulting the gamekeeper upon the door's opening. The gamekeeper was probably mauled by Frost's powerfully poetic voice, which prompted him to hide behind his shotgun again, but was too scared to point it at the fearsome Frost, so he directed it towards Thomas. Like any other sensible human being, Thomas engaged in a tactical retreat, but Frost firmly stood his ground yet again, like the Statue of Liberty standing against the dark depths of oppression.

After this harrowing experience for Thomas, he was deeply ashamed of having acted like a coward. On top of all this, the incident took place while World War I was being fought, and all of Thomas' friends had gone to war. Additionally, at the time, Britain was advocating for "pal battalions," which meant that the people who you grew up with, laughed with, played football with, gone fishing with, and shot guns with, would be guaranteed to be grouped together, and to fight and die together in the front lines. Thus, Thomas must have felt rather excluded and even more of a coward.

However, Thomas was an anti-nationalist. Although he often discussed politics with Frost on their leisurely nature walks, he was disinterested in the politics that started World War I and he despised the propaganda and blatant racism that were denouncing Germans at the time in Britain. He was more interested in enjoying the beautiful English countryside and the birds who called it home. In fact, he was even quoted as saying that his "real countrymen were not Englishmen, but the birds!"

Thomas proudly took a stronger stance against racism, violence and bigotry than before and, continuing the war analogy, he dug deep trenches and stationed plenty of machine guns in his fight against racism – similar to the trenches and machine guns that Thomas faced on the front lines. Wait … what was Thomas doing on the front lines?

Turns out Thomas had chosen "The Road Not Taken." Even though he was an anti-nationalist and had two children, Thomas decided that the politics behind the start of the war did not matter as he had a burning desire to protect the beautiful artwork of nature against the foreign German invaders.

Before Frost sent him this poem, Thomas had initially planned to depart with Frost to New Hampshire in America to escape the war and begin a new life farming, writing and reading poetry with his bestie. It's hard to imagine a more idealistic and pure life than being able to hang out with your best friend for the rest of your life and doing what you both love together, whilst surveying the beautiful rural landscapes.

Although to be honest, while things may have been different back then, going to live with your best friend seems a bit far-fetched. I'd understand the occasional couch surf, but actually moving in with your bestie shows just how close Frost and Thomas were. In fact, later in life, Frost reportedly said of all the people he had met, the only person whom he could truly call a friend was Edward Thomas. Therefore, Thomas's decision to abandon all this after Frost sent him this poem undoubtedly demonstrates the power four five-line stanzas can have on an individual.

In fact, it was this poem that pushed Thomas off the edge to finally make a choice. After a full year of indecision, Thomas had to juggle the two ideas of whether he should emigrate to America with Frost or fight for his beautiful landscapes against the dreadful invaders.

Usually, when faced with a tough set of options, we will brood over it for perhaps a few minutes, maybe even a few hours, at most a day or a week. Sitting on the fence must have been uncomfortable at first, but excruciating after a full year for Thomas.

Frost, superhero-of-sorts, courageously swooped down and saved him by plucking him off the fence and setting him gently on one side, with his trusty side-kick "The Road Not Taken." However, in reality, Frost had set his best friend on a metaphorical bear trap, which would cost Thomas' life almost immediately, by a stray concussive blast wave from a shell, shortly after he was deployed in France.

There could have been no conceivable way for Frost to have foreseen such an event, and I'd imagine he was filled to the brim with regret for quite some time, always questioning himself about what if Thomas hadn't taken "The Road Not Taken."

Now, after all that, I bet your perspective of this poem that you thought you knew so well has radically changed.

David Lu is a student currently in his twelfth year at Pinehurst School from the North Shore in Auckland, New Zealand. He is currently taking computer science, literature, maths, physics and chemistry. Although his favourite subject is computer science, he thoroughly enjoys history. His favourite author and book series is Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson and the Olympians.

Art

Girl Dreaming By Olivia Lee

Girl Dreaming

Girl Dreaming *is a digital piece I painted to emulate a collection of sculptures I saw in a museum exhibit. I was inspired by the intricacy of African artifacts and wanted to capture the beautiful intermingling of human history within the natural world. For the backdrop of vines, I*

utilized deep, earthy tones to mimic the richness of the earth against her skin and the inherent power and lore behind her history.

