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FEBRUARY 2015 | VOL. 26, No. 6

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WW/PP
2/15

- 4 Feedback
- 18-19 College Directory
- 21 Art Gallery

Nonfiction

- 6-12 **LOVE** *True stories of the highs and lows of love*
- 14-16 **MEMOIRS** *The kitchen: a place of love • OJ and mahogany • I survived the Great Sichuan Earthquake • My first CD • Do you remember, Papa? • Killing your perfect daughter*
- 17 **PRIDE & PREJUDICE** *What does it mean to be a feminist? • Dear legged people*
- 20 **ENVIRONMENT** *GMOs: blessing or curse? • Eradicating malaria*
- 22 **HEALTH** *Brain tumor • Body image*
- 23 **SPORTS** *Finding confidence after failure*
- 24-25 **POINTS OF VIEW** *What can space exploration offer us? • Je suis Charlie • Why I hated "The Fault in Our Stars" • The execution of George Stinney*
- 26 **COMMUNITY SERVICE** *The value of small sacrifices • Nonprofit entrepreneurs*
- 27 **EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR** *Nominations for our annual educator contest*
- 28-29 **TRAVEL & CULTURE** *Ghana • Turkey • Japanese culture*

Reviews

- 30 **MOVIES** *Lost and Delirious • In Time • Mood Indigo • Legend of Kung Fu Rabbit*
- 31 **MUSIC** *Anaïs Mitchell and Patty Griffin in concert • Foster the People • King Crimson*
- 32 **BOOKS** *Me Before You • Every Day • Five Days at Memorial • Anna and the French Kiss*

33-39 Fiction

40-47 Poetry



ON THE COVER

The Love Issue

True love stories 6-12

Romantic fiction 33-39

Earthquake!

"The teacher yells, 'Earthquake!' and the classroom bursts to life as students scramble to squeeze under their desks."

"Shaken," page 15

Defining the F-Word

"If we have in fact achieved gender equality, why is it that U.S. women earn 78 cents for every dollar made by their male counterparts? Why is it that over half of the U.S. population is female but women make up less than 20 percent of Congress?"

Pride & Prejudice, page 17

Cover by Joyce Song, Edwards, IL

FEEDBACK

To submit your feedback or find the articles mentioned here, go to TeenInk.com

Understanding White Privilege

“Understanding White Privilege” by Jack Coyle was a big reality check. The examples he included of nonwhites being discriminated against by law enforcement and employers filled me with frustration and anger.

I am an African-American, but in my small island community I have never faced any real racial problems. However, I see it on the news and notice people calling each other harsh names online. Sometimes I’m insulted for being black when I go online, but I try to ignore these comments.

When Jack wrote, “6.8 percent of white workers are unemployed; the number of unemployed black workers is more than double that,” it left me confused. Why would business owners reject black people? What really surprised me, though, is Jack’s reporting that “a 2003 study from Princeton University found that white men with criminal records were more likely to be hired than black men with identical or superior qualifications and no criminal record.”

This article clearly shows how there is still racism in the United States. Jack presented and explained the information in a very professional way. Kudos to you, Jack.

Tripp Hopkins, Oak Bluffs, MA

Brown

“Brown” by Megha Agarwal is the most beautiful poem I’ve read in a long time. It centers around a specific person’s eyes, and the best part is that those eyes are brown.

When I realized this piece of writing was about brown eyes, I couldn’t contain the smile on my face, so I have to applaud this poet for making brown eyes special.

Every day we hear how beautiful blue, green, or gray eyes are. When have you ever heard someone say brown eyes are amazing? It rarely happens. The way she compares brown eyes to the color of coffee is spectacular. She describes this individual’s eyes as caffeine, something she can’t live without.

Isn’t that just heart-melting?

I myself have brown eyes, so when I read this poem, I was close to tears. It gives a shout-out to people who feel ordinary because they believe they have basic features, though that is not the case. We are all beautiful and amazing in our own way, and this poem shows that.

Aysha Khawaja, Edison, NJ

TeenInk.com Changes

TeenInk.com has introduced a new rating system, and a new comment system as well. I love both of these changes, especially the new comment system, which is much less tedious than the previous one. I hope it encourages TeenInk.com users to provide more feedback to peers. I, for sure, will be commenting much more on my friends’ works now.

Thank you for the changes, Teen Ink.

Ujjwal Khanal, Kathmandu, Nepal

Editor’s response: Thanks, Ujjwal. We are always working to improve Teen Ink magazine and TeenInk.com for you, our users. If you have any suggestions for how we can do this, send them in!

1% Survival Rate

“1% Survival Rate” by Trey Buzzard shows that there can be a happy ending if you just have hope and strength. His story grabbed my attention and didn’t let go until the very end. Trey writes about how his rare illness, a genetic condition called STXBP2, means he’s been in and out of the hospital his whole life and has had to go through multiple surgeries.

I can relate to this story because of my sister, who passed away after being sick her whole life. She had cystic fibrosis, diabetes, and other health problems. She couldn’t walk or talk. Being three years younger, I visited her in the hospital a lot. She attended a hospital school, so I got to meet many other young people who had disabilities or

were sick.

Trey’s uplifting story reminded me of seeing people struggle yet somehow manage to be happy and positive. If you or someone you love has ever been in the hospital, you will be able to relate as well.

Simone Davis, Oak Bluffs, MA

Silent Speech

“Silent Speech” by Tennessee Hill is a touching story. It is very well written, and I could imagine exactly what was happening throughout the piece. At the end she states, “He loves me. I love him. And that is that.” What a powerful way to end. Right before her brother is ready to leave, he signs to her, and it shows how much they love each other.

I can relate to “Silent Speech” because my uncle is deaf. He is a funny, outgoing, and kind person. Tennessee included just the right amount of sincerity and humor to show how she feels about her brother, and vice versa. This article makes you see the world in a different way and appreciate your loved ones – including those who are deaf, blind, or disabled in any way.

Salomé Roberts, Defiance, OH

How Tall Are You?

I found April Cooke’s article “How Tall Are You?” very relatable. She wrote about how her height used to make her insecure. I am 5’11” and understand exactly how she feels. I get asked the same questions she does: “Do you play basketball?” and “How tall are you?”

In her article April explains how she played volleyball and felt like a star because she was the tallest and could block and spike well. I also play volleyball and always hated being so tall. I used to be made fun of as April was, but as I grew up I realized those people weren’t worth worrying about, and I started to accept my height.

I learned that being tall is a great advantage. Yeah, you might not be able to find guys who are taller than you all the time, but that’s not all that matters in life. What’s really important is how happy you are with yourself. Now I have good self-esteem and just laugh at people who feel the need to make rude comments about my height.

Destiny Bartley, Defiance, OH

Thank You

I have had a TeenInk.com account and a subscription to the magazine for a mere five months, and I would like to say thanks. Thank you for giving teenagers an opportunity to be published and allowing us to express our feelings. I wish I had found this magazine sooner; it has helped me bloom as a writer and show others my voice.

Not only does this magazine have fiction and nonfiction, but articles that teenagers as a whole can relate to. I have never found any magazine with this diversity. I especially value the reviews section. I bought the album “Pure Heroine” after reading a review of it, and have not stopped listening since. Trust is important in a relationship, and I have that with *Teen Ink*.

