

Issue 33
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Collection by Isabella Spiess

Editor's Note

No Editor's Note this month

Poetry

Home By Maya Collins

To hold and be held

(Warmth of my skin
Against your sweater)

(Sweet cologne
Perfume of flowers)

The day we leave home
Maria sings of a place for us

Make you a somewhere

Build you a poem

Maya Collins is a passionate artist and writer. She is a freshman in college, currently living between PA and IL. As a biracial 21st century woman, she is interested in resistance and renewal within marginalized communities.

Rowing Catharsis By Beatriz Lindemann

The world is outside my boat:

Tap-down, feather, square,
plunge the blade in the water,
drive with the heels—
A rhythm that cannot be broken.

The world is outside my boat:

Zone in, squeeze your core, don't rush the slide,
strong finish,
set the boat—
Responsibility in the lineup.

The world is outside my boat:

Listen to your coxswain, keep the ratio, stay in time,
push harder,
deeper and deeper—
The pain is temporary.

The world is outside my boat:

No time to stress, no room to slip, no other thoughts are able to enter
a clear mind, a strong drive—
Release, center, finally,
a meditative rhythm.

Beatriz Lindemann is a sixteen-year-old writer who lives in Miami Beach, Florida. Her stories have been published across various literary platforms, from Girls Write the World to the Women's Media Center. She is a varsity rower and hopes to study journalism, political science, or law at university. Her unorthodox upbringing, being raised by two gay dads, impacted her perception of the world and the power of writing.

Theory of Consciousness By Calloway Song

When I was small, I wanted to have every
heroic title & honor in American

textbook history, the same books I stack
my 10-inch monitor from a recent

dumpster dive. The unique combination of names grows
scarcer each year, I reclaim a thing & centuries later it's on

street poster stomped over, maybe it already is. I search
jobs that pay me to stare at words & remembered our local

restaurant was looking for someone, I
thought it was nice, bringing an idea into
existence:

a breath on the window, a canvas for circles,
or sketches on a red-stained napkin. Being a
Lego

designer was my first dream, I wonder if they're still
hiring—the power to make a shelter some constant

or boats into space shuttles. I wanted
a small cabin so we wouldn't have to

pay mortgage, although this sublet room with hear-through walls feels quite similar. My parents interpreted this dream as a sign:

I would become a great engineer &
invent magnificent machines. I was,

poetically, like some robot that runs
into a wall & keeps on running, but

there's this programming joke: *it's not a bug,*
it's a feature. Maybe the robot has a reason

—

a reason that applies to me.

Calloway Song plans on pursuing a BA in Religious Studies and Linguistics at Duke University. He has obtained a green checkmark from Google reCAPTCHA. More at callowaysong.com.

Things a Mother May Say By Harmony Noelle

Answer me Brush your teeth Comb your hair Don't be late Everything okay? Fix your clothes Good night. Hurry up

I Love You.

Just joking! Kiss me goodbye Listen to me

Meds are on the table

No.

Only an A-? Pick up after yourself

Quiet!

Relax Sit still Text me when you leave Understand?

Very expensive Watch your sister for a minute X-rays again today

You're fine.

Zero patience for this.

Harmony Noelle is a twenty-one- year-old studying English Literature and Writing.

Butterfly Migration By Melodie Qian

The painted lady on the tiled floor
was stuck in half wet speckled paint, and dead
in two more minutes, but for now it writhes
and coats its sunset wings as its own clan
flies on, to north and warmth, which shift too soon
these dying days, as Fahrenheit stays up
and up and Mercury will go become
a god, and change this earth to match its burning
home. I watch wind and sun touch lips
to spray a halo soft across these hills,
these specks of gold and black will dance in light
and hide in newborn leaves from turbid night.
My brush is lifted, canvas browned like bread.
I think that Turner would have been aghast,
his paintings warned of solar wrath, but we
still ate the sky and tore the ozone shield,
and with our bellies full, laid back and watched
the fire in distant lands with hooded eyes.

Melodie Qian (they/them) is interested in exploring gender-nonconforming identity and ecology through their writing. In their spare time, they love to play looter-shooter games and watch birds.

In a world of white noise By Shawna Pugh

I sit in silence

Instead of speaking

I tap my foot

Against the floor

Like morse code

Hoping one day

Someone will understand

The look in my eyes

When my lungs refuse
To exhale the words inside

Sometimes I want to scream
But it never leaves my brain
Only tears fall down my face
But they're lost in the noise
Of millions of tapping feet

Shawna Pugh is an eighteen-year-old writer new to publication. Her poetry varies from dark and emotional, to light and romantic pieces. In addition to writing, she enjoys spending time with her family and her three loving cats.

Laika in Space By Sofia Eun-Young Guerra

I told everyone

I was moving overseas

when really, I was just

going back to Texas

and the graveyard of

cascarones in my

backyard, my white

skateboard rattling down

the driveway

no longer my father's
hijita linda

I remember the moon like
I remember burying

my face in the fur of the
stray dog I used to meet

on the corner by the bus
stop when I was a child

My first and last visit
home before spinning out

among the hydrogen stars

Translation note: *cascarones* is the name for dyed egg shells filled with confetti, used (read: cracked on the heads of others) on festive occasions. *Hijita linda* translates to precious little daughter

Sofia Eun-Young Guerra (she/they) is a writer from Tacoma, Washington. Their work has previously appeared and is forthcoming in JMWW, Neologism Poetry Journal, The Inflectionist Review, fifth wheel press, and Eunoia Review. Outside of writing, she spends her time folding origami butterflies and reading about sharks.

Sunrise By Noor Belien

What a waste it is, to make yourself a prisoner
of moments, to live here and still
there, to wish for an eternity, to cry and
dream of going back to that place in time. And i know,

you never asked to get older, to
change, to be here,
but you are here.

How futile it is to live half written stories, to breath in and
only allow your lungs to fill up to the middle, to let
the unfinished love letters wither, because

it is not what it used to be

But,
Your heart is still beating, and
Your legs are still working,
Aren't they?

You are not a half-formed thing, alienated from
all that you once knew.
You are here. You are present. You are still human.

So please go ahead with it,
with the world, and your life.
You survived this far, and you are still here, so
do tell me, what could happen if you decided
to live some more, to love some more?

Noor Beliën is an emerging writer living in Belgium. She is a seventeen-year-old high school student who spends most of her time reading and writing. After graduating high school, she aspires to study English literature at Ghent

university. Aside from devouring books, she enjoys spending time in nature and baking. You can find her on instagram @writtenbynoorr

I Want to be in Love By Ollie Kartowicz

I want to be in love.

The kind of love where you can sit in silence together for hours and be entirely content.

The kind of love where you just like to be around each other.

Not doing anything in particular

Just existing together.

The kind of love where you don't even need to speak to communicate.

You just know.

I want to love in the way I love my favorite book

Or the weight of the keys on the piano.

I want to love in the way that I love to dance

Even though I swear I am allergic to all things beat or rhythm.

I want to love the way I love to sing off key in the shower.

I want to love the way I love the rug on my bedroom floor

Or the blankets on my bed.

I want to love in the way that I love the smell of bookstores and libraries.

I want to be in love with *someone* the same way I am in love with *some things*.

Ollie is a student at Shaker Heights High School and has written for their school newspaper, The Shakerite. They've had a love for writing for their entire life and are glad to be getting their work published. They'd like to thank Mom, Dad, Kaity, Jr, Daniel, Ruthie, and Sophia for making them the best author they could ever be and for always supporting them no matter what.

Yukon XL By Finn Maxwell

Here's our town in case you have forgotten

that in the winter there are two

blue hours when even the trees

look to be shivering without their sweaters.

There are no clouds, not right now,
but I'm sure in the morning
our fog will roll in.

I hope it will rain, but I know you
fear the branches will breach the roof
of our Yukon XL(2004).

The one that took us on all those trips
Dead silent, arid hills till NorCal(In 2019)
It did rain last week,

Or the one before

The redwoods stand tall and strong
despite being snapped in half
from the lightning before.

It cracked their bark,
made a vein down the highway,
from 17 to 9.

I'm out on the porch
to watch the turkeys pass, and to see
the pale blue light fading.

The old school house fallen to sea.

Here's one last lesson before it's never been ours.

I mean ours
as in mine and that old owl's
who sits up in the tree,
or mine and the sharks;
the clenched jaws of the sea.
In case your abhorrence is bubbling
that I didn't leave the house today,
you should know I don't feel well.
Sunsick and afraid
like the dog down the street;
he's barking as I type;
Sunsick from missing
it's just behind the fog till morning,
but he still sees headlights pass.

Finn Maxwell is a sophomore in high school. He writes short stories and poems, often taking inspiration from his mountainous hometown in California. Finn's work is present in The Malu Zine. When he isn't writing, he enjoys exploring his local state park, painting, and listening to music.

u—

i see **ur** lips when
my eyes **fl**utter open in the
dead of **su**mmers nights—

like **bu**tterflies kissing my
skin. don't **u** know that
u've infected me, the way

humidity infects mid-**Jul**y?
one a.m.—i **cou**nt stars,
but i miss the ones i saw in

ur eyes, **bu**rsting with
constellations at golden **hou**r.
u—u don't know that **u** **sat**urate

my **lu**ngs & rob me of oxygen all at
once, make my **pu**lse come in
dizzying **ru**shes. **u** **stru**ck my body

like a comet, **u**nknowingly cradled
my soul & split it into shards by not
giving me yours. **u**—

i hear **ur** laugh a stone's throw away.
cannot determine whether or not i am
dreaming, **but** i catch a papery **butterfly**

wing between my **thumb**
& index finger.

—**u**

Sierra Elman is an aspiring author and poet. She has been recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, Stone Soup, NaNoWriMo, and is a two-time winner of the Sarah Mook Poetry Contest. Besides writing, she also enjoys playing the piano and guitar.

my math teacher says I have friends like wolves By Kyla Guimaraes

all of them, even the boys; says they're all yellow
eyes and gaping jaws when exposed to the unknown.

this is true: I see them howling at the moon from rooftops
until it tastes empty; I see them try to lick up the sunset
with the sharp-clawed curve of their palms. during class,
I learn to sense when breath means snapping canines will emerge
to devour the latest challenge and then hunt rabbits down
the hall until the water fountains are bled of all familiarity.
if they're wolves, I ask, *what does that make me?* I ask
if I'm a wolf too or something even lonelier, nonlinear,
half-drained. *no*, my math teacher says, adjusting his tortoise-eyes
up the bridge of his nose, *you're the prey, the roots' raised curve, the sun's open-eyed longing*, says it like he's praying to be
wrong,
like he's offering to oversee my transformation from prey
to predator, from rabbit to wolf, from conquered to conqueror.
during class, I try to make my shoulders big and sharp-edged.
until it's rough, all wide-eyed and twitchy. I press soft touch
against coarse fur and will it to become one. my math teacher
watches these efforts—raised hands, slick responses, empty
glares—and shakes his head. I can try to be a wolf all I want,
he decides sadly after class, but I won't ever transform. even
if the moon fills again, I won't be able to lap it up. my small
body will just grow mean. I tell him I don't care; he frowns gently.
it's a race for the good life, between me and him. I walk away.

my math teacher watches me in worry: he, the tortoise, free from
the wolves' beautiful howls, and me, the hare, begging for a body
guilty only of intentional harm.