Olivia Lee is a senior at California School of the Arts – San Gabriel Valley. Her art and writing have been recognized by the Alliance of Young Artists and Writers, Princeton University, and the California Coastal Commission. She has work published, or forthcoming in Canvas Literary Journal, Polyphony Lit, Body Without Organs, Tab, The Journal of Poetry and Poetics, and Apprentice Writer among others. In her spare time, she enjoys watching stationery hauls on YouTube and way too much anime on Crunchyroll.

Convergence of Wishes By Sophia Zhao

Convergence of Wishes

Convergence of Wishes *was taken on a summer trip to visit my grandparents in Shanghai, where we soon visited a traditional temple. The photo serves as a glimpse into the unique practices Chinese temple-goers can partake in. Both young and elderly visitors attempt to balance spare change on their edges, a feat I've been told can increase the probability of fulfilling one's wishes. Traveling with the intent of using a camera—be it a smartphone or DSLR—pushes me to seek out narrative components of an unfamiliar environment; I enjoy creating photos that I can return to, to relive the subjects' emotions.*

Sophia Zhao is a nineteen-year-old from Newark, Delaware currently studying at Yale University. Her creative work has been recognized by the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers and is featured or forthcoming in The Adroit Journal, The Rising Phoenix, The Heritage Review, and elsewhere. She enjoys painting, poetry, and jasmine tea.

Star, Citrus By Sung Cho

Star

Citrus

Star *and* ***Citrus*** *are origami models I created and photographed. Each layer of paper is hidden to the naked eye, so I chose to backlight them to reveal the intricate layers of paper and the organic nature of it all. I only recently took up photography as a hobby, but as cliché as it is, my creative process has always been to capture the surroundings, the self, and the interaction*

between the two in all of my work. Whether it be through my photography or my writing, I am always trying to depict the world through my eyes in a way that I hope is refreshing to others.

Sung is a student from Pennsylvania who enjoys reading and writing in his free time. When he isn't reading or writing, he makes his best attempts at photography. When he isn't photographing, he is eating potato chips late at night (either sour cream & onion, or kettle-cooked).

Girlhood, Mama By Elena Hlamenko

Girlhood

This photo is taken after my sister's last day of kindergarten. She just finished her online celebration and as a treat, we went to the beach as a family. Here, Maria dashes through shallow water in search of shells or a crab, having already forgotten about her momentous day.

Mama

As someone with an eleven-year age difference with my sibling, I've found a chance to relive my own childhood by watching my younger sister. Watching her skip over the water on the beach or shake in excitement when she receives a new toy has been moving: trapped in the body of this sticky six-year-old is a sense of innocence and childhood bliss I so desperately try to capture on camera. In these photos, I want to show the impact that my younger sister has had on our family, and on me.

In this photo, Maria is tired of walking all day and is beginning to whine but my mother refuses to carry her. As an act of defiance, she stops in the middle of the street and clutches my mother's arm with her doll tucked underneath. I was struck by her expression in this frame, as instead of screaming or crying, she expresses pure affection and a desire for my mother to show her the same.

Elena Hlamenko is a rising senior at Stuyvesant High School in New York City. In her free time, Elena enjoys journaling, writing, and exploring the functions on her film camera, in addition to writing for her school newspaper, *The Spectator*. Her younger, six-year-old, sister is the inspiration behind most of her work. With an eleven-year age gap with her sister, Elena has started a long-term project to document the growth of her younger sister over the years.

Sundown in Kenyatta, Fanon Gawks with Grief, Of Rubbish and Railways By Onyekachi Iloh

Sundown in Kenyatta

Fanon Gawks with Grief

Of Rubbish and Railways

Sundown in Kenyatta. *A supplication to hope. A prayer to a future dreamed of. In the foreground, men talk after lifting something into a car boot–Nigerians are a hardworking people, despite governments that see them as nothing but as souvenirs of conquest, each leaving them worse and disillusioned than the last. This picture is a credo to a future where women are kings and the girl child has taken [*been given*] the proper position she deserves–that of relevance.*

Fanon Gawks at Grief *is of a homeless mother and her three children. Heartbreaking. It took me a while before I got this shot and the most intriguing thing about it is that I wasn't accosted*

by any of the hundreds of people using the sidewalk at that moment. Apropos of what I said earlier about the vast majority of Nigerians being averse to any form of picture-taking, it is obvious that there are certain issues of which they take no responsibility, issues about which they have no concern, issues which involve people about whom they do not care if they suffer whatever fate they believe a camera thrusts on its human subjects–a fate from which they shield themselves, and their churches. That homeless woman and her kids are nobody's business, just like that train track, just like the hygiene of public spaces.