Joy Aun, Brooklyn, NY

Teen Ink

Box 30 • Newton, MA 02461
(617) 964-6800
Editor@TeenInk.com
www.TeenInk.com

Publishers	Stephanie Meyer John Meyer
Senior Editor	Stephanie Meyer
Editor	Emily Sperber
Production	Susan Gedrick Katie Olsen
Associate Editor	Cindy Spertner
Book Devel. Editor	Adam Halwitz
Advertising	John Meyer
Interns	Natasza Gawlick Jonathan Halpern Kate West
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I'm Not Good at Love Stories

by Catherine Sleeman, Horsham, England

I grew up in what was later labeled for me as *une famille anglaise typique*. My brother, parents, and I were a close-knit unit, and we Loved each other with the Love typically attributed to our nuclear state. I've always found it funny and convenient that "nuclear" is a word used to describe both bombs and families – like the people who thought things up had wanted to draw our attention to the fact that we were always a touch away from detonation, a mere countdown from demolition.

Mummy blew me full of buck-shots; her Love was fired in rounds. Each cartridge of anger settled deep but left only pleasant traces behind. The bullets lodged beneath my skin, etched with Protection and Compassion and Parenting, and those words bled into my immune system so that I knew how to identify hatred and remove its threat from my body.

But if you'd asked me about Love, I would have said that Daddy rubbed it through my hair when he said "Good

night" so that it crept through my dreams while I slept. I would have told you how I'd clung to the playground fence until my brother came to tell me that it was okay to let go. I might have said that it was an underrated ingredient in Mummy's baking, one that she kept in a cupboard all by itself. I would have passed you as many clichés as you could bear, and I would have delivered them all in the half-smiling manner of a typical intelligent six-year-old girl.

Love.

It's not that we don't continue to Love each other, but on all of our to-do lists we manage to exclude the most important one: Love Yourself.

Even when we remember the task's existence, we procrastinate until something easier comes along. We overlook ourselves – and yet people still say that humans are selfish creatures.

It's not simply because self-deprecation is in fashion (although it is) or merely because we want to draw pity from those who watch our lives (although we do). It is with the utmost sincerity that my friend and I agree that "if I were my friend, I'd loathe me."

She says, "Sometimes I'm scared that my friends don't actually like me, because I can only see myself as annoying."

I say, "That's not a 'sometimes' thing, Evelyn."

Love. It's such a difficult thing to hold on to, like an idea or an after-taste. She laughs and asks, "Do you think we'll ever grow up?"

And I ponder this for a while. I know that we'll grow old, but that's not the same thing. I wonder if I'll ever grow out of my petulance and

fantasies and idiocies and excuses.

"Not really. I don't want to, to be honest."

"Me neither. Everyone wants to fast-forward to prom and then hold time there like, like – I dunno – like you'd hold someone's hand."

"I don't."

"Me neither."

"It's just an awkward excuse for dressing up and standing around pretending to look pretty."

"You going with anyone?"

"Of course not." I hope she isn't either. I want to carry on being two lonely, ignorant, inexperienced best friends who've never been kissed.

"You should go with Alex."

"Why, because we're both short?" I quip. But I know how stepped-on I'll feel when he turns up at prom with a tie in a shade that fits my dress and an arm around some other girl.

When I was nine, I followed an instruction manual for making a Secrets Box, and the first secret I squirreled away was his name. I wrote it on a piece of paper and punched hearts into it with my red pen.

These days, we've taken to exchanging banter in class, and I always make sure that I never make too much eye contact in case of humiliation. I busy myself with the fear that if he looked at me too closely, he'd realize that I was staring back at him with my nine-year-old self. He'd recognize in my face that I still have the Secrets Box, empty except for his name, and although I don't quite believe that I'm in love with him, I know that I smile inside when we have good conversations. I know that if he asked me to



Photo by Emily O'Neal, Knightdale, NC

prom I'd say yes, and not just because he's the only boy with whom I'm on eye level.

Love.

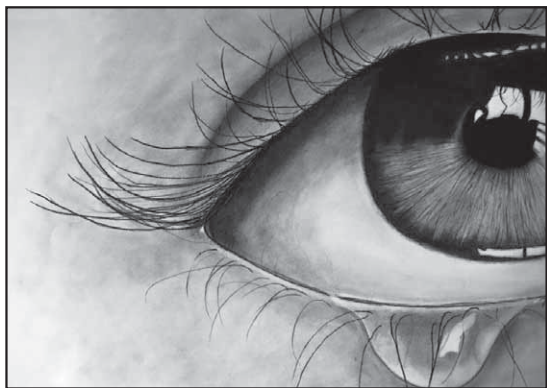
"It'd be cute," she says, and I lean away, holding up my hands as a protest and a shield.

"God no."

And here I go again, hating myself once more, because I have absolutely no intention of telling her that I keep my heartlike Secrets Box. I confide enough in her to say that I don't care for myself, but I starve myself of honesty when it comes to caring for someone else.

Love.

I don't know much about Love. I know that there are four types – *philia*, *storge*, *eros*, *agape* – but who could say exactly where those four filter into my life? I know that I "love" Rolos and I "love" beaches and I "love" the smell of pencil shavings and good books, but the truth is that when it comes to Love, I'm a Sherbert Love Heart that's been left to dissolve in a glass-jar ocean. I'm a Cadbury's Dream that's been allowed to melt itself out. I'm a Strawberry Lace that someone likes to chew the end of. ♦



Art by Jolijn Schilder, De Weere, Netherlands

Ode to Ritual Crying

ritual crying
like
sunday afternoon.
short
like
prom date
touchy feely
but
not really
you
make
art
like you
make
love
red eyes
like
sunday afternoon.

by Gabriela Mancuso, Rivervale, NJ

Hopeless Romantic

by Andrew Galanter,
Tappan, NY

Seventh grade: I am a romantic – albeit a hunch-backed, shy, scrawny, bespectacled, unconfident one. I walk with my gaze on the floor, petrified of making eye contact with anyone. Occasionally, daring to be bold, I glance up, searching for one person in particular: the Juliet to my Romeo, or, more ideally, the Princess Leia to my Han Solo.

The apish athlete in front of me lumbers to the left, clearing my obstructed view. It's then that I see her: beautiful, luminous ... and totally uninterested in me.

Alas, nothing, not even my one hundred percent chance of failure, can stop me. My heart speeds up as if following the lead of an invisible conductor. The orchestra's once-placid music becomes a frenzied piece with no melody. I try to collect myself as the distance between us decreases. Feet turn to inches turn to centimeters, and I am now beside her.

With the speed of a supercomputer, I assess my options. There are only two: speak now or forever hold my peace.

But what to say?

My repertoire of pickup lines is a null set. If anything, I should call them pickdown lines – incantations guaranteed to make all girls within a 12-mile radius vacate the area.

To hell with pickup lines. I have a way with words, don't I? I'll just improvise. After all, aren't some of the best film scenes unscripted?

Deep breath. *I've got the eye of the tiger.* Deeper breath. My mouth opens and

the first thing that comes into my head escapes my lips:

"I like mayonnaise."

My pale skin turns a strawberry red, and I run away as quickly as I can. ♦

To hell with pickup lines. I'll just improvise

The Letter

by Joseph Tingley, Meadville, PA

I weigh the letter in my hands. It's not heavy. What I had to say fit on one page. Graduation starts in an hour, and I really need to get going, but I am still standing here. I promised myself I'd give you this letter today, but now I am not so sure. I don't know why this won't go away. It's been over a year, but something keeps bringing it back. You have moved on, and so have I, but I can't shake the pain.

The letter is not an angry one. I don't want to hurt you or upset you. I want to tell you what I once felt for you. You were the first person who made me that happy. I want to tell you that I remember the day I first kissed you and held your hand better than I remember whole months.

The letter says other things, though. I remember the arguments, the times when I did nothing wrong but ended up apologizing anyway. You hurt me more than I will ever be able to describe, and I need you to understand that.