Kyla Guimaraes is a student and writer from New York City. Her work is published in or forthcoming for The Penn Review, Aster Lit, and Eunoia Review, among others, and has been recognized by the Alliance for Artists & Writers and the Young Poets Network. Kyla edits poetry for Eucalyptus Lit, and, in addition to writing, likes playing basketball and watching the sunrise.

rotten apple By Eian Tsou

inside you we dance,
champagne dripping like
blood down our shinbones
atop metal skyscrapers. regardless

of your stuffed streets that reek of
mid-summer citrus or homeless
men with hollow cheeks:
despite your smell of stale piss split
only by the strum of sirens I
love you—and though we chant wordless
hymns into the heart of night, worshiping
shadows, brilliant incarnations, lime-sticky sugar,
red nail polish, my tongue forced
inwards by your nonnative tongue, lustrous
midnight to permeate these white days
of retrograde life juxtaposed
against espresso's buzz,
burning, burning—I still ache.

Eian Tsou is a current student studying in New York. His work has been acknowledged by organizations such as the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers, JUST POETRY!!! Teen Ink, and the WEIGHT Journal. Outside of writing, Eian loves to volunteer, play with his dogs, kick around a soccer ball, and eat tasty foods.

Great Loves of a Young Woman By Grace Hall

My roaring fire and ice-cold diet coke.
My mother's red beret and her dark green coat.
My autumn leaves when they crisp and fall,
My father's and his father's market stall.

Ripe cherries when spring sees sun
Sugar snap peas when the cherries are done.
Witches and harlots, their potions and brews,
My faded, burgundy, combat boots.

Old women with narrow eyes and round glasses.
The righteous and hungry roar of the masses.
Shakespeare's women, their eloquent pain
Dancing in the field when it's pouring with rain.

The slow blink of a cat keeping secrets.
When a man finally admits his weakness.
Scholars with fig trees and chairs full of books,
When women give each other that knowing look.

When word came down from high above,
And writing, my first and only love.

Grace Hall (she/they) is a nineteen- year-old poet from Northern England. She is a feminist, a Jew, and a history student who feels that Queerness is a great strength in life and in art. Her poetry focuses on themes such as bisexuality, womanhood, love and nature. These themes inspire her daily life and, in turn, her poetry. Grace published her first poem in Unfiltered Magazine at the age of sixteen, and has since published poems in Binge Magazine, Paper Lanterns Literature, Pastel Serenity Zine and the Luna Collective.

Fiction

Somber Space By Isabel Ceballos

Beep, beep, beep, blared the sound of my alarm clock. My eyes shot open with wariness then quickly dissipated into a sense of drowsiness as soon as my consciousness returned to me. It was pitch black outside and it looked as if someone had spilt a great big deal of somber, starless ocean space just outside my window. It was cold. My eyes shifted from left to right and I saw that my stuffed animals, blankets, and pillows had all been thrown to my bedroom floor in my restless unconscious sleep. My bed was completely barren except for the sheet that spread and hugged the mattress beneath it. This alarm was set as a reminder not for the day but instead for homework. I absolutely despise my math class. I delayed my homework for as long as possible and now here I was, pushing both my tired body and mind to get up from bed.

Get up, get up, get up. I persisted as if my body was a corpse and I begged for life to return to me again. *Get up, get up, get up.* A whirlwind of the deep dark space outside swirled and crashed against my window. *Get up, get up, get up.* This voice was no longer my own but I heard it echo inside my head. Feeling returned to my bitterly cold fingertips, taste returned to my tongue and a great pressure-like matter accompanied my returning sense of sound. I deserted my starfish disposition stiffly and left my barren bed. I made my way through the quiet hallway and out to my backyard.

There it was standing before me, its shining titanium silver plating glowing in the pitch black atmosphere. A singular circular window could be seen just below the tip. It was a rocket ship, –in my backyard? I moved forward without any control as if my body was in a trance but I didn't resist. Its doors automatically opened like the kind in a grocery store and I sat inside.

A great impenetrable cloud of fog filled my head. It was pitch black inside. A small shape of light took form in the circular window that I had seen outside. This wasn't any bright or

luminescent light either, it was dull and almost fading. With every step I took the fog only seemed to get heavier and heavier. I thirsted for the light. I couldn't stand the pitch black darkness. I hadn't realized I made my way to the window until I laid my head beside it. I felt like a kid riding the bus home from school after a bad day.

The blaring roar of the rocket ship at long last came to a standstill. It was deafeningly silent for a brief moment. I heard the familiar sound of those automatic doors and I hazily made my way outside. My eyes were met with a bone-dry surface. Dirt had completely covered the desiccated ground and it was so dry. Deep narrow fissures embedded themselves into the dry exterior. There were no signs of life, no plants, no trees, no flowers, fruits, or gardens. Wherever I was, it was completely barren and colorless. Except for the sky. Bright twinkling lights shone above the

barren wasteland. It reminded me of the lights on a Christmas tree, warm and all sorts of different colors. The only company that I had seemed to be welcomed with was a rough and scratchy feeling in my throat. I really wanted a glass of water.

*

I see a figure in the distance. Its silhouette appears closer and less faded as it walks towards me. I am still in a daze and I don't feel it going away any time soon. The unfamiliarity of this strange place isn't helping either but I feel too out of place to feel any type of fear. It makes its way closer to me now. I am standing still. *Don't move.* Closer. Much closer now. We are standing face to face.

"Hello." His voice is stern but calm. "Hi." I respond, sleepily.

His voice sounds a bit silly to me. It's in complete contrast to the way he looks. Despite his rocky exterior, he moves swiftly and gracefully, just like a deer. He is pale and nothing more. A small wave of pity abruptly hits me as he continues to speak.

"There is no life here and it's so dry. We are dying." His voice raises concern in me like a rising tide.

"I want to help you. What can I do? I'll do anything— as long as it isn't math." I reply still in a bit of a haze.

“There is no water here. I don’t know what else to do. I am all alone.” His voice now strangely monotone.

“I’m still here.” A voice emerges from what seems to be out of the blue. I guess this place isn’t completely barren.

“I called you here. Our planet is on the brink of death. Get up.” His voice is now familiar to me.

My vision is blurry, and I can scarcely make out the two creatures in front of me. One, a sea spider, is nothing but a pale blob with its sprawled legs. This other creature has no legs at all and when he speaks his mouth opens to an enormous length. At one point I think he’s going to eat me. This creature is much larger than the sea spider. I would say about the same size as a whale.

“Come now, What will we do? We cannot keep standing around here doing nothing.” He declares impatiently.

I want to wake up and leave. This planet leaves me feeling a great amount of brain fog I can hardly think straight. There was nothing we could do. This planet was barren. I looked down at the deep, narrow openings on the surface. The space between matches the pitch black sky. I kneel on the rock hard ground, and speak into the deep somber space, to the dry desiccated dirt. I remember hearing that sometimes on Earth when people spoke to their plants, flowers would bloom, sprouts shooting up towards the sky and the sweet smell of fruits upon the arrival of Spring. Maybe if we did the same here, life would return again.

Soon enough, water begins to rise between these deep narrow fissures. It sounds no different than water flowing through a stream, gently and pleasantly. A sense of relief hits me finally and these animals no longer have to worry. I remember carefully lifting my head, my vision still blurry. I can’t tell what their expressions are but I can guess they’re

pretty happy. Sweetness and warmth fill me like an old childhood memory. Just as quickly as it comes the memory is gone. The pleasantly sweet sound of water transformed into an unsuspecting familiarity.

*

Beep, beep, beep went the sound of my alarm. I found that I had returned to my starfish disposition and my bed was barren. The dark somber space still outside my window. I looked hazily and there was a single star. Bright and shining just like the kind from a Christmas tree. I went to school the next day and my math homework remained undone.

Isabel Ceballos is a senior in high school. She has recently rediscovered a love for writing in a creative writing class. This is her first time submitting to a publisher and she's so happy to have the opportunity to have her work reviewed.

The Rains Go On By Linnea Koops

Stolen speech hissed on the horizon. There was no water to be found that day, not in the wells or the streams. The tap ran dry, the pond drained away, and the ground broke open. Late in the afternoon, the wind whipped thousands of brown, withered leaves from the groves in the east. Echoes of the drought thrummed underground, sending tremors through the earth. Cracks opened in the seams of stone and the sun scorched everything it touched. The earth bled.

There had never been a drought like it, not that anyone could remember. Even Old Lace, the one-eyed woman who kept vigil over the burned remains of a garden, could recall nothing so ravenous or devastating. “There’s trouble in it, I’m sure,” she warned anyone who came close enough to hear. “There’s trouble, and it won’t go easily.”

It seemed that the earth had turned cruel in the space of a day. A hopeful few talked of water underground, saying that a drought that came so quickly would leave quickly, too. They promised to dig and dig until they found a stream, but the soil proved to be hard and unrelenting. Those that hoped quickly retreated into their homes or vanished into the hills, taking their families and fleeing.

When evening came, it brought only lonely, dismal shade. No respite. Rissa sat in the cellar for hours, searching for the last dying breezes. At midnight, the glass of the sallow windowpane cracked. Hot, disquieted air flooded into the room, burning through the last inches of solace she could find.

Left with nothing but a dusty canteen with a few drops of water, Rissa left the house to find her sister.

Don't leave me here, Rissa had begged when Teren left the house, when the burning had just begun. Rissa had stepped outside to see a sky bleached bone-white and a field of withered husks, parched earth cleaved open. She screamed

and screamed, but Teren just stared, a whisper of longing in her eyes.

Teren hadn't stayed. *I'm going to find water. Don't follow me.* She had disappeared into the hills, a shawl wrapped around her shoulders and cold certainty in her eyes.

If Teren thought herself clandestine, she was wrong. Rissa knew exactly where her sister had gone.

Spectral clouds gathered low over the crossroads. Nothing grew there and no one had the heart to plant anything. Rutted roads, caked with dirt, slashed across the valley. This was a place of buried coins and fervent pleas, a place where people might make their fortune or weep and bleed and die.

Don't ever go to the crossroads by yourself, understand? Mama used to say, again and again, more a prayer than a warning. *There's powerful things awake in these hills.* When they were children, it was a game—who would step closest to that tantalizing sliver of hard-packed earth where the two roads met. Teren always won, until one day when Rissa marched up and planted one foot squarely on the crossroads. The world had twisted like a veil drawn back as Teren shrieked, *Your eyes! Rissa, your eyes!*

Neither of them went there after that.