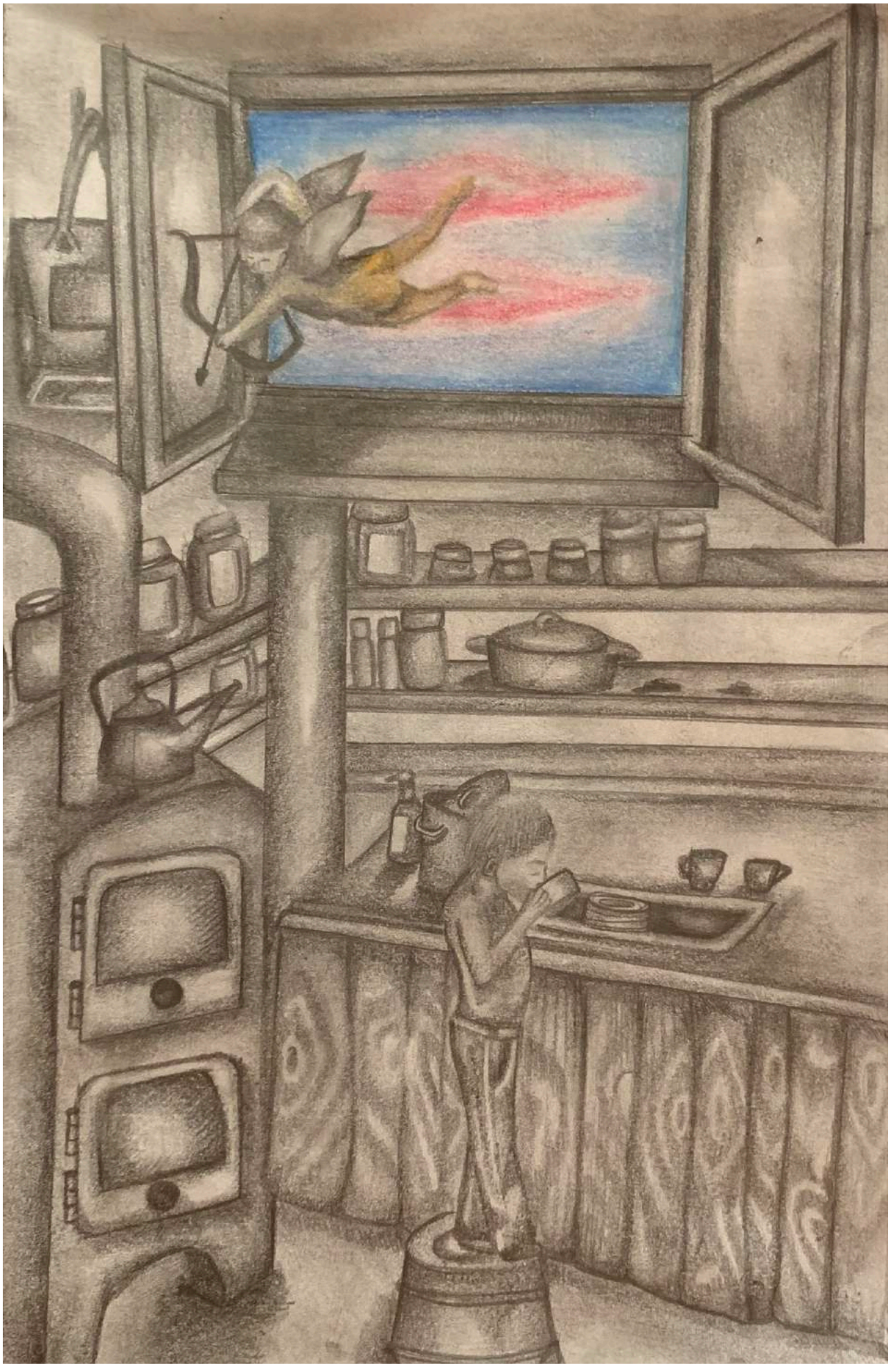
This picture is one of which I wish more of the world to see.