Today may be the last time I ever see you in person. There is no reason not to give it to you. If I don't, these things will go unsaid. There is nothing in it that I don't want you to know.

Well, one thing.

I drop the letter onto the passenger seat on top of my cap and gown, pull out of the driveway, and open the window. It's a warm, sunny June day. I breathe in the air and smile. As I park in the school lot, I see your car pull in just ahead of me. The bumper stickers always give you away.

My heart starts beating faster, just like it always does when I see you. I reach for the letter; this is my chance. I open the car door – but at that moment one of your friends gets out. You walk together, talking happily.

I stand by my car for a moment, unsure what to do. I take my blue graduation gown and hat, leaving the letter on the seat for a moment. But I can't walk away without it. Finally, I tuck it into the folds of my gown and start for the school doors.

The dull roar of voices grows louder as I approach the hallway where the class of 2014 will enter the auditorium for commencement. It's a sea of blue gowns and yellow tassels. I head toward the back of the line and the end of the alphabet, taking my place just five spots behind you. I can hear you talking to your friends, and the sound of your voice causes an ache in my chest.

As I wait with the rest of my class, my eyes keep flitting to you. When I see you standing alone I take the letter from my pocket and start to move forward, but at that moment there is a call for attention. I slip it back in, heart beating fast once again.

The ceremony runs the usual course: speakers telling us of the promise of our class and the coming challenges; fellow students telling us the challenges they have overcome. After the last student has crossed the stage and we've thrown our caps in the air, I again look for you in the crowd.

I can't find you, and I begin to fear I won't. Then I feel a tap on the shoulder. I turn, and my breath catches. We smile at each other awkwardly. Neither of us speaks for a moment.

"I just wanted to say good luck and congratulations," you say, extending your hand.

I take it gingerly. The moment we touch, the memory of the day I first held your hand comes flooding back. The softness, that gentle touch, it

hasn't changed.

The smell of your perfume overwhelms me. It brings back memories: watching movies, laughing together, bike rides through the deserted school campus. That wonderful summer. I can almost feel that last hug and smell the sweet scent of your hair. I remember it all. If I had only known that was going to be the last time. You shattered me less than a month later.

I can see your parents waiting by the door, ready to go.

"Thanks ... I just wanted to give you ..." I say, my fingers closing around the envelope in my pocket.

I can't say it. The truth is, part of my heart, no matter how small, will always be yours. This is what I can never admit. I never will.

You've noticed that I'm reaching for something, and I can see the puzzlement in your eyes. My hand drops from the pocket to my side, empty.

"I just wanted to give you my congratulations." I force a smile.

Slowly you turn away.

I will move on, and I will be happy, but a part of you will never leave me. The mention of girls' ten-

*This may be
the last time
I ever see you*

Author's note: "This is not entirely nonfiction, but it is for the most part. I took a little creative license, but the essence of the story is entirely true."

nis, select choir, even just a few bars of music from "West Side Story" or "Damn Yankees" will forever remind me of our time together. That tiny hole in my heart will seem to grow bigger for a moment, and I will pause and wonder where you are and whether you think of me from time to time. I doubt you will, but I'll still wonder. Then the moment will pass.

You disappear from my sight. I remove the letter from my pocket and look at your name inked across the envelope in my small, untidy scrawl.

I tear the letter in half, right through the center of your name, and let it drop to the floor.

I step carefully over the letter and walk toward the doors and my family. They are taking pictures and smiling widely at me. I grin and wave my diploma in triumph. ♦

Two Weeks After

by "Erin,"
Franklin Lakes, NJ

I walk down the hallway. Tables are lined up along the walls; they're called booths at my school.

As long as I keep my head down, I won't need to make eye contact.

Look at my shoes. Play with my rings. Then stop, because as I twist them around my fingers, memories of him playing with the silver jewelry resurface with a pang.

Look straight ahead.

I can see out of the corner of my eye. He is sitting in the furthest booth on the left. Giggles erupt from his friends around him. I refuse to acknowledge my weakness by seeming vulnerable.

I'm just about past their table when I hear it.

*We lock
eyes, and he
twistedly smiles*

Loud and clear. Almost a little too much so, as if he wants me to hear it.

"Hey, Paul! Isn't that the girl you hooked up with, like, two weeks ago?"

My face flushes red. I contemplate turning around to say something to the obnoxious guy, but I decide that I'll do it when I come back. I'll finally stick up for myself and speak my mind.

As I clear the corner, every head at the booth spins around to look at me. The previously lively conversation instantly disappears into tension-filled silence.

This time I don't bother trying not to look. We lock eyes, and he twistedly smiles. Once they see the expression on my face, his friends turn back around, satisfied and laughing at how apparently funny they are.

My witty and sarcastic speech about how mature they are evaporates.

With that eye contact comes more than just a meeting of gazes that has not happened in over a month. It's as revealing and intimate as I had hoped.

But beyond that, I want what I'd see in the movies: for him to step out of the booth and run after me, apologizing. For him to text me that night saying how sorry he is for everything and how much he misses me. But that isn't meant to happen. None of it is.

Real teenage life is not "The Notebook" or "Titanic" or any of the cutesy television shows that girls my age fantasize about. It's this. ♦



Photo by Nathalie Paradise, Olympia, WA

A Boy's First Kiss

by Cody Suesser, Ripon, WI

An ordinary day in October, right after school lets out

3:12 p.m.: Text I receive from my girlfriend: *Hey, need a ride home?*

Reason why I hesitate to respond: A 16-year-old boy getting a ride home from his girlfriend? Shouldn't it be the other way around?

How I feel after thinking this: Sexist.

3:14 p.m.: Text I send to my girlfriend: *Sure! :)*

Fact I have been worrying about for the last few days: My girlfriend and I have been dating for two weeks and we still haven't kissed.

Fact that bothers me even more: I've never kissed a girl.

Who my girlfriend is in my phone contacts: Crystal <3

How I feel about this fact: Cheesy.

A phenomenon that fascinates me: She's still dating me.

Number of minutes my girlfriend is late picking me up: Five.

Amount by which my feelings should be hurt: None.

Amount by which my feelings are hurt: Not none.

3:20 p.m.: We drive out of the high school parking lot.

3:21 p.m.: I try to initiate conversation.

3:22 p.m.: Conversation falters.

Question that persists: Why is she dating me?

3:22 p.m.: I take my girlfriend's hand.

My reason for doing this: I feel awkward and have to assert myself somehow.

Why I immediately regret this decision: Now she has only one hand to drive with. Not safe!

Reason I don't take my hand back: Geez, this is awkward enough as it is.

3:27 p.m.: We arrive at my house, still holding hands.

3:29 p.m.: I realize I'm still sitting in my girlfriend's car.

How my girlfriend looks when she smiles at me in this moment: Absolutely beautiful.

Action I realize I should take: Kiss her.

Questions that immediately come up: What if she doesn't want to be kissed? How the heck do I do this smoothly? How do you kiss a girl? What do I do with my hands?

3:31 p.m.: I awkwardly remove my seat belt while continuing our conversation to cover up my awkwardness. I don't want to make this awkward.

How I feel in this moment: So, so awkward.

3:33 p.m.: Action I want to take: Kiss her.

3:37 p.m.: Action I still haven't taken: Kissed her.

3:40 p.m.: DARNIT.

3:41 p.m.: Question my girlfriend asks: "Are you okay?"

3:41 p.m.: My immediate response: "Yeah, of course!"

What I am really thinking: *What do I do what DO I DO!*

3:42 p.m.: What I do: Lean in closer.

3:42 p.m.: What my girlfriend does: Leans in closer.

What I think I will do: Kiss her.

What I do: Kiss her.