By the time Rissa reached the crossroads, the sun's fevered eye peered over the horizon, weeping droplets of light. It was far too early for another turn of the day, but perhaps the drought had stolen that from them, too. Dust rose from the roads, tainting the air bitter. If Rissa had not known better, it would have seemed a strange mist, an echo of blissful rain.

She stopped at the edge of the road, knowing better than to step onto the crossroads. “Teren,” she called, her voice raspy from lack of water.

A **f**igure came into view. She walked towards Rissa, but for a moment it seemed that she was being formed from the dust of the road, coalescing into the form of a sister. “Teren,” Rissa said again.

A pause. A breath. “I told you not to come here.”

It was Teren and it was not Teren. That lyrical voice had turned low and sonorous, echoing through the road and making Rissa’s bones hum. Rissa would never mistake her sister’s voice, though Teren’s face was turned away from her. “I’m here now, aren’t I?” Rissa said.

A distant rumble echoed through the hills. *Another earthquake*, Rissa wondered, *or something else?*

Teren sighed, sending a plume of dust into the air. “You knew where I would be.” “Where else?” She closed her eyes and pulled her pale yellow shawl tighter around herself. The shawl had been crisp and clean when she left the house; now, it was singed at the edges, ash trailing up the linen cloth.

The clouds were thickening now, weaving across the sky. The air **f**illed with the acrid scent of thunder.

“Will the water return?” Rissa asked, hating every inch of fear in her words. “The earth will collect what is hers.”

The thunderheads rippled across the land. A cool, sweet wind rushed past Rissa, bringing with it the earthy smell of rain.

Understanding finally reached her. “What have you done?”

“It will storm,” Teren said, the edge of satisfaction in her voice.

Rissa shook her head, trying to form words. Her sister was flickering in and out of view as the wind shifted. “Mama wouldn’t have wanted—”

“Let the dead weep and leave the wanting to the rest of us, Rissa. I did what I had to do.”

Rissa thought back to the scorched earth, the barren ground, the empty wells. There’s powerful things awake in these hills. “You don’t need to do this. We’ll find another way, we’ll go somewhere else—”

“There’s nowhere else to go.”

A single salty tear ran down Rissa’s face. She didn’t wipe it away. Another peal of thunder rolled by, louder this time. Droplets of pearlescent rain came down from the heavens, hissing where they hit the road. Where they touched Teren, dust flew into the air, hovering around her in a half-formed veil.

“Stop,” Rissa choked out, unsure of who—or what—she was addressing. “Teren, you have to—”

Teren turned towards her.

“Your eyes,” Rissa breathed. There was nothing human in those eyes, not anymore. Her sister’s eyes spilled over with hungry golden light, piercing Rissa with an incendiary glow.

The rain grew stronger, lashing down with a frantic, frenzied energy. The road **filled** up with water, washing away the scarred ruts, the lonely skies. “It’s done,” Teren said. There was no warmth in her smile. “The rains are here.”

Rissa stepped onto the crossroads, hardly noticing the chill that ran through her. She grabbed Teren’s wrist, but found herself holding loose, sandy dirt. “Teren?” She reached out to touch her sister’s shoulder, hoping for a sign, any sign, that her sister was still there, but her **fingers** passed directly through Teren’s body. She whipped her hand back, recoiling in horror to see that she only clutched a **fistful** of sand.

A gentle, feather-light touch on Rissa’s shoulder was all she had to know that Teren was still there. “The earth claims her due, little sister,” Teren whispered, her voice a faint hiss. “I promised my life. The rains will return.”

With a **final** breath, what was left of Teren collapsed into the dirt.

The rains went on, pelting the dust for hours and hours. Rissa stayed there, kneeling in the remains of the crossroads, until the sky **finally** cleared, revealing a deep, jubilant blue. A **flock** of birds soared above the hills, their cries echoing over the land.

Finally, Rissa said a prayer over the mound in the dust where her sister had stood. She slowly got to her feet and trudged through the mud and the dirt, eyes **fixed** on the horizon. The clouds ebbed away and still she walked, until she came upon the village.

The **fields** were soaked through, water pooling on the ground. Rivulets ran across the paths and off rooftops. A few children played in a puddle that formed in the square, splashing and laughing with delight.

Rissa's steps turned towards the well, now full. She stared down into its inky depths, marveling at the hollow face that greeted her in her **reflection**.

Mama was dead and buried. Teren was gone. The rains had returned, and Rissa was the only one left to see them.

Let the dead weep and leave the wanting to the rest of us.

And oh, how she wished she could.

Linnea Koops is a senior from Shaker Heights, Ohio. She is the president of her school's creative writing club, as well as a co-editor of her school's literary magazine, The Seam. When not writing, Linnea enjoys playing the violin and spending time with her cats, Merry and Pippin. She loves the poetry of Mary Oliver and her favorite word is "quintessential."

portrait of a dead man By Robin Nguyen

The elephant leers down at me.

It's not really an elephant. It's a water stain with a trunk and two sloping tusks, a tail flicking to the right, wrinkly lower lip curled in a sneer.

I roll out of my cot—there's a faint dip in the mattress after nine years—and crawl to the dresser, too bone-weary to stand up.

Eight months ago, James left a china doll in our mailbox. She has waxy skin, red paint flaking from her glossy red lips. An ivory qipao stretches over her chest and my thumb brushes over her porcelain curves as I pick her up. I pinch the stained silk between two fingertips, rubbing it in circles. It's brittle. Transparent. Like him.

He used to write me letters in his sloppy, stilted handwriting. Then, he started mailing me threadbare cadet hats. Dane's shoelaces. The prom tickets we bought together. An embroidered handkerchief with a spring chicken stitched

into the fabric.

The doll smells like leather and cigars and his rosemary aftershave. The way men used to smell, my mother says, when women wore two-inch pumps and walked with halting steps. She told me that smoking was an act of elegance “back in the day” — men were seen lighting cigarettes dressed in Saint Laurent suits, while women in cocktail gowns flicked ashes from sleek cigarette holders.

One month after the china doll, the gifts came to a halt. Just like that. My mother was flipping through crosswords when James’ father, Joseph, knocked on our door. The door nearly snapped off its hinges when he flung it open, his face worn and drooping like Dalí’s melting clocks.

His words bounce around my head as I pull the white canvas from Dollar Tree out from underneath my dresser. “He died from a blast injury two days ago,” Joseph rasped. “An’ don’t tell me he’s in a better place. He’s an eighteen-year-old boy for God’s sake.”

Like clockwork, I climb into a streetcar twenty minutes later and watch the storefront windows pass in a blur of FOR RENT signs and flaking paint. The trees lining the sidewalk grow in small square plots, leaves still stubbornly clinging to their branches. The city is asleep. I haven’t brushed my teeth yet.

The china doll is tucked away in my drawstring knapsack, which rests against my feet. I lean against the plastic seat and line the bottles of paint on the seat next to me. Magenta. Red. Blue. Brown. Three seats away, a wiry old man with a puckered red face puffs on a pipe, his chest heaving.

I squeeze a drop of brown paint onto a paper plate caked with old paint. James didn't use white or black. Ever. He painted bright, bold geometric shapes — yellow diamonds for feathers, green triangles for pine trees. Uniform strips of red, orange and pink sunsets.

I never paid attention to the mint fragrance of his cologne, or the calluses on his palms, until he was gone. I took his raspy laughter and crooked smiles for granted, never saving the stems of angel's breath that he'd snap off and tuck behind my ear.

You don't long for the sweltering heat of Tucson summers until winter rolls in.

I start by painting his thick, dark curls, easing the bristles into the thin canvas. His eyes, a dark mauve. Slashes of magenta to suggest lips. A strong, square chin. A single dot for the mole beneath his cheekbone and—

The old man behind me begins sputtering, his coffee splashing down the front of his Oxford shirt.

The stain is shaped like Africa.

“Jesus,” he spits, dabbing at the coffee stain with a tissue. “I'm gonna die young.” But he won't.

He won't ever know what it means to “die young.”

He lived in a sweeping Craftsman home, I imagine. Probably owned a cocker spaniel named Gloria. He could afford luxury smoke pipes and premium rolling papers, cannabis gummies and bottles of whiskey that he drank like orange

juice.

He lived three times the life James could have lived, and he didn't deserve half of it. And suddenly, I'm making my way down the aisle as the streetcar jolts to a stop.

It's like I'm watching a YouTube video through a first-person camera. I watch *her* hands grab *his* cooled coffee cup. *She* tears the cardboard sleeve to shreds. *She* dumps the rest of the liquid down his shirt.

She stumbles into the gray morning, leaving behind the china doll and the painting of her boyfriend on the streetcar.

Robina Nguyen (she/her) is a queer Vietnamese-Canadian freelance writer based in Toronto, as well as the current Editor-in-Chief of The Outland Magazine. Her work is featured or forthcoming in Shameless Magazine, Disobedient Magazine, the Yale Daily News, Ambré Magazine and West End Phoenix, among others.

A Swift's World By Lauren Kawamoto

The wind whistled through the downy, feathery warmth of the swift's wings, soaring like an arrow to accompany the swift on its wearying flight before dispatching into ribbons of currents that the swift utilized to ride the skies. A fierce, harsh cry echoed from its ebony beak, hooked talons arching through the hair, and the sonic echo rang through the empty air over the rolling quadrants divided neatly below.

The swift's ancient eyes, pitch-black and haloed with steel-strong spirit, swept over the rippling points of the compass rose that transformed into four wild and bright territories. Beneath the grubby point of a human finger on a time-worn, crinkly map, this land meant none to those who were only eager to reap its resources, but to the swift soaring across the blue expanse of the empyrean, it was home.

Look – to the south. There lies beautiful, verdant Summer in emerald glory. Trees stand tall and proud, bark deep mahogany, leaves sprouting from every visible surface of every arching branch. Elegant are the carpets of endless green that ripple across acres of rich moist soil, smelling of ripeness and things long gone.

Somewhere in the distant future, a little girl will be seated in a compartment of a creaky silver train that rumbles along its tracks, occasionally stopping to spill forth passengers or bring aboard new adventurers in search of the next place to walk toward. She will be unable to keep still as the air grows warmer and the white-hot sun cooks the train's weary shell past miles of deserted country until finally –

She disembarks the train, a small yellow bag in hand. Looks around for the hunched, waving couple standing by the door leading outside of the station, running over in delight. Skips into the pasture, climbs over the fence to lie with the cows and chickens, breathes in the smell of growing things, and learns to call this place which thrives in the scorched atmosphere of mid-summer heat, home.

“Dhudum, god of the summer and health, hear me.”

The swift tipped its wings and angled its path to the west, where Summer's green began to recede, giving birth to deep ruby, dark tangerine, and golden yellow leaves that littered the ground like teeth from splintered rowan

branches. Ah – this is Autumn. A gauzy veil of approaching chill hung over the cinnamon crunch of the forest floors, which twitched here and there with small, warm field mice. Nearby, the honks of geese rang by the swift as they flapped their wings, returning south.