Of Rubbish and Railways *shows a train track, a defunct one, passing through the market, and I see it as a testament to the mismanagement and irresponsibility of successive pseudo-democratic Nigerian governments, who render post-election lip service to a people who do not have environmental and ethical values to keep their marketplaces clean. Our country's steady descent into disrepair has been [is being] facilitated by the collaborative efforts of the ruler and the ruled, the oppressor and the oppressed, government and citizen. And that is why I mourn her.*

Onyekachi Iloh is an artist, photographer and writer from Nigeria who believes in art as a weapon of revolution. When he isn't playing pretend guitar or dancing before mirrors, he reads poetry or mourns his country. He occasionally rants on mutemusings.home.blog and watches the world from the sidelines @demigodly_kachi

---

If You Only Looked Up, Ancestral Weight By Maya Renaud-Levine



If You Only Looked Up

Ancestral Weight

These pieces were created during quarantine and were very much influenced by my experience under lockdown in New York City. I stuck to the most basic materials – printer paper, a ball point pen, a number two pencil, and a few colored pencils – as a reflection of the limitations of our current situation.

If You Only Looked Up *and* ***Ancestral Weight*** *were both created using only printer paper and a number two pencil (though "If You Only Looked Up" has a touch of colored pencil in the top*

window). "If You Only Looked Up" tries to capture the feeling of being trapped indoors and searching for that lifesaving, almost angelic connection to the outside world. I created "Ancestral Weight" while looking at the African artwork in my house – mostly, masks and small figurines that I almost feel experienced quarantine with me.

Maya Renaud-Levine is a sophomore at Beacon High School, born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. She sings in a chorus, plays the piano, goes for long walks with friends, and inhales crime novels. Poetry and art are her favorite quarantine hobbies.

Book Review

Review: One Hundred Years of Solitude By Christine Baek

Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien Años de Soledad*, or *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, reads more like a history than a novel. Chronicling seven generations of the Buendía family, the narrative acts as a wandering guide, often retracing its steps to breathe new life into past memories before moving forward. This writing style could almost be mistaken as discursive if not for the vibrant cast of characters– explorers, scientists, soldiers, artists– whose variegated trials and errors, loves and losses distract us from the rapid shifts through time, and revitalize the glories and pains of humanity.

In the very first chapter, we are carried from the present as Colonel Aureliano Buendía faces the firing squad, to the past where the colonel and his father José Arcadio first touch ice, and then even further back to the founding of Macondo, the Colombian village-home of the Buendías. These bursts of "time-travel" permeate nearly every page and can be as confusing as the repetitious Buendía family names: two Amarantas, four José Arcadios, and over twenty Aurelianos. But the mind-bending effects of these elements are purposeful, forwarding the themes of cyclical fate and the inseparability of past, present, and future. Whether by divine will or by virtue of human nature, each and every generation of the Buendías suffers from Solitude. Family members bearing the

same name even share identical causes, which can take the forms of spurned love, violent death, or decrepitude. And with this infallible condition of Solitude comes slow decay, as the once invincible Buendía family descends into ignominy, unable to break free from the inheritance and conditionings of its predecessors.

While *One Hundred Years of Solitude* can be read solely as a compelling family drama, Márquez's 448-page book serves as a political commentary on the Latin American elite and the cycles of violence and instability plaguing the continent. Intertwining with the Buendía narrative are military campaigns, political executions, and short-lived dictatorships. In doing so, Márquez retells his own experience as a Colombian living in the crossfire of the banana republics. His unflinching narrative of destruction and decay, therefore, is less of a pessimistic criticism and more of a solemn reflection on humankind. The paradise of Macondo, removed from society and technology, cannot last, Márquez seems to say, because human nature and history deem it so.

And yet *One Hundred Years of Solitude* reads as uplifting, celebrating the brevity of joy and peace in the midst of war and turmoil. This strange and seemingly irreconcilable dichotomy only cements the nuance of Márquez's voice and of his belief in our capacity for redemption. As he states in his Nobel Prize Lecture, an echo of the story's ending:

"It is not yet too late to engage in the creation of the opposite utopia. A new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth."

A high school student from the Atlanta suburbs, Christine Baek enjoys writing for The Muse and reading up on history, philosophy, and paleontology.