Thoughts that immediately go through my mind: Am I doing this right? Is she closing her eyes too? Is this what lips are supposed to feel like? Am I breathing too heavy? Did I brush my teeth today?

My thoughts a minute later: Wow, this feels good! I must be doing it right! I did it! I'm the best kisser ever!

My glee in this moment: Immeasurable.

3:48 p.m.: I get out of the car and walk toward my house.

3:48 p.m.: My girlfriend's face when I turn and wave good-bye: Smiling.

3:49 p.m.: My own face when I walk into my house: Smiling. ♦

*I don't want
to make this
awkward*



Art by Kian McKeown, New York, NY

Sometime in December

i taste like cedar closets and moth balls
you should kiss me
tie me in knots, cherry stems –
i have dark pits.
i am antique now, more than ever
love ages more than just the soul
shine the light, trembling hands –
i am a map.

by Sabrina Koss, New City, NY

Never

by Grace Coberly, Oak Park, IL

I never expected you to love me.

I never expected to hear my name in your mouth. We talked a bit, mostly about algebra. You thought I was smart. Yet I walked away from those brief, number-filled conversations, variables still swirling in front of my eyes, feeling like a fool. What was I thinking? Why hadn't I given up? These were the questions that entered my mind and took their place among the homework problems that had pushed me toward the best part of my day. But I never looked back. I wasn't stupid enough to try to make my luck last when I knew it wouldn't. I never thought you'd want me to stay.

I never expected to find you looking at me. During these four years, I've mastered the glance-and-look-away move; it's a valuable skill. You'll never know how much I watched you. By the time you turned, I was already gone. Still, everyone else saw me looking. How didn't you? I was hopeless, head-over-heels in something – was it love? I never thought I'd glance-and-look-away at you only to see you glance-and-look-away at me.

I never expected to see my hand in yours. My thin wrist, my cold fingers: I didn't think you liked them. I didn't think you liked how eager I was to sit next to you. I didn't think you liked hugging me. I liked it. I never had stage fright again after that night. You're the one who could set me on fire by touching my arm, the one who could electrocute me with a half smile. I always imagined

taking your hand at just the right moment and you giving me your half smile. I never thought it would be the other way around.

I never expected you to love me. Everyone said we'd be a cute couple. I agreed; you ignored. You were embarrassed. I didn't think you'd ever love me the day you danced with me. I didn't think you'd love me when you gave me your jacket because I was cold, or when you said the two of us "worked." I kept my hopes hidden behind the blush growing on my cheeks the night you called me your girlfriend. I tried to hold on to reality when you kissed me in the back of my mom's car.

I knew I loved you. But I didn't expect you to lean in and whisper those three earth-shattering words. I closed my eyes. I shivered. You do that to me.

I love you too. ♦

*I never
expected to
see my hand
in yours*



Art by Ania Hatfield, Augusta, GA

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Life Is Not a Movie

by William Burk, Grove, OK

Mark Twain hit the nail on the head when he said, "Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; truth isn't." Life is strange, not as simple and predictable as Hollywood would have it. The guy doesn't always get the girl, and if he doesn't, it's rarely the life-crushing event that movies make it out to be. Your first kiss isn't some magical moment with your eventual spouse. It doesn't always rain at funerals. The heroes don't always win; in the end, they're only human. Sometimes I think people, including me, try to make life something it isn't: a movie.



Art by Casey Carsel, Christchurch, New Zealand

We want falling in love to be just like it is in the movies. First we look for the cliché scene: one of you drops your books and the other helps pick them up, resulting in eye contact and a smile that is the beginning of something special. Then we're meant to enter the "stare at her, then look away when she meets your gaze" stage. After that, the guy works up the courage to ask the girl out to dinner or a movie (of course, the encounter is both sickeningly cute and awkward), and the date goes well. They go to prom and fall in love during the slow dance. One of them inevitably has to move out of town, or graduates, and thus ensues the emotional good-bye scene. One watches the other's car until it is out of sight, followed by depression and lots of ice cream.

Well, let me tell you the version of that story that happened to me. I dropped my books in the hallway, and of course a girl knelt to help me. I looked up and saw she was one of the school cheerleaders – one who I didn't find particularly attractive. A guy, maybe her boyfriend, was standing behind her. After I stood up, I said "Thank you" and hurried off to my AP Chemistry class, never to talk to her again.

There was another girl. We were both on the robotics team. We liked each other, and she asked me to prom. I was an underclassman; she was an upperclassman. I accepted and asked her out a few days later. Our first kiss was pretty awkward and notably unmagical. The relationship ended in three months, leading up to an excruciatingly awkward

prom as exes. I was over her in a month or two. Not a very entertaining plot for a rom-com.

As for funerals, I've only gone to one, and if my memory serves me right (I was eight), it didn't rain. I didn't even cry. I mean, come on, it was my great-grandfather. I hardly knew the guy. The only other experience I've had with death – or should I say near-death – was when my mother nearly bled out from a rare cancerous tumor in her stomach. I didn't get the dying piece of advice from her that would give me guidance throughout life. In fact,

I was in school when she had to go to the emergency room; I was needed by my robotics team, which was in the middle of the competition season.

Mom was in the hospital for the next few months, and I was so busy I barely saw her. She is still on chemo today – but not the kind that makes you go bald and need to wear a mask. Instead, she'll be taking a pill every day for a couple of years. She's functioning, although not at 100 percent. This is another anecdote that would not make for a good movie.

You know that girlfriend I mentioned earlier? Well, she wasn't what you would call stable. I feared that she would hurt herself multiple times during our relationship. I did my best to make her happy, but I couldn't be her Superman. I was just me. I didn't "save" her. I wasn't a hero who turned her life around. I didn't get her into counseling or anything, but I

made her feel better those few months we were together. This was in the midst of my mother's health problems, so she helped me too. The relationship was useful for a time, but then we realized that we weren't meant for each other, and it ended. If there's a pattern forming, it's that my life isn't destined to become a Hollywood blockbuster.

Movies are brief sessions of fiction created to help us escape from reality, but they influence us more than we think. We want the escape to *be* reality. We want that relationship we see in the movies. We want our Superman to swoop in and save the day, and sometimes this hinders our lives. Girls often want their crush to make the first move, just like in the movies, but often the guy is in his own universe, oblivious to this girl he's never spoken to. Meanwhile, the girl is stuck with the misconception that this guy she's been crushing on is going to figure it out and then they'll be so cute together. But in reality, if she were to go up to him and start a conversation, the fantasy relationship could become a real one. Guys see movies with incredibly beautiful women and forget that they are acting out a story –

that real women are not like the ones in the movies. This often leads men to have unrealistic standards, making it harder for them to find satisfying relationships.

People want heroes to swoop in and fix their lives, but the truth is that more often than not, your hero doesn't exist. You have to work hard to get that job, you have to pull yourself out of depression, and since nobody knows what they're doing when it comes to relationships, you have to take the dive and just ask that person out. No one is going to do it for you.

Movies are made for money by storytellers who carefully create a finite universe with a beginning, middle, and end. Whoever or whatever you believe created the universe, it didn't

make a script.