Somewhere in the distant future, a young girl will be fishing by a large pond that is quickly beginning to chill as summer dies and fall returns to the countryside. Her small hands are enclosed within her grandfather's big, wrinkled ones, and both pairs are grasped around a fishing pole. Inside of the brightly lit house, lights twinkle; the days are growing darker and shorter indeed. Winter is coming. But for now, autumn – the time of change, decay, and renewal – is enough.

The fishing pole jerks around violently, and the girl almost drops it, but her grandfather steadies her hands. Together, they haul a small carp onto land, and her grandfather drives a hook into its belly. The girl watches the fish wriggle and die, eyes dimming, and anticipates the onion and potato fried meal that this carp will provide.

“Now don't forget, autumn is the season of survival,” her grandfather says to her as they walk across the grass, golden light burnishing the deep purple of oncoming twilight around them. “Our land, this land, it takes care of you as long as you take care of it.” He coughs, covering his mouth with a white cloth, but his eyes twinkle.

The girl nods and hopes that she will be able to remember this fleeting moment.

“Xivanke, god of the autumn and chaos, hear me.”

The north greeted the swift before it could truly descend into its frozen heart. A howling wind crisped with frost smacked the swift sideways, and it quickly righted itself before flakes of soft snow settled onto its feathers. The swift

strained its eyes and thought it caught a glimpse of skeletal, cold-bitten trees bristling with barren sticks and knobbly spindles, peppered only by teardrops of gleaming silver shrouded with a layer of ethereal mist that wafted like steam off of the hard-packed, ice-slick ground. Winter was the time of death and darkness, and yet, the swift only saw a world that was just as alive as any of the others.

Somewhere in the distant future, a teenager will be sitting by the frost-laced window of her grandparents' country house, a mug of hot chocolate clasped within her rosy hands, which are now significantly bigger than the ones that held that fishing pole. She is staring out the window, longing to run outside and roll in the snow, maybe catch a snowflake on her tongue and let it melt into a patch of icy water and satisfaction, but she remembers the stories her grandmother tells her; the wolf of the ice prowls outside looking for young women to snap up, blizzards come without warning to swallow up unsuspecting people, the ground is as thin as a sheet; with one step the ice will fracture and dissolve into knife-sharp shards. Stories that would not faze another child, but would frighten a girl who loves the worlds her grandparents create with soothing voices and dancing words.

Outside, it is a magical, wintery world, one she is forbidden to enter, but as her grandmother sets a plate of biscuits down in front of her, she finds that she is content to stay in the world she knows.

"Qorasil, god of the winter and thought, hear me."

Pockets of green punctuated the snow, which began to melt in rapid sheets that rushed into a throbbing river of cool, fresh water. Brown, beastly bears snagged flapping salmon with hooked claws, stripping pink flesh from the narrow bones. All around the swift, flocks and gaggles of fellow avians soared toward the warm air as nimble buds uncurled, sprouted, and bloomed into pink cherry flowers, snapping daffodils, and long-petaled mums. A rosy light shrouded the chirping of newborn bluebirds, the sigh of rejuvenated oak trees, and the chatter of new life.

Perhaps this was the swift's final stop, the end of its journey. It was as if winter had never come to freeze this place into drowsy darkness.

Somewhere in the distant future, two white coffins emblazoned with the golden cross and one with an American flag draped with great ceremony across the lid rest in the sweet spring grass. A small group of mourners clothed in deep black gather by the trees, where a funeral meal has been appointed, to grieve the loss of two full and rich lives. Visible over the tops of the trees is the beloved country house that has weathered summer flame, autumn wind, wintry storms, and spring buzz for generations.

Standing in black, a graduation cap clasped in both hands, remembering this, is a child becoming a young woman who lets a peck of salt dry on her cheeks. She knows the turn of seasons, generations of lifeblood, and cycles of leaves like no other; it is her blood. Her home. Her inheritance.

"I love you," she says to the quiet calm of the spring air, wiping tears that start anew.

Tomorrow, she will take her first step into the unknown, of navigating the four ancestral corners of the world. Summer, fall, winter, spring.

Somewhere in the distant future, the young woman will grow up to preserve and protect the land her family has kept for as long as the leaves fall and the flowers bloom. She will face love, adversity, hunger, kindness, cruelty – but even when her hands have withered and her hair grays, she will remember what those who came before her have taught her: home is forever.

"But where is my home?"

—asked the swift as it flew onward desperately, seeking a reprieve. The currents billowed like taut sails and carried it across the points of the compass rose, but none felt like its rightful place.

“Maybe there is no place for me out there.”

Said the withdrawn swift as it glided through the air in search of a place to rest its weary wings.

“Maybe there is no such thing—

as home.”

Lauren Kawamoto began writing when she was seven years old. To further her technique, she has attended several programs such as ATDP (Academic Talent Development Program) and BAWP (Bay Area Writing Project). She has additionally won the historical fiction section of her school’s Creative Art and Writing Contest, and been published in the Written Tales Magazine.

Trish By Henry Lomma

“Remember Trish,” my dad said to me. “She went out without a jacket and by the time we found her, she was frozen solid. It took a whole week to unfreeze her.”

“That’s great, Dad,” I muttered. Trish this. Trish that. That’s all I ever heard from him. Now you’re probably wondering who Trish is. Trish is my imaginary sibling that my dad made up to scare me into following the rules. As if one sibling wasn’t bad enough. When I was little it was funny, but now it’s just weird. I grabbed my backpack and walked out the door. It was Friday and I had school.

“Remember not to talk in class, James,” my dad called to me. “There was a girl named Trish and she talked in class so much that her tongue fell out and she couldn’t speak.”

“Ok. Whatever Dad,” I muttered.

“Don’t ‘whatever’ me,” my dad said. “You know, you had a sister once and she...”

I got on the bus before he could finish his sentence. My real sister, Maddy (not Trish) sat next to me.

“If I hear one more word about Trish,” I grumbled.

“I think it’s funny,” said Maddy brightly.

“Well, I don’t,” I said and the conversation ended.

Later that day, during science class, I felt my phone vibrate in my pocket. We were working with chemicals, but I knew that it could be important, so I raised my hand.

“Can I go to the bathroom?” I said. Once I had made it to the bathroom I picked out a stall and slipped in. After making sure I had put the seat down, so as to not drop my phone in the toilet, I unlocked my phone and checked my text messages. It was my dad.

“Be careful to waft when you’re smelling the chemicals. This girl, Trish once forgot to waft and her nose got so big, she could barely breathe.”

“Cool, Dad,” I sent and sighed. Texting me during school? He had gone too far this time.

I once again pocketed my phone, annoyed that he had interrupted my favorite class over this. Later that day, back home, I heard banging in the attic. I asked my parents if I could check it out, but my dad gave his response.

“You had a sister once and she wanted to go into the attic, but we told her no. She did it anyway and she got stuck up there.”

I sighed in exasperation, but the next day I heard the banging again. And the next day. And the next. Then, one day my parents said they were going to go on a short business trip, but they'd be back in the morning. Me and Maddy would be home alone until they got back.

"Don't do anything reckless," my dad said. "The last time we went on a business trip, Trish decided to play with the lawnmower, and she got so cut up, she actually lost an ear!"

"Dad," I said. "The last time you went on a business trip was a month ago and the worst thing that happened was when I bruised my elbow."

"Maybe if you had listened to my Trish stories, that wouldn't have happened," countered my dad. "You know you had a sister once," he began. I nearly shoved them out the door. After they had left, I turned to Maddy.

"Let's go up in the attic," I said. "Mom and Dad aren't here!"

"No!" said my sister. "You heard what Dad said. About Trish."

"He made that up," I sighed.

"I don't know," she said. "He sounded pretty serious."

"Whatever," I said. "You can be a scaredy cat if you want, but I'm going."

“Well I’m staying here,” she said promptly and walked into the kitchen to grab a snack. I ran up the stairs, ignoring my dad’s warning that Trish did that and hit her head. I skidded to a stop in front of the door to my parent’s room. I opened their valuables drawer, grabbed the keys and left the room, ignoring my dad’s warning that Trish had done that and scarred herself with the key by accident. I unlocked the attic door and pushed it open, ignoring my dad’s warning that Trish had done that once and the door had crushed her hand. I climbed the ladder and turned on the flashlight. I looked around the room. I couldn’t find the cause of the banging.

Then I heard another noise. A raspy, choking sound.

I turned around. I was face to face with a horrid creature. As it came into the light I realized what it was. She had a huge bulbous nose, from the story where she forgot to waft. She had red, bloodshot eyes, from the story where she looked directly at the sun. Flecks of ice clung to her skin, from the story where she didn’t wear a jacket. She made another sound and I got a glimpse of what was in her mouth, or more accurately, what wasn’t in her mouth. She had no tongue, from the story where she talked too much. There was a huge bump on her head, from the story where she ran too fast on the stairs. Her body was covered in scars, from the story where she fooled around with the lawnmower. She wore nothing more than tattered rags, from the story where she didn’t do her laundry and had nothing to wear. Her gnarled hands extended towards me. One was deformed and crumpled, from the story where she threw open the attic door. The other had a long scar running across it, from the story where she stole the keys.

Then it hit me. She was here, because of the story where she went up into the attic without permission. Then I realized that I had done everything she had. I didn’t wear my jacket. I had talked in class. I had forgotten to waft. I had been reckless when my parents were away. I had run up the stairs. I had grabbed the keys. I had opened the attic door. I had gone up without permission. I had looked directly at the sun. I had neglected to do my laundry. She made a

croaky chuckle and leapt through the air. Her chewed-on nails dug into my flesh, her maw opened wide, and she attacked. No one even heard my scream.

Years later...

“Remember to wear your jacket son,” Charlie’s mother, Madeline, called.

“I had a brother named James once...”

Henry Lomma is thirteen years old and enjoys writing, playing the clarinet, skiing and reading mystery stories. He lives with his family in New York.

Abandoned Playground By Adah Richards

A chill breeze blows through the abandoned playground. Its cold fingers toy with the swings, casually rocking them back and forth. The wispy air flirts with a forgotten jacket on the bench, lifting it an inch or two before dropping it. Pale moonlight filters down the tube slide and casts eerie shadows that dance and twist, contorting into strange shapes in the night. The children’s bright world seems draped in a thin, supernatural gauze that pools in the sandbox and curls around the teeter-totter. A single, incandescent light bulb struggles against the strangling darkness, trying to penetrate the veil.

A man walking a dog comes down the sidewalk. The dog stops to bark at the preternatural playground. The man sees nothing, but the dog sees a young girl, white and diaphanous, riding the creaking swing set. The child locks eyes with the dog and laughs a thin, drifting laugh.