So don't try to be an actor. Be a person. Do what makes you happy, not what makes people in the movies happy. Love how you want to love, not how movies tell you to. Grieve how you need to grieve, not how actors do it. The amount of emotion a movie can create in you pales in comparison with the beauty you can experience if you get out there and just live. ♦

I did my best to make her happy, but I couldn't be her Superman

lampposts

It's Christmastime I miss you most.
You are not one person but the collection
of the hundreds,
The hundreds of little boys and men I've collected,
Their hands were never soft and they were dippy like me,
But the softness of the lamppost I had kissed them under
was soft enough
To suffice for a night,
A night only.
But you are more than all of them, at least right now.
You hold a light softer than the lampposts, if that's
even possible,
At least right now.
I'm sure some day I will find another buck,
young and witty,
Whose lamppost, or aura, or whatever,
Is also soft,
But when we drank coffee on the brisk, biting bleachers,
You had your uncle's jacket,
You told me his story,
While our eyes followed the football game,
exaggerating this fallacy,
As if the game was what we came for,
As if it wasn't to sit with our hips connected and our
hands smashed into a knot
In between us,
Like it mattered,
Like I mattered to you, and for that game I did,
But that's how lust or love or whatever works:
Love only lasts as long as a game,
Then you go home and sit on your bed with your phone
and your past rings,
And because the game is over,
You pick it up.

by Mariah Potter, Lansing, MI

Overwhelmed

by Stefania Gheorghiu, Stevenson, MD

It is inexplicable, overwhelming, exhilarating, frustrating. You cannot sleep or eat; suddenly the most instinctive habits are pushed to the far back of your mind. It is only when struck by a sudden pain and an audible rumble in your abdomen that you realize you haven't eaten breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

Shoot, the dining halls are closed. So you put on those hideous tan UGGs and sniff through the pile of laundry strewn across your desk in search of the cleanest shirt, preparing yourself for the hike to 7-Eleven – the only store open this late in this small town – to buy five bags of chips. The evidence will be gone by morning, so you don't bother feeling guilty about the prospect of consuming so much fat.

As you walk, you envision his short blond hair spiked with gel. You see his bright blue eyes, his long nose, and the curve of his smiling lips. You long to feel his touch, to hear his deep voice whisper sweetly in your ear. A feeling of warmth replaces the pain in your stomach, and you are no longer hungry. You remember what he's shared with you about his past,

his family, his goals, and his failures: *I'm not a man, but a boy with big dreams.* You smile. You know he is in love with your mind, not your body. A cool breeze engulfs you like a wave of salty water. Goosebumps. How refreshing.

Is this love? you wonder. You begin to think about your previous relationships and how no one else has made you feel this way. Perhaps you will never understand or know love, but it doesn't matter now. This is enough. More than enough – this is overwhelming.

• • •
Hi Stef! See you have had a very "busy" weekend ... Hope you found some time to study too ... Stef, you were out till after 1 a.m. last night. Please don't be offended if I wonder how efficient your work day was today!

I scrolled down to the end of the text, contemplating whether to reply. I knew my parents tracked me via the brilliant and loathsome invention of Find My iPhone, but this was just too

much!

"What is it?" Sam asked.

I looked up; her eyebrows were knitted in an expression of concern. I rearranged my face, realizing the distress it must have shown.

"It's nothing. My mom was just tracking me again last night."

Everyone has their own way of showing love, but I was not fond of my parents' approach. Fear of losing their oldest daughter caused them to cling to me, and rather than feeling comforted by their tight embrace, I felt smothered.

"If this is love," I said to my roommate through tears of frustration one night, "then I don't want to be loved by them." I had just had a heated argument with my mother which I'd abruptly ended by a press of the "end" button. I knew she'd be even angrier at my having hung up so rudely, but I didn't care. I needed to escape, and that red button was my only way out.

Perhaps I will understand how it feels to love a child one day. It must

be overwhelming, wanting to protect the flower you have cultivated with such care and dedication. You've shed blood, sweat, and tears over one delicate and unpredictable individual. Despite all the lies I've told, the trouble I've gotten myself into, and the tears I have caused to fall from their tired eyes, my parents still love me unconditionally.

"I'm afraid that I will never find a man who loves me as much as my dad does," my roommate said during one of our midnight talks. We lay in our beds, each of us a little bundle beneath our blanket, visible only by the dim light of the streetlights. Her fear was a valid one. We both knew that despite our anger and frustration at some of the things our parents did, we would never be loved as fiercely, as tenderly, and as unconditionally by anyone else.

There are different kinds of love. Each is on its own scale, but the love I seek – which I think we all search for – is the kind that causes us to do crazy things; the love that makes us selfless and irrational; the love that's so intense, it brings us both joy and anguish. I want to be overwhelmed. ♦

**A feeling of
warmth replaces
the pain in
your stomach**

Middle School Crush

by "Abigail," Windsor, ID

I am not the sappy, romantic type. I absolutely hate those scenes in movies where the girl is like, "But I love you!" and then the couple kisses in the rain. I can't stand to see people displaying affection in public, but even I have succumbed to the plague: the feelings of joy and foolishness, and then utter anguish.

What am I talking about? A crush. A middle school crush, to be exact.

It's absolutely terrible.

Having a crush feels like Valentine's Day has thrown up all over you. You feel like a sparkly fairy princess, and whenever your crush is nearby, you always say the stupidest stuff. It's like your brain has popped out of your skull and walked away. "Hey, do you like those new puffy Cheetos at the cafeteria? Oh, you're lactose intolerant? Yeah, me too. Um ... I mean, no, I'm not. Wait, no, that's not what I – well, I, uh, I mean, I don't really like Cheetos that much."

After obsessing over your crush for months, you feel like maybe, just maybe, he might like you too. After all, he smiles at you during P.E. occasionally, right?

Wrong. So very wrong. Your heart has been crushed into a million pieces. He doesn't like you. He likes someone else. And of course, that someone is *that* girl. You know, the one who sits in front of you in Algebra. She's waaaaay prettier than you'll ever be, but she's so nice that no matter how hard you try to hate her, you can't. You just can't.

Or maybe your crush does like you back. In that case, hooray for you! You must not have sounded that stupid after all. You tell your friends, and you all have a squealing fit. But because you're in middle school, this just leads to two weeks of awkwardly smiling at each other in the hallways until your crush decides that you are not of as high a caliber as the other girl that he also likes. He forgets about you and actually asks this girl on a real "date," or as close to a date as two 12-year-olds can have. He probably

just took her to see the new Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles movie because that's the only one his parents would let him see with a girl.

In all seriousness, maybe it's good that I've never been asked out. I mean, in a study done by York

University in Toronto, researchers found that kids who started dating at 10 or 12 reported more lying and cheating in relationships than those who started at 15 or 16. The late bloomers were also the students with high academic goals. Besides, next to no one ends up marrying the person they went out with in sixth grade.

But even so, I feel kind of out of the loop. The end-of-year formal is coming up, and I'm going to either awkwardly

go by myself or awkwardly go with my awkward (but awesome) friends dressed up as Pokémon or something of the sort.

Until then, I will focus on what's important: being a kid, doing well in school, and—

Wait, who's that? Is he new?

He's kinda cute.

Oh no. Here we go again. ♦

**It feels like
Valentine's Day
has thrown up
all over you**



Photo by Katie McMichael, Walla Walla, WA

Pressure to Do "It"

by "Claudia," Wilton, CT

All my friends are racing to grow up. It's like a contest. Who's going to smoke the first cigarette? Get into the best college? Lose her virginity first? Now that we've turned 17, my friends are starting to feel like their youth is slipping away. Haven't you heard? Seventeen is the new 70. Everyone I know is scrambling to reclaim their "lost" innocence while at the same time becoming more sexual, more grown-up.

I don't understand why everyone our age is trying so hard not to be our age. Those of us lagging behind in the great race toward adulthood are starting to feel the pressure. Especially the virgins. It's as if you can't be a legal adult until you've done "it." I bet in certain cities, like Los Angeles, you can't vote if you're still a virgin. When the first of my friends lost her V-card, she started strutting around campus like Beyoncé in the "Single Ladies" video (oh, the irony). But watching her parading around like Queen Bey herself, I couldn't help thinking, *What's the big deal?* It's just sex ... or is it? I don't actually know.

When I was little, people loved to ask me what I wanted to be when I grew up. Even when I went to bed I heard those words clanging around

in my head. I couldn't escape them. Being a princess never interested me; all I ever wanted to be was a teenager. Pretty cutting-edge stuff, I know. "Teenager" was the coolest title I could imagine. It seemed so glamorous – the friends, the cafeteria, the boys, the drama, the lockers, the homework. I blame Disney Channel. Lizzie McGuire did not prepare me for what high school would actually be like. My girl Lizzie gave me the unrealistic expectation that my biggest teenage problem would be telling my mom I wanted to wear a bra.

I never could have guessed that my biggest teenage problem would actually be sex. When to have it? Who to have it with? Should I make my selection from the soccer team or the debate club? Or should I have sex at all? How will I know when I'm ready?

Being the last virgin in your group of friends is no fun, let me tell you. It's like being the last one awake at a sleepover. Or the only human left after the zombie apocalypse. Seriously, it's as if my friends have had their brains fried by hormones

and are stumbling around campus, chests thrust out, yelling in their best "Walking Dead" voices. "It's not a big deal," they tell me. "You'll lose it when you're ready. No pressure." What they're really saying is, "What are you, twelve? Just do it already. Feel the pressure!" Can't we just go back to pretending boys have cooties?

Can't we just go back to pretending boys have cooties?

The pressure to lose my virginity has done weird things to how I look at guys. I can't help myself. Every boy I see, I wonder, "Is it going to be you?"

What does having sex have to do with being a grown-up, anyway? For a while I thought holding a corporate meeting was a good indicator that you'd reached the pinnacle of adulthood. I could just picture myself in a glass office aggressively pointing to a spreadsheet and saying, "We need these reports tomorrow, people!" Yeah – that's what being a grown-up is all about. It has nothing to do with maturity. Or, like, world experience. I've realized

the point about growing up is that you can't fake it; you can't make it happen. It doesn't matter how much sex you have or how many cigarettes you've smoked or how many meetings you've headed. Growing up is inevitable. Time, not sex, does it for you.

And since that's the case, I don't want to have sex just so I can say I have. I want more. I want the connection that comes with doing it right (pun intended). I want a good partner. I want Ryan Gosling standing shirtless in the rain, belting my name into the wind. Or, if he's not available, someone who thinks the sexiest thing I've ever said is, "Let's stay in and watch Netflix." Or, maybe, "Let's go for a walk."

That's where I am right now. While my friends are speeding down the highway to adulthood, I'm perfectly happy walking. Just walking. ♦

Love Yourself First

by Ash Rivera, Camden, NJ

I met Charlie during a time in my life when I thought I had no one. He brought me happiness. I thought he was my Prince Charming, that we'd get married. He would say and do unforgettable things that put my head in a fantasy. However, as our relationship progressed, I lost more and more of myself to him.

I believe in self-expression. When Charlie and I first met, my hair was green and I had two lip piercings. Every day I dressed how I felt, so a lot of the time my hair was in a messy bun and I wore pajamas. After we'd been together for about four months, he started to criticize my appearance; I should redye my hair, he told me, and get rid of the piercings. At first I said no; they were part of who I was. But after a while, I dyed my hair a normal color and took out my piercings. I lost part of myself when I did that. Charlie told me I looked better that way.

A few months later, he started commenting on how I dressed. We would spend most of our time together at his house watching television, so I saw no reason to get all dressed up – but Charlie told me I looked horrible and needed to take better care of myself. He threw away some of my favorite shirts. I decided then just to dress how he wanted me to, even though I was less comfortable hanging out in tight jeans.

One day, when we were in the car, I connected

my phone to the radio to play one of my favorite songs. He told me it was "crap," then put on his own music. He told me I should start listening to what he liked, the music that "people our age actually listen to." I agreed just to make him happy. The whole car ride, he went on and on about how his music was better than mine and how I needed to develop better taste. Later that day, I let him take my phone and replace all the music I loved with his music. I didn't listen to anything on my phone for months, and didn't dare touch the radio any time we were in the car together.

I agreed just to make him happy

I believe in striving toward success and making sure that your future career is in reach. Charlie had just graduated high school when we started dating, and I was very proud of him.

However, he had no plans for his life; he didn't even try to apply for college. I would tell him how well I was doing in school and that he should get started on his next step in life. He would just nod and tell me he would get to it.

I got a job and started spending less time with Charlie. I told him he should get one too, but after being fired three times, he didn't try anymore. Instead, he started smoking a lot, and I hated it. I kept begging him to stop, but he said that this was who he was and he wasn't about to change for me.

Reality hit me when he said those words. Here



Art by Ravela Smyth, Northridge, CA

I was, changing my appearance and my opinions, settling for less just for him, but he wouldn't even try to change for me. It wasn't worth it anymore.

When you choose to love someone, you should love them for who they are, not who you want them to be. Because of Charlie, I lost myself for a long time. Every day I spent in that relationship, I was becoming more depressed, but I never knew why. When I broke up with him, it was like a weight was lifted off my shoulders. I no longer had to fear his disapproval.

Never let a boyfriend or girlfriend make you feel that you're not good enough, because for someone who truly loves you, you will always be worthy just the way you are. ♦

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The Kitchen: A Place of Love

by Jennifer Yu, College Park, MD

I've never liked kitchens much. A thick fog hangs perpetually over ours, and a symphony of clanking pots, kettle whistles, and popping bubbles is performed day and night. The messes in my kitchen are like the piles of grass left after the lawn is mowed: they sit by themselves, wasting away.

My grandma's love of cooking has sometimes frustrated the rest of my household over the years. More cooking leads to more food, and more food means we each get a bigger serving. The sound of running water is incessant, cascading down over the mountain of dirty plates. While we are away, my grandmother, a petite woman, tackles the heap like a student tackles homework the night before it's due, scrubbing relentlessly and urgently.

It is all in vain, because whenever dinnertime arrives, the mountain makes a comeback.

When I was younger I enjoyed watching my grandmother cook. In the mornings, when I ambled into the kitchen sleepily, my grandmother was always there, an apothecary stirring another brew in her mysterious pot. A bowl of bright green spinach might sit next to the sink, waiting to be rinsed and then bathed in scalding water. There was always something on the trusty stove, and my grandmother's glasses were constantly fogged. Pots hissed like cats, warning you of the consequences of getting too close. Once, when I pulled the lid off a pot that was boiling furiously, a geyser of steam shot up and burned my finger. The enormous blister lasted three weeks – and reminded me never to provoke an angry pot again. From then on I stood quietly to the side, watching my grandma create many somethings out of almost nothing.

The kitchen wasn't just a hub of life. Occasionally a crab or lobster was brought home to be killed and cooked, and skinned, plucked chickens sometimes

found their way into the ornery pots. On Qing Ming, a Chinese holiday when families visit gravesites of relatives, cooked pig parts were packed up ready for travel in Tupperware containers. And our cutting board must have looked like death itself to the countless fish that entered our kitchen. Fish taste much better if they're cooked immediately after they're caught, my grandfather explained nonchalantly. Out of water, these live fish would flop insanely. Their glassy eyes, usually so cold and distant, seemed filled with panic as our dinner anticipated its impending doom. The scales shimmered like stars, reminding me of the tale "The Little Matchgirl." The grandmother in the story claims that every time a star falls, another soul goes up to heaven – and I knew that the quelled soul would be the fish's.