Slipping down from their undulating perch, she begins to walk toward the dog. The man, still seeing nothing, tugs impatiently at the dog's leash, urging him on ahead. Although he doesn't know why, the man feels a strange compulsion to leave this place. . . quickly.

The dog resists, approaching the playground fence instead. He presses his face to the metal grid, struggling in vain to smell the girl. A small, translucent hand reaches out, and a pair of pale lips giggle at the soft feel of the dog's licking tongue. The dog noses the child as a signal for her to follow him down the slope. She complies, passing through the wires.

The man watches his dog's actions with apprehension. He begins to pull sharply on the dog's leash, yelling and calling in a sense of rising panic. The dog dawdles, appearing to guide something, or someone, down the embankment, away from the playground fence. The dog's eyes are glued to something beside him. The man fumbles for his phone, clumsily turning on the flashlight app. He turns the light toward the dog. . . and sees two shadows on the grass.

The man screams as he bolts. The dog's leash slips from his hand; he races in wild terror down the road, his shoes beating a fast tattoo on the asphalt. The dog looks in curiosity after his owner, wondering what there is to fear in this small stranger. When the dog turns back, the girl is gone. He spins around, whirling in a half circle, seeking through the gloom for a sign. There is nothing, no smell to trace, no shadow to spot, only a dark playground with a weak light bulb casting an anemic glow. The dog lowers his head, whimpering, as he sulks after his owner. His leash drags over

the blacktop, fraying the edge of the nylon handle. A frozen gale whips past, ruffling the fur on the back of his neck. He's sure he hears it whispering, "Thank you for being my friend."

Adah is a high school senior with an addiction to Jesus and words. She has been homeschooled by her mother since Pre-K, and is looking forward to graduating in the coming spring. Adah is currently studying Creative Writing, and is excited to see how God plans on using her. Adah also loves horses (especially Appaloosas), spending every minute she can with them. Her main hobby is model-horse collecting/customizing, and her blog can be found at: spotteddreamsstudio.blogspot.com.

The Final March By Alec Damien

"Band, ten-hut!" exclaimed Karlee, calling the band to attention.

It was the last time for a lot of things, but it was the last time I'd be marching down the track to the stands. It was the last time I'd hear that call for attention before a game. It was the final day of being a section leader. It was the end.

It was so loud, yet I couldn't hear a single thing. No faint taps of drumsticks, passing conversations from the crowd, not even the sound of my own steps. I was stuck in my head as I looked at my band for one of the last times. My gaze

shifted to Carter, my beloved underclassman and co-section leader, whom I want to pass the reins onto after I graduate. I saw that look in his eyes that matched my own, it was almost as if the knot in my chest was just as bad as his. It was only a few seconds, but I looked away because that's when the tears started.

My eyes burned with emotion, I couldn't even pinpoint what I was feeling. There was something so sad about this moment, yet it felt so fulfilling. I wasn't ever ready for change, I wasn't ready for it to be my turn. But I knew it was inevitable.

As we marched in unison, it felt like time had slowed nearly to a stop as we approached the front of the stands. Before I knew it, the roll-off for the national anthem rang out, and I felt the volume of the snare drum rattling against my ribs. It was the same routine as every other game, playing the national anthem, following it up with loyalty, and then making our way to the end zone where we would play. It felt like every other game to everyone else, and in reality, it was like every other game. But I felt like I was losing a part of myself as I played those same songs I'd played only two weeks prior.

It seemed only a moment's notice before halftime came around. I walked in close tracks behind Karlee, Carter, and Mateyka. It was like I was walking with my family one last time before going to college,— at least that's what it felt like.

The halftime show felt like a blur in a way. I couldn't even remember anything about it at the time. I stepped off the field. I only remember messing up once or twice, but it wasn't anything too noticeable other than something I would notice.

We actually did it, for the first time, we finally performed the entire halftime show, and with few mistakes at that. It felt perfect, but what I was feeling wasn't. It was far from perfect, I felt so empty in a way, like I was missing something. But that something wasn't anything I could attain.

It was the longing to do it all again one last time.

Alec E. Damien is a seventeen-year-old student author and performer of the fine arts, Born in Mount Vernon, Illinois. He is working to get his high school diploma, as he plans to attend college to pursue a career in music production and writing. Once he had started writing in his early years of elementary school his writing career has only continued to evolve over the years. Further into his high school years, and now as a senior student at Mount Vernon Township High School, he plays a vital role in the art and music department, including being a part of the school marching band and symphonic band as a senior trumpet section leader and first chair. Being new to the writing scene, Damien plans to dive into genres of writing such as; Dramatic narratives, Horror, Thrillers, and Fictional narratives.

Nonfiction

Chai Chronicles By Diya Maria Tom

Talking about the Kerala chai requires a geographical explanation of the land that is even titled as God's own country, where the emerald green landscapes meet the bright blue embrace of the Arabian sea. But amongst all this charm, it's the evenings at home that truly transport you to a dimension of artistry, emotions, and sweetness beyond compare.

The evenings are always different. It can be a warm, golden embrace that caresses the lush green landscape, or sometimes after the morning rains that quenched the thirst of the earth, the evenings bring a refreshing change to the sky once heavy with clouds, now wearing a duet between the royal purples and the most ethereal blues.

Our home is nestled amidst a lush sanctuary of trees, both big and small. The big trees with their sprawling canopy and the delicate flowering plants that hug the fence co-exist in the harmonious surrender to nature's rhythm. The mango trees in our front yard are in full bloom, their branches heavy with fragrant blossoms, a perfume that lingers on the senses. It is as if the very essence of Kerala's summer has been captured in those blossoms.

Snacks play an important role in the illustrations of evenings in Kerala. They are not just culinary creations; they are incorporations of generations of culinary understandings, wisdom, love and tradition.

Imagine biting into a crispy golden brown yet yellow sphere that crackles like autumn leaves underfoot. This is the magic of the lentil-stuffed sukhiyan. As you take the first indulgent bite, your taste buds are met with a sweet surprise – a luscious, fragrant filling of cooked green-gram in jaggery and grated coconut, infused with love and the flavors of cardamom. As the effort I put into explaining sukhiyan would explain my love for them, there are also other snacks

like neyyappam, and vattayappam. And how not to mention wonders created with plantains,— and impossible not to mention a malayali's relationship with tapioca, with love – kappa. The creativity and ability of Kerala home cooks to turn a humble root into boiled or crispy , savory chips and much more.

Sitting on the porch, as we sip our chai with some homemade snacks, the warmth of the cup in my hands mirrors the warmth in my heart.

Neighbors pass by with their cows, heading back home after a day of grazing. An everyday sight that adds rustic charm to our village, we exchange pleasantries, wits and stories, connecting in a way that only happens in tight-knit communities. The rhythmic clinking of cowbells accompanies our conversations, blending seamlessly with the philharmonic evenings.

My grandmother, a living storehouse of wisdom and love, joins me. Watching the world go by, her wrinkled hands, adorned with simple undecorated gold bangles that chime like music effortlessly find their way through my hair, massaging my scalp with a fondness that words cannot express. Her touch is a balm to my soul, an unspoken reassurance that I hold dear. A very simple gesture that spoke of a lifetime of care and affection. Our conversations about life, her advice, stories, her patiently listening to me, her beautiful smile filled with innocence and all that love, together makes all those moments very special.

As the stars begin to twinkle in the velvet sky, nature quiets down, the only sounds are the crickets. It's a moment of serenity, a reminder of the beauty of simplicity. Whispering “good night” to the rustling leaves, I carry the evening's magic with me to my dreams.

An aspiring healer with a passion for words and a stethoscope around her neck., Diya Maria is a Tennessee- based nursing student. A devoted reader and an art enthusiast, she tries to bring unique perspectives to the pages that resonate with the heartbeat of readers everywhere.

Dear Nani By Tara Prakash

Dear Nani,

I'm writing to you from the mountain top in Sewanee. I'm participating in a creative writing conference here. I think I told you this, but you probably forgot. You always love reading my pieces, so I'm sending you a few stories with this letter. I've enlarged the font, so you can read them. I know you're forgetting so much, so let me tell you what I remember.

I remember bowls of Annie's mac-and-cheese with peas and purified water from a pitcher. I loved that mac-and-cheese, and I also loved the bowls. You always used the same one, ceramic white and laced with green tulips on the lip. One time, I asked my mom to make the mac-and-cheese, just the way you did, but it didn't taste quite the same. When I asked why the water was purified, not the normal water I had at home, you said "Only the best for my favorite granddaughter!" I remember smiling.

Even when Nana spent hours in his room, lying on the gray comforter and staring at the chipped ceiling with glazed eyes, you were moving around, grabbing balled up socks and playing cards trapped under the legs of kitchen chairs, bony fingers hammering nails into the wall to hang up my school pictures and family photos, light bouncing off smiling faces.

I remember watching Young Sheldon in your living room in the evenings. Usually for the first twenty minutes of each episode, you would be bustling around in the small kitchen, pulling out chocolate-almond Dove bars and pouring us glasses of fizzing Coke, but I loved when you would join Rahul and me on the couch, the embroidered burgundy blanket draped across our laps. I'm pretty sure I looked at you more than the television screen, how a smile broke across your face whenever Missy and Sheldon teased each other, reminded you of me and Rahul, I think. You were so pretty when you laughed, your head thrown back, slightly crooked smile and dimpled cheeks, dark eyes creased. I don't remember you ever scolding us, even when bits of chocolate broke off the bar and fell onto the carpet, lost in the plush crimson. I always fell asleep before the episode ended, my soft snore pushing into the quiet room.

This piece that I'm writing now came from an "I remember" prompt. When our teacher assigned it to us a few days ago, the other kids in my class rolled their eyes. It's a generic prompt, an easy one. But I couldn't wait to jump in, to close my eyes and picture your egg-shell white plaster walls, your large fluorescent light bulbs, the small manicured lawn out front. I do a lot with memory in my writing. It's funny how memory works, how I can remember which photos are taped on your fridge but lying in bed some nights, staring up at the glowing stars taped on my ceiling, I forget the sound of your laugh. I have a bit of an obsession with memory in my writing, maybe because there's so much of it. There's always more to remember. And I'm watching you and learning how easy it is to forget.

I remember you would carry me to the bed, your fingers pressing gently into my ribs, until you no longer picked me up. I learned this one evening as I lay sprawled on the couch, my brother's voice muted. I waited for you to scoop me up, for your cool hands on my waist, but instead you gently shook my leg and told me I was too heavy for you to lift. When I looked up at you, lines creased your cheeks, your dimples. I went to my red-and-white trundle bed that night with a lump in my throat and fell asleep to Rahul's voice talking on the phone in the room next to mine, where he slept. I woke up in the morning to find clumps of dark brown hair in the bathroom trash can, thick locks among cherry Dum-Dum wrappers and Old Navy t-shirt receipts. That was how I found out. I ran, crying, to the kitchen, where I found you. You set down your whisk and pushed the bowl of egg yolks to the side to sit down with me, groaning as you lowered yourself onto the cool linoleum tiles. Our backs against the refrigerator, you pressed your hand firmly onto mine. Later that afternoon, I curled up in the sagging bean bag in the corner of the room, my face in the fuzz. When you survived the chemotherapy, and the doctors removed the lump in your breast, I thought you were immortal. Then aging kicked in, and I could see every day that you weren't.