I bore all this with a staunchness uncommon in a young child who has just witnessed the vanquishing of a life. Maybe it was because I didn't value a fish's life as much as a human's, or because

I wanted to be a doctor, and to be one, you had to handle dead animals. Inside, I felt only a slight nudging of sadness for the fish, and when dinner arrived, I had no trouble eating my food.

Many of my family members' routines were centered around the kitchen. Nearly every morning, my father, with his face still unshaven and his glasses on, drank water mixed with apple cider. He thumbed through the newspaper, its gritty pages making a *shlk shlk* noise as he turned them. Next to him, my brother wolfed down his noodles, hair still messy – "like a bird's nest," my mother clucked, yanking a comb through his mop. My grandma was always at the stove, pouring soy sauce into a crackling pan. Her face lit up when my brother coyly asked for

There was always something on the trusty stove



Photo by Julia McClain, West Bend, WI

seconds. My mother tied her shoes, readying for work. My father crunched his eyes up thoughtfully at an article.

I used to watch all this from behind my enormous white mug, a snow-capped mountain that isolated me in this moment from my family. I have come far from the young girl. Now I wake up earlier in the mornings and go downstairs to find that my grandmother is, for once, not in her sanctuary. Every day this discovery astonishes me until I remember how fast time passes – how something you once took for granted may not always be there the next day. I've even tried cooking a few things, although I am simply a naive chick in the culinary arts compared to the old wise bird my grandma is.

Dawn shows its face, shyly rising up into the drowsy sky. The cloud of steam returns. Never have I been so happy to hear such a rowdy tumult. The kitchen is a place of birth, a place of death – and as I see now, it is a place of love. ♦

OJ and Mahogany

by Taseen Rahman, Cambridge, MA

The paint was infused with the great poison known as lead, but we didn't know that yet. The wire and piping, almost all of it, failed some sort of safety regulation, but we didn't know that yet. The landlord charged a ludicrous amount of money, but we didn't know

that yet. Of course, that is when I was born (don't worry – that we knew). It was the '90s, a simpler time (it wasn't, but just go with it); jean jackets filled the streets and the Backstreet Boys filled the air. "Popular" trends were immortalized by Kodak cameras. Immigrants flocked to this country by the thousands, including my pregnant mother and her daughters.

Even a year after their arrival, my mom was still struggling to assimilate, my older sisters were struggling with their identity crises, and I was struggling with being a one-year-old. My mother tried very hard to keep me alive in that death trap of a house (successfully, I might add). I had almost mastered the art of walking by then. My mom, by emigrating, had already

protected me from the horrors of the third world: from the diphtheria that took the life of the brother I never met, and the hunger that makes death seem preferable. However, there was one danger she could not protect me from.

The coffee table is probably a Bangladeshi's favorite piece of furniture; it's what people and their guests sit by as they drink gallons of tea. Bengalis have a word for this table; we call it a "coffee table" (blame the British). Maybe, subconsciously, little Taseen knew the importance of coffee tables, or maybe he was just being a stupid child, but little Taseen had an obsession with running into the coffee table.

Once, like a true warrior, I quickly, courageously stumbled toward my mahogany demon, each step more awkward than the next. Close now, my OJ splashing as if to say, "Oy vey, you schmuck, your tokhis is gonna get hurt!"

Even closer now, I clenched my traditional Bengali *panjabi* (I know some of you were wondering what I was wearing). That huge circular dome some call a head headed straight for the coffee table. Like Newton predicted hundreds of years ago, physics happened.

SMACK!

I sit and look at the picture. It's titled "Little Taseen Post Coffee Table Trauma" – long but aptly named. Here he contemplates the questions no one dares to ask about coffee tables: "If God is all-loving, why did he create coffee tables?" "Why do I feel so compelled to run into them?" "Why do they hurt?" What you cannot see is that while he was busy contemplating life, little Taseen's mother placed him on his demon, on his table, along with the OJ. She took out her Kodak camera, and in that lead-infested apartment, the photo was captured. ♦

do I feel so compelled to run into them?" "Why do they hurt?" What you cannot see is that while he was busy contemplating life, little Taseen's mother placed him on his demon, on his table, along with the OJ. She took out her Kodak camera, and in that lead-infested apartment, the photo was captured. ♦

I had an obsession with running into the coffee table



Art by Michelle Wen, Brooklyn, NY

Shaken

by Catie Carson, Chandler, AZ

My foot hits against the bar beneath my desk as I listen to the tapping of fingers on computer keys around me. The clock ticks slowly toward 2:30. I glance outside at the gray skies of Chengdu, China. I can't wait for this class to end so I can go to basketball practice. I feel my desk shiver. My mom will be there for a parents-versus-kids scrimmage, and I want to beat her. The desk-shiver becomes a violent shudder, then the whole room is shaking. The teacher yells, "Earthquake!" and the classroom bursts to life as students scramble to squeeze under their desks. Mine is too small to cover me, so I brace myself against the floor and the teacher lays a protective hand on my back.

As the shaking continues, the students' murmurs quiet. My head pounds with bewildered excitement. A minute passes. The shaking amplifies, and the phone falls from its hook and dangles. I remember that my mom and younger sisters are in the building. I hope they are okay.

Another minute. What is this? I thought earthquakes only lasted seconds. Then again, I also thought earthquakes didn't happen in Chengdu.

A third minute. Just as suddenly as it began, the shaking stops and the room is silent. Eerily silent. In a strained voice the teacher orders us to leave the building. We scurry like a colony of disrupted ants down the stairs and onto the grass, where my mom and sisters envelop me in a relieved embrace. We have survived.

The Great Sichuan Earthquake of 2008, a 7.9-magnitude disaster, killed thousands and left millions homeless. I was ten years old at the time,

living in China with my family for my dad's work. For two years we had called this place our home, each day growing more familiar with the foreign environment. We had found our place amidst the comfortable chaos of the city. We felt safe. Then this.

Sichuan was struck by the earthquake the way an anthill is struck by a naughty child. One moment we were contentedly going about our daily lives, focusing on our mundane tasks. Then the very ground beneath us shook and our everyday concerns lost their importance as the anthill crumbled. We felt small and powerless, newly aware of our vulnerability.

The Chengdu streets swarmed with frantic people rushing to buy water and food in case of a shortage. They clung to what they knew they could trust: their bikes and bags. In my apartment complex, no one dared return to their multi-story rooms; instead, they set up tents and blankets in the grass and felt the roll of the earth as aftershocks came and came. Like ants, we scattered, unsure where to go or what to do.

Then the reports flooded in from outside the city – *earthquake felt all the way to Thailand ... villages decimated ... tens of thousands dead* – and the gravity of the situation hit us. Just miles from where we sat shivering on blankets, entire villages had been buried under rubble. Although we all felt shaken and afraid, the knowledge that thousands of people nearby desperately needed help moved us to act.

As days passed, I watched people leave their blankets and do what they could to help. Rescue missions began. Those who were old enough traveled to the villages to pull injured people from the rubble and provide medical care. Too young to go,

I helped pack boxes of supplies to send. Foreigners and locals worked side by side, doing what we could to heal and rebuild.

When an anthill is destroyed, the ants do not scurry around frantically forever; they gather together again to build a new home, a new normal. We did this too. As we worked to help those in need, we mourned what we had lost but also sought a new normal.

Some people watch disasters such as the Sichuan earthquake, observe the amount of destruction and death they inflict, and mourn human vulnerability. Indeed, these tragedies do remind us of our fragility, but the impact does not end there. I witnessed the strength and compassion with which people united in the wake of the earthquake. We small, individually powerless ants came together to rebuild a shaken society. Sichuan's renewing strength did not come only from within. International relief organizations sent mission groups, foreign doctors donated their skills, and individuals from around the world contributed financial and emotional support. One of the most destructive earthquakes in history became an opportunity for humans to reach out to one another and hold each other steady in the midst of a trembling world.