I remember Wii tennis, standing on the crimson carpet, flinging the remote around to hit the ball flying toward us on the screen. We almost hit each other so many times, a light breeze from a remote whizzing too close to skin. I got a bruise from when I slammed my arm mid-swing into the side of the brown sectional couch. You were never too good at playing. You'd have to sit down on the couch a few points into the game, out of breath, your shoulders pressed against the fabric back of the couch, and you'd lose some leverage on your swing. So, I played easy on you. Some points, I even pretended to not see the ball and swung a few seconds too late. You would always grin when you won, spinning around on the carpet, your arms flying around your waist in celebration.

At our meeting yesterday, my teacher told me to remove some of the details. They're unnecessary, she said. I nodded, smiled politely. I didn't know how to tell her that the kitchen isn't just bright, but sunlight falls through the window in showers. The carpet isn't red; it is maroon with flecks of gold and auburn if you kneel down and stare at it long enough. The speakers aren't low quality; the voices crackle like static into the family room. I understand what my teacher is saying, but I am attached to these details I've grown up with. The carpet is not red.

Whenever I walked to the bathroom, I would stop at the portrait of your brother, clean-shaven face, dimpled cheeks, military uniform ironed and smooth. He died in a plane, you had told me once, after I'd asked a few times. When I probed further, you suggested a game of carrom and walked out of the room before I could respond. I have a lot of questions. What did you want to be or do in your life? Did you get it? Were you loved in the way you wanted to be?

Tara Prakash is an eleventh grader at Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C. Her work has been recognized in the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards (where she won a National Gold Medal and a National Silver Medal), YoungArts, the New York Times, Blue Marble Review, Bow Seat's Ocean Awareness Contest, The Daphne Review, and other literary journals and platforms. As a 2023 mentee in the Adroit Summer Mentorship Program, a participant in the Iowa Young Writers' Studio, and the founder of a nonprofit, Write to Right, which teaches writing to underserved communities, Tara loves writing poetry, flash fiction pieces, and creative nonfiction essays.

You are Still Who I Want to Be By Juliet Rotondo

Dear R. F. Kuang,

I didn't know who you were when I was in middle school. If I did, you would have been the person seventh grade me wanted to be when she grew up.

I had less access to iPhones and computers than my peers growing up, a decision by my parents that I credit with creating a love for reading and writing in the absence of the constant distraction that is social media. I entertained myself using the pages of books, both those authored by adults (J.K. Rowling and Rick Riordan, but also older, more arcane authors that made seventh grade me really think she was something of an intellectual) and by myself (I wrote constantly, in spiral notebooks and cloth-bound ones, carried them everywhere because a handful of graphite-smearred pages really did contain the boundaries of my world). My stories were long and winding, their plots propelled by contrived coincidences more than cohesive conflicts, their characters so blatantly derived from my favorite fictional protagonists it was as if I'd pulled them from the published page.

I wrote about Adventure and Magic and War and Love (as much as any twelve-year-old raised in a privileged suburban bubble can write about Adventure or Magic or War or Love), and I think if I knew what your books were about—which is to say, Adventure and Magic and War and Love (and also lessons on colonialism and imperialism and real life war crimes communicated through the lens of historical fantasy, except seventh grade me didn't really know what any of those words mean and would have been distracted by the rawness of your characters and the shininess of your fantastical world over your stories' real life implications, so I will overlook these issues for now)—if I knew what your books were about, I would have loved them, and my stories would have started to emulate them as they did everything I loved. My writing would have taken the shape of yours, my characters morphing their physical

appearance and quirks and flaws to resemble your own protagonists, the system of magic I constructed in my fantasy world a mirror image of the type of magic used in your bestselling novels.

You became a published author when you were barely twenty, and in seventh grade, a published author was exactly what I wanted to be. I am certain that if I knew you then, I would have wanted to become you.

The problem is that I haven't been a seventh grader for nearly half a decade. I've outgrown my graphite pencils and college-ruled composition notebooks, exchanged them for a laptop and Google Drive stuffed full of ideas for stories or poems with an eternal audience of one: me. Instead of spending free time writing at a desk, pencil flying to transcribe characters and plots and worlds from mind to finger to page, I take breaks from homework on social media, relying on a kaleidoscopic plethora of Instagram Reels to stimulate my exhausted brain.

I spend so much time on school and sports and extracurriculars I convince myself that I don't have the capacity to pursue intellectual activities for fun, so my downtime is dedicated to consuming media over producing it. And with the loss of creative pursuits I've lost my desire to become an author, because growing up means realizing that if you are someone who doesn't have the self-discipline to do homework for more than an hour without checking social media, a job with a work schedule that's entirely self-imposed might not be the job for you.

Besides, no one wants to become an author when Chat GPT will soon be able to write better than a human can. No one wants to pursue an overpriced liberal arts degree in English or Comparative Literature when the job market seems saturated with opportunities only for people who study business or STEM. I once told my aunt, who graduated from Cornell with a master's in engineering, that I wanted to study anthropology in college because I am interested in

the connections between humans and histories and cultures. She laughed and told me to pursue a degree in engineering if I *really* wanted to be successful.

I think that growing up means learning which things are impossible under the constraints of time and the anxiety of living a real life. It is impossible to be a creative *and* successful person in a world that squeezes profit only from people who maximize their fields of study, their money, their time in the pursuit of the most obviously practical skills. To be successful in life is to pursue an occupation you might find unfulfilling, one you can only tolerate, something lucrative enough that you live comfortably but so inevitably exhausting that when you get home from work each day you have neither the desire nor the motivation to pursue the production of anything artistic.

To be creative in life is to spend your time writing silly little stories and silly little papers while your friends take college level courses in physics and calculus, is to acquire an overpriced degree from an overpriced institution only to fail to foster a worthwhile career, is to come back home and live in your mother's basement at the ripe old age of twenty-seven or thirty. You cannot be both.

This is what I might believe, Ms. Kuang, if I did not know about you. How are you only twenty-seven years old and a published author of five *New York Times* bestselling books, a recipient of multiple degrees in East Asian Studies and Chinese Literature from institutions like Cambridge and Oxford and Yale? You are successful and important and studied something that really *mattered* to you, and every day you wake up and use your degree to do the things that seem to really *matter* to you (write about things that are important to Asian Americans and East Asians and simply *The World*, about British imperialism and the Opium Wars and cultural appropriation in the publishing industry, but write in such a way that you are crafting a beautiful narrative even before you are educating your audience).

I am not naive: I know the shiny, perfect, academic bubble of a life you project on your Instagram account and Squarespace website are as fabricated as anything else on social media in 2024, and for all I know you might hate what you do and wish you were an engineer, an ophthalmologist, a woman in STEM. But I do not think this is the case; I think the facts speak for themselves. Your ability to derive success and profit from a degree with no obviously practical application, your budding literary empire that operates and thrives under the constraints of capitalism, speak for themselves.

I don't think I necessarily still want to be an author. I *do* think I want to study anthropology, or history, or philosophy, to pursue education for the purpose of learning something I care about and to believe I can still build success at the end of it all. I think it doesn't really matter what you pursue but how you take advantage of your opportunities, and studying something that's not obviously practical doesn't mean you will be useless for the rest of your life.

Dear R. F. Kuang,

I think you are still who I want to be when I grow up.

Juliet Rotondo is a high school junior from Rye High School in Rye, New York. Her writing is recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards and featured in her school's literary magazine and newspaper; she is on the editorial staff of her school's literary magazine, newspaper, and Polyphony Lit. She loves using art and writing as creative mediums to connect her lived experiences with universal ones.

The Forbidden Fruit By Kathryne Hong

Kenkyo, Kenjitsu o Motto ni Ikite Orimasu is a mouthful—and a true masterpiece that transcends time.

When I initially delved into its pages, I expected another run-of-the-mill Japanese reverse harem web novel with a Mary Sue protagonist—an exhausting trope that often gives romance web novels a bad name. However, *I Will Live with Humility and Dependability as My Motto* (its translated English name), which debuted in 2013, expertly dismantles these stereotypes, one by one, in a way that many authors continue to struggle with even a decade later.

From the age of five, our endearing protagonist, Kisshouin Reika, realizes that she has been reincarnated as the archetypal villainess from a shoujo manga titled *You Are My Dolce*. With her cool exterior, elegant princess curls, and exorbitant wealth, Reika is destined to become the reigning empress of her posh private school, the very setting in which *You Are My Dolce* unfolds. As the villainess, her role is to bring about the downfall of the handsome and affluent male lead and his commoner female love interest—a fate she has no desire to fulfill, given her attachment to the golden spoon lifestyle she was born into.

Instead, this web novel is filled with Reika's hilarious antics of saving up money, reminding her wealthy yet tanuki-like father to clean up his act, and trying to prevent her supposed fate. Even more so, Reika is far from being a Mary Sue

character; for one, she isn't an academic weapon. Instead, she struggles to recall the knowledge she acquired in her past life, resulting in a refreshing portrayal of a character who must work diligently to excel academically. *Kenkyo* beautifully captures her endearing angst as she fluctuates between ranking in the top 20 to the top 50 of her Japanese school's test results.

One of *Kenkyo's* greatest strengths lies in its ability to create rich and multi-dimensional characters. Each character we encounter harbors hidden facets, and Reika herself proves to be an unreliable narrator. While we are primarily privy to Reika's thoughts, where she portrays herself as a soft-hearted drama queen, it becomes clear through intermittent glimpses into other characters' perspectives that her outward appearance exudes a domineering demeanor, making it challenging for others to get close to her. These occasional perspectives from other characters are like savoring a scoop of ice cream on a scorching hot day—refreshing and leaving you yearning for more.

And what about the “emperor” of the school—the cool, dignified male lead from *You Are My Dolce* whom everyone admires? The heir to a vast business empire? Well, in reality, Kaburagi Masaya is a lovesick “stalking horse,” as Reika playfully labels him, constantly seeking her assistance in resolving his love troubles and winning over the original female lead—the plain commoner girl. And let's not forget the angelic figure adored by all—the friendly “prince” everyone longs to engage with. Surprise! Enjou Shuusuke is, in fact, a mischievous devil with a dual nature, playfully tormenting Reika. He's someone you'd never want to owe a favor to.

But, what truly sets this web novel apart is its lack of completion.

Even today, *Kenkyo* remains immensely popular in Japan, consistently topping the web novel charts. Regrettably, its anonymous author stopped writing the web novel mysteriously at the 299th chapter over six years ago, on October

20th, 2017. International readers, like myself, have since speculated about the author's fate—was she akin to Reika, a young wealthy girl, who was silenced by her parents? Did she meet an unfortunate accident? Or did she simply grow weary and decide to cease writing?

Perhaps my affection for this novel stems from rose-tinted nostalgia, idealizing it more than it deserves. And maybe, just maybe, it's my love for *Kenkyo* that intensifies precisely because I yearn for something that I can never have: a happy ending for Reika.

Kathryne Hong is a junior at a high school in North Carolina. She adores reading multicultural literature, playing tennis, and exploring stationery shops in her free time.

Art

Collection By Isabella Spiess



Isabella (any pronouns) is an undergraduate student studying Acting at the University of Minnesota. Izzy is inspired by the origin of love (greek myth), the origin of love (hedwig and the angry inch song) and, the origin of love (queer ancestry). They love acrylic paint, cardboard, and getting library books mailed to their house. Isabella was a Gold Key

senior portfolio winner for the Scholastic Arts and Writing awards of 2021 and was selected to be displayed in the Coffman Memorial Union art gallery in spring of 2024 as a part of the “Yours Truly” gallery.

Elemental By Yifei Li





Elemental

Yifei Li was born and raised in Xiamen, China. At sixteen years old, she is currently in high school and attending Xiamen International School. For as long as she can remember, Yifei has been creating and studying art. During her primary and middle school years, Yifei often experimented with different mediums to express her ideas. It was in her

high school years that she started taking private classes at an art development center. Working under the tutelage of a foreign art instructor, Yifei began to broaden her horizons with respect to her artistic development.

For years, Yifei expressed her passion for animals, especially cats, as this was a common theme indicative of her work. It wasn't until recent years that Yifei began to explore conceptual art making and with it the deeper, more philosophical themes related to humanity that have emerged in her work. While Yifei has typically worked with acrylics and watercolors, she has recently branched out and moved towards different mediums and materials to help express her ideas. In doing so, her work has shifted towards concepts rather than just pure aesthetics. In an age where AI can reproduce a Jackson Pollock painting to perfection, the last refuge for the modern artist is in their ideas... at least for now.

The Color of Pomegranate By Patricia Zhang



The Color of Pomegranate

Patricia is a grade eleven student in Toronto, Canada who loves writing, film, fashion, and philosophy. She also wishes she could add to this bio, but can't really think of anything. You can reach her at [@_patriciaphobic_](#) on Instagram.

Abandoned By Youyi Yang





Youyi Yang is fourteen years old. She was born in Hong Kong and lived for many years in Shanghai. She is currently attending Aiglon College in Switzerland. For almost ten years, Youyi has been creating and studying art. During her primary and middle school years, she studied privately at an art development center in Shanghai, China. While there,

she was under the tutelage of a foreign art instructor from Canada. It was during her early years that she honed her skills, worked with different mediums, and explored different methods of art making.

While Youyi's influences and inspirations have changed from one project to the next, her most recent work is centered around the theme of human rights. As a developing artist, it wasn't until the past year or so that Youyi began to incorporate conceptual thinking into her work. For Youyi, visually communicating her ideas effectively emanates through the various methods, mediums, and materials that she works with. Her hope is that her work will help to inspire change and encourage people to not only reflect on the world around them, but also work towards creating a better future for the world at large.

Confetti, Inside By Sofia Yakymenko





Confetti



Inside

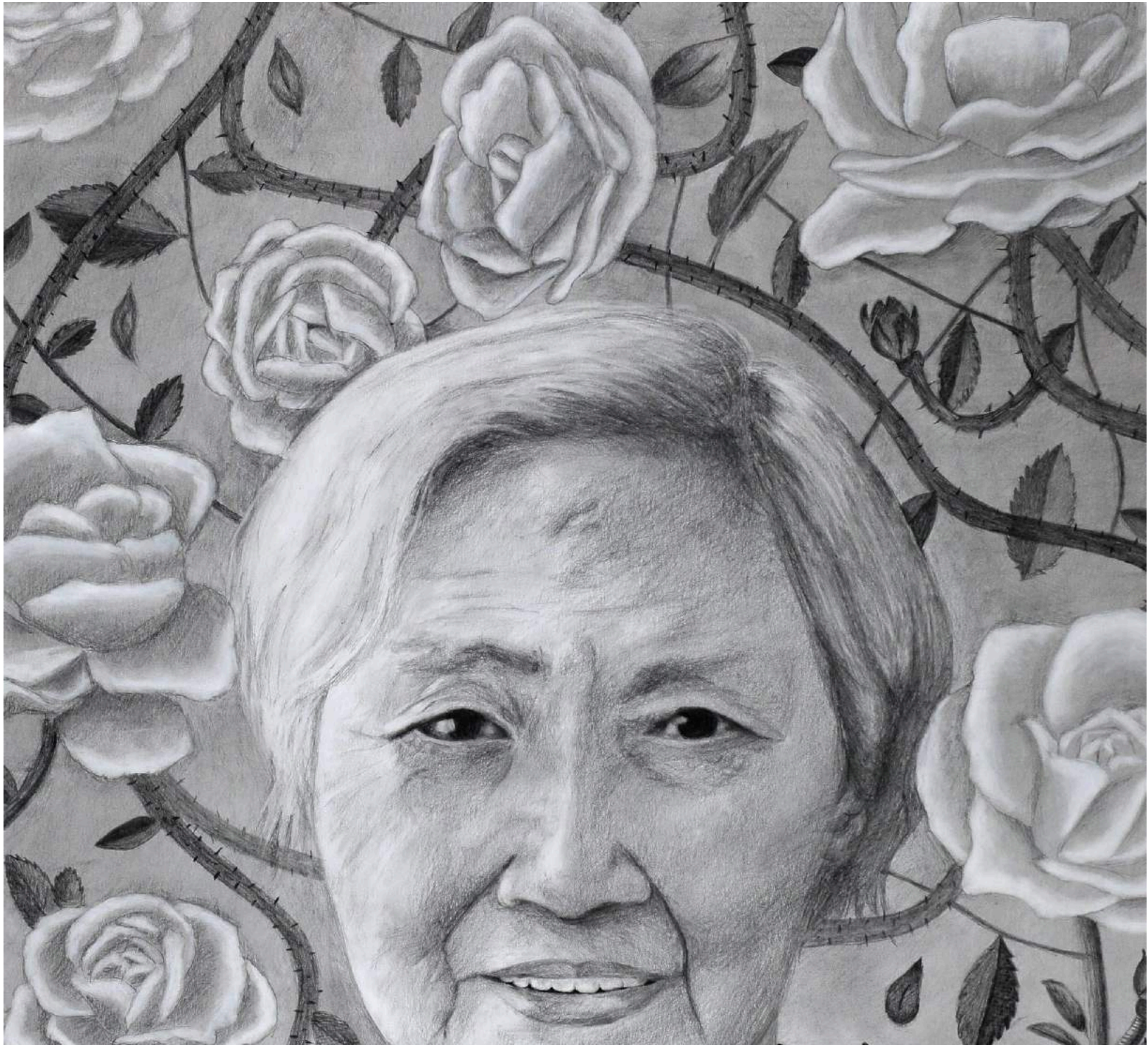
Sofia is a fourteen-year-old from Kyiv, Ukraine, who fled to Italy because of the war. She`s a self-taught photographer. Sofia takes her camera wherever she goes, taking pictures in Italy and abroad while traveling with her family and a small dog. Sofia enjoys nature and architecture photography but does not miss a chance to picture an interesting passerby. Her photo “Window” has been published in the Blue Marble Review.

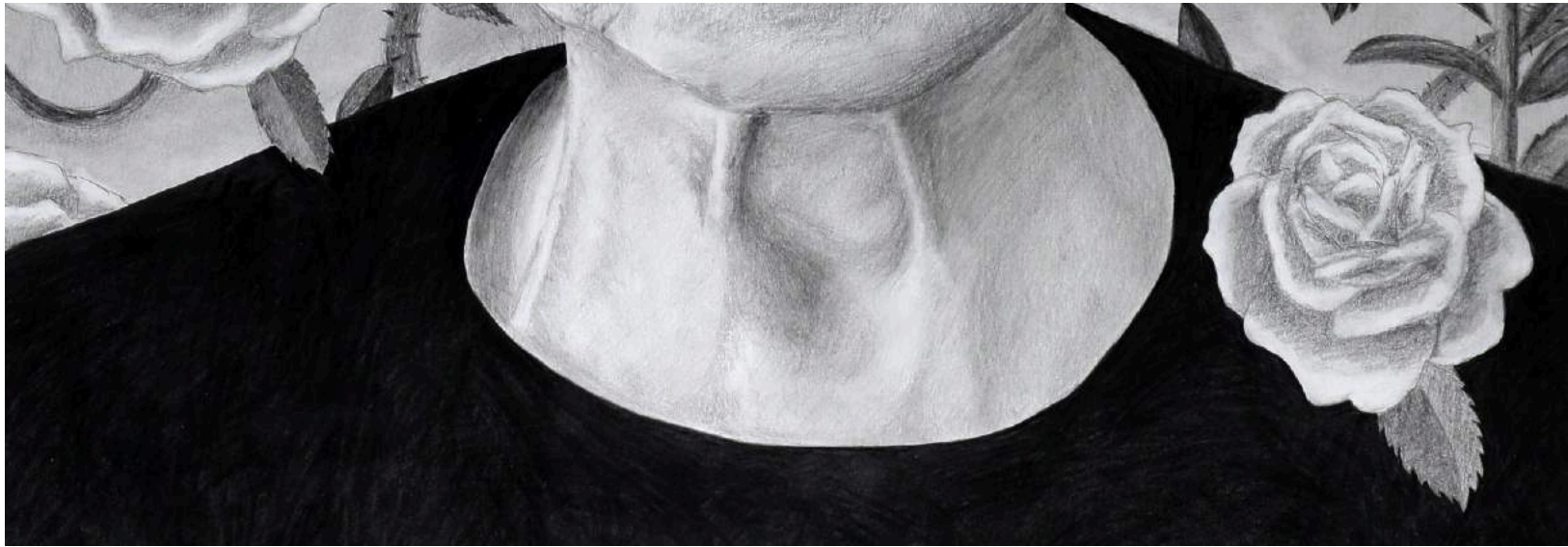
Girl in Rain, Grandma By Sabrina Xu





Girl in Rain





Grandma

Sabrina is a sixteen-year-old artist attending Stuyvesant High School in New York City. Her favorite subjects in school are biology and chemistry, and in her free time, you can find her playing tennis or exploring new boba shops.

female children are not slaves By Sholanke Boluwatife Emmanuel





female children are not slaves

Sholanke Boluwatife is a young artist based in Ogun state Nigeria. He is also an experimental artist, whose work has been featured in many literary online magazines.

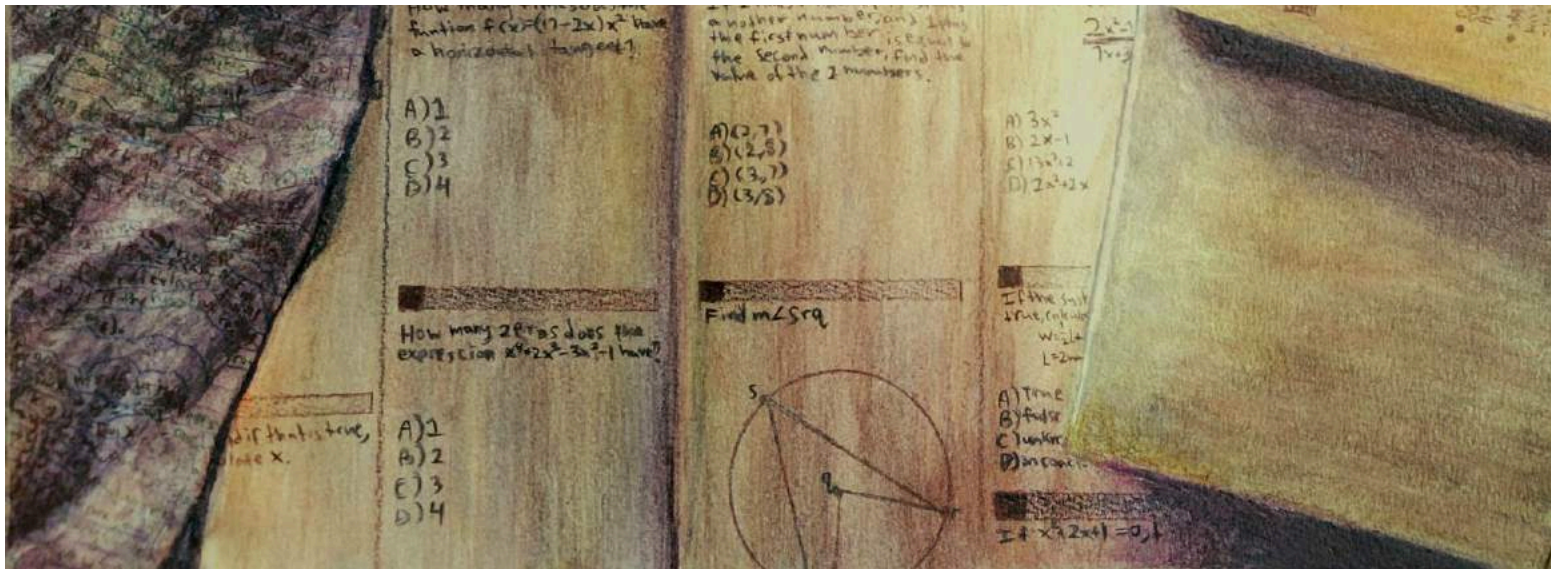
family lunch By Audrika Chakrobartty



Audrika Chakrobartty is an eighth-grader who lives in Texas. She enjoys writing, reading, drawing, and listening to music during her free time. She's also an avid artist, working with all types of mediums, but her favorite one to work with is just pencil and paper. She also enjoys creating watercolor/oil paintings.

Words Can Never Hurt, Right? By Hans Gupta





Words Can Never Hurt, Right?

Hans is a sixteen-year-old, Indian American, male from upstate New York who has, alongside mathematics, passionately pursued art since young. Now, as a high school student in junior year, he's looking to go further with his

art skills and publicize his work. On a more personal level, he puts a high value on academic excellence, sports (Tennis and Badminton), and individual nuances or hobbies that add texture to a well rounded person.

Rooster, Untitled By Melissa Lola-Vazquez









untitled

Melissa Lola Vazquez is an ardent artist who finds profound self-expression through her work. Art is not just a passion but an integral part of her life, shaping perspective and emotions. She draws inspiration primarily from her home city and its vibrant cultural heritage, —and is currently enamored with Edgar Degas and his impressionist works.

Book Review

Pride and Prejudice By Fiona Li

If you're a bookworm, you've probably found yourself in a situation where you don't know what to read next, but desperately want to read a book; If that's the case for you right now, I recommend you read Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, my favourite book of all time. There are countless reasons why I would recommend this book to you, and naming them all would take us all day, so I decided to share the top three reasons why you should read the book.

To begin with, Jane Austen's characters in the book are undeniably outstanding; they each have their own personalities, and as you read the book, you will become acquainted with them. Austen's legendary writing skills transfer you into the story. Lydia and Mrs. Bennet are sometimes so annoying that you want to hit them, while Jane is sometimes seemed very reserved when it comes to love, and her personality makes her always appear very kind and good-natured. Lizzy, short for Elizabeth, has always been my favourite character in the novel as she is rational and intelligent and always speaks in a lively playful tone, and perpetually stays very optimistic no matter what has happened.

Elizabeth's attitudes toward love, gender, wealth, and relationships are quite modern, and the charm of this novel is that, while being written many years ago, we can still relate events in the book to our daily lives.

Secondly, the plot is absolutely engaging, and the writing is unquestionably phenomenal, you won't feel bland and bored reading it even if you've read it many times before. Every time you read it, there will always be something new for you to discover that you hadn't taken much notice of before. Unlike some romance novels, *Pride and Prejudice* makes you think deeply about wealth, status, and the true meaning of love after you finish reading it. I believe this is the enchantment of classic literature that makes you feel it will never be out of date.

Finally, the book's writing is delightful, and there are usage of words/phrases in the book that we rarely use nowadays that will surely help you enhance your writing skills once you become acquainted with them. Reading Jane Austen's writings will take you back in time, and through her descriptions, it is nearly impossible to resist wanting to live in the British countryside in the nineteenth century. The scenery, the landscape, the good-natured people, and the estates all seem flawless.

Pride and Prejudice is an unblemished novel because of its extraordinary characters, the engaging plot, and the undeniably delightful writing. Austen has a mastery over her creativity which makes the story appear flawless and intriguing. I've always enjoyed reading classic novels, but Austen's Pride and Prejudice is my all-time favourite, which I've read many times and never grow tired of.

Fiona Li is an up-and-coming writer from Toronto, Canada who is making a name for herself in the literary world. As a lifelong bookworm, Fiona is passionate about writing and literature, spending much of her free time reading and writing. In addition to her literary pursuits, Fiona is also a talented pianist, drawing inspiration from her love of music to fuel her writing. Her work can be seen on a variety of popular websites, including Teen Ink, Book Recaps, Wikihow, and The Teen Mag. With a natural talent for writing and a deep passion for the written word, her work is sure to inspire and captivate readers for years to come.

Charlotte Bronte: A Fiery Heart By Leela Kingsnorth

The Brontës and their lives have been, if anything, hugely overanalyzed ever since their first works were published under pseudonyms and speculations about their identities began to circulate. Their pioneering books, which are still studied extensively today, and their strange, solitary, and eventually tragic lives have been adapted in so many forms that the real elements of their stories have often been overlooked.

So although Harman's more recent biography does draw, as the cover claims, on some letters "unavailable to previous biographers," much of it covers territory that countless biographers, novelists, and filmmakers have already visited. But this is not at all a negative aspect. *Charlotte Brontë: A Fiery Heart* is still a new and refreshingly broad take on a fascinating historical figure. Indeed, it covers topics with a uniquely creative pen, making it a very comprehensive read for anyone who wishes to learn about the lives of Charlotte and her sisters. Perhaps it's not the read for scholars of this subject, but it is certainly absorbing for anyone else.

Reading the book, one is struck by how well-planned it is. So many biographies dive heartily into details which may be interesting to the author but are certainly not so fascinating to their audience. Harman does not bog us down in miniscule details, but then neither does she sweep too broadly over any part of their lives.

Every chapter brings us further into Charlotte's story, with each one concisely addressing a stage of her life, which was the perfect length for keeping interest. Harman gave this biography a novelistic scope: the author often lets her imagination run wild, even speculating that Charlotte may have been a consumer of opium, which in my mind went a little too far. But she draws from real evidence to reach any such conclusions, and the book benefits from this more personal take, as it brings us closer to Charlotte's emotions as well as her working life.

The book also focuses more widely on the entire Brontë family, which was very useful, both as someone who is not solely interested in Charlotte's life, and from a more general point of view. Their inclusion helps provide insight into Charlotte's unusual circumstances and the inspirations for her books—especially since the family worked together and lived so closely. Emily, Anne, Branwell, and their elusive father Patrick are also fascinating characters whose influence has been neglected in other biographies.

Speaking of wider lenses, the book's first chapter focuses on the Brontës before Charlotte's birth, setting the scene, as it were, for the chapter set in the aftermath of her death. We are also privy to a "sneak peek" at her life from the prologue, in which we see her as a young Lady in Brussels, tormented, like her most famous characters, with unrequited love. Here Harman again demonstrates her almost sensational writing style. Wherever there is possible drama, it does not go neglected!

It reminds one occasionally of a BBC documentary—it's based on facts, but features bonus imagined moments that could have happened, but probably didn't, acted out in period costumes with added drama and music. But this was how the author kept me engaged, and she does it admirably. This approach manages to entertain and inform at once. It also allows us a precious glimpse into the mind not only of Charlotte, but also of Harman herself, and how she came to these conclusions. And it's hard not to want to be privy to contemporary gossip surrounding poor Charlotte's love life, Branwell's hopeless affairs, Charlotte's many struggles with herself and her family and the strange, lonely house they all inhabited.

The Brontë sisters, with their deceased mother, their stern father, their addict brother and their untimely deaths due to tuberculosis, faced a lot of trouble in their lives. Harman manages to very respectfully and clearly acknowledge that without shoving their trauma down anyone's throat. Instead, we are shown all of their lives, the highlights and the lowlights, in this stunning portrait not of a just victim but of a very human and very talented author.

The book features a wide bibliography and an extremely comprehensive and helpful index—the kind all biographies should have! More images would have been greatly appreciated given photos are such a useful anchor in nonfiction. Even this is hard to fault, however, the few pictures which are provided having been chosen so carefully as to encompass every stage of her life.

Charlotte Brontë, the title tells us, had a fiery heart—and so does this book. It is spirited, clear, and yet as delicate and plotted as the confines of nonfiction allow. “You are human and fallible,” Jane Eyre tells Mr. Rochester in Charlotte’s most enduring novel. So are we all, and so indeed was Charlotte herself, as this biography shows us more than anything. But since, as the savvy Jane also tells us, “The eagerness of a listener quickens the tongue of a narrator,” this also makes for an absorbing and inspiring read. Highly recommended.

Leela Kingsnorth is sixteen and lives in the countryside of County Galway. She primarily writes historical fiction. She has been published in a supplement to the Irish Times and Paper Lanterns Magazine, and was the first place winner of the LuneSpark international short story contest. She is currently working on a fantasy novel. She is an Orthodox Christian.