From the outside, Chengdu now appears the same as always, just as a rebuilt anthill resembles the prior one. But those of us who lived through the earthquake have changed. We understand that we are all vulnerable. Life is fragile and we have little control. But in our vulnerability, we can find strength. Tragedies like the Sichuan earthquake force us to confront our weaknesses, but they also bring us together and prove our resilience. ♦

The gravity of the earthquake hit us

My First CD

by Claire Tran, Sacramento, CA

Everyone knows that one album. It's the one you starved yourself for a whole week to save up lunch money to buy. It's the one you blasted at 1 a.m. as you jumped around your room or punched your pillow, eager to gush out all your prepubescent angst. It's the one that you had your first kiss to. It's the one that you played during your first night at college, because it makes you feel like you're at home. It's the one that you swear is the soundtrack to your life.

"We're only liars, but we're the best; we're only good for the latest trend."

My eight-year-old brain couldn't even decipher Patrick Stump's poetic lyrics. It was 10 p.m., scandalous for a school night, and I was sitting next to my ancient CD player, listening to "From Under the Cork Tree" for the first time. The three-chord progression plus the accelerated beat plus the lyrics meant absolutely nothing to me at the time. I was confused yet eager to discover what exactly this new genre was.

Before this rite of passage, I listened along to my parents' adult contem-

porary radio stations (Josh Groban, anyone?), and scratched my head at the suggestion of anything mildly upbeat – or should I say, rock. It wasn't until third grade, while watching Fuse, that I encountered Fall Out Boy's music video for "Sugar We're Goin Down." A music countdown show had rated the lead single as #1 for "Most Likely to Get Stuck in Your Head." And it did.

After I purchased the album, I ran directly to my bedroom, popped the disc in, and pressed play. I opened the booklet and dedicated myself to listening to the entire album single night until I memorized all the lyrics. Honestly, I didn't understand any of it, and to this day I still scratch my head

at some of the lines. But the fast tempo of "Nobody Puts Baby in a Corner" urged me to get up and dance, while the melancholic lyrics of "Sophomore Slump" or "Comeback of the Year" made me want to bawl my eyes out. Before Fall Out Boy, I considered music to be a nice background to my everyday life. Slow acoustic songs were the backdrop to car rides to the grocery store or school, but never anything more.

Now I realized music had the ability to make me feel better, to anger or sadden me, or to make me feel like bustin' a move. People come and go, but music will never leave; it is always available as a personal lifeboat. As Blink-182's Mark Hoppus tweeted in 2011, "The fact that music can induce goosebumps, draw a tear, inspire, and connect is one of my favorite parts of being a human."

"From Under the Cork Tree" turned me into a music geek. I dedicated my life to collecting albums, memorizing the names and hometowns of all my favorite bands, and Googling record labels. Fall Out Boy opened a window for me. My mother encouraged me to listen to classical, though much to her dismay, I preferred this so-called emo pop-punk band. In her words, "Punk is not ladylike."

Eight years later, I still shed a tear every time I listen to "A Little Less Sixteen Candles, A Little More Touch Me," and my father still makes horrible jokes: "Fall Out Boy? Do they need a Band-Aid for their knees? Because they fell down?" Patrick Stump, Pete Wentz, Joe Trohman, and Andrew Hurley taught me that it's okay to feel less than happy sometimes, and that I am never alone.

It's the soundtrack to your life



Art by Erin Stevens, Springfield, MA

"From Under the Cork Tree" is one of those albums that I will always cherish for bringing a new light into my life. It helped me find the cure to growing older, and it's the only place that feels like home. ♦

Do You Remember?

by Julia Lynch, Pittsburgh, PA

Do you remember that time when I ran into your kitchen, slammed my empty ice cream mug onto your counter, and jumped into your embrace? Even though my feet were already ten feet off the ground, the spoon was still banging against the rim of the cup. I was filled with as much happiness as an eight-year-old could possess, and my smile stretched for miles. I can still hear the deep exhale from your chest and the crackling of your laugh. I was much too big to be in your arms, but you didn't mind. As you put me down, I stood up straight and looked at you with admiration.

"Thanks so much, Pop, for having me. I can't wait until next Saturday! Good-bye!"

I could see the smile slowly drain from your face. It was replaced with a weird look, one I had never witnessed before. As you got down on your

knee and the keys clipped to your belt clanged like the church bell next door, I started to get worried. Had you noticed the extra helping of ice cream I took? Had I not made my bed that morning?

When I had just about exhausted every criminal act of the past couple days, you calmly said, "Julia, I am not going anywhere and neither are you, so good-bye is not the proper farewell. It's goodnight. Goodnight and until next time, okay?" I nodded and slowly walked out of the kitchen, bidding you "Goodnight and until next time."

Do you remember that time when I was sitting in the back seat of your white Crown Victoria after you had just gotten me from school? When you picked me up, you parked in the bus lane. Even though the curb was painted yellow and there were "No parking" signs galore, you didn't care; you didn't want Gram to have to walk across the parking lot. It's okay that you did that. I didn't tell the bus monitor the next day.

When I slid into the comfy leather seats, I made sure I was right behind you. Your white hair poked through the hole between the headrest and the seat, and I could just barely see the corner of your glasses in the rearview mirror. Gram sat next to me because she didn't want me to be alone in the back. While she tightly grasped

the handle above the window, my fingers were moving around the door, playing with the window button, door lock, and ashtray. However, our free hands were joined in the middle, right above the hump that the center seat formed.

As you silenced the sports radio, I waited for you to ask me about my day. I could not wait to tell you about the project I was working on for social studies or the latest installment of my four-square tournament. Finally the question came and I spewed out words a million miles a minute.

"And then we were on the blacktop and Mrs. Brosewitz came out and finally unlocked the cage with our balls, which we had been waiting for forever, ya know? And Michael and I both reached for the red one (because that one is the best) and

when I got it first I was so excited! Ya know?"

A little cough and readjustment of the rearview mirror was all that you needed to stop me mid-story. "Julia, Gram, and I are both listening. It is not necessary to ask us if 'we know.' You don't have to draw us back into the conversation to check if we are still here. We are. Trust me. So start over."

Although Gram swatted the side of your seat with the back of her hand and gave a stern "Mario!" you stood by what you said, explaining that it was important for me to understand these things. I started my story over, being mindful of the "ya know"s.

Do you remember how you would always reprimand my mother when we arrived at your home without coats on? I would hear you explain about the cold and the sickness that we were going to catch. My mother would mutter something under her breath, then apologize for risking our lives and not listening to what you always told her.

I remember how you would rush into the Little Room to get me one of your sweaters right before I left. You would bring one still attached to the hanger, hand it to me, and then go back and get a scarf that matched. No matter how many times I pleaded that it was spring and warm outside, it didn't matter. There was no way you were going to change your mind, and no way I was stepping through that glass door onto the front porch without your sweater and matching scarf.

After a while my mom caught on, and every time we were outside your brick house on Herron Avenue, my brothers and I weren't allowed to get out of our white minivan without either our coats or hers. She would give us the same speech about the cold and how much she cared about us and our well-being, and in the end, despite our complaints, we would be bundled up as if it were mid-January. You should know that to this day I will not walk out of my house without a coat or a sweater.

Do you remember that last Sunday dinner we had at your house in early May, right before I left? I wished you good-bye, and we both knew that I did not need to be corrected.

Good-bye, Papa. ♦

"'Good-bye' is not the proper farewell"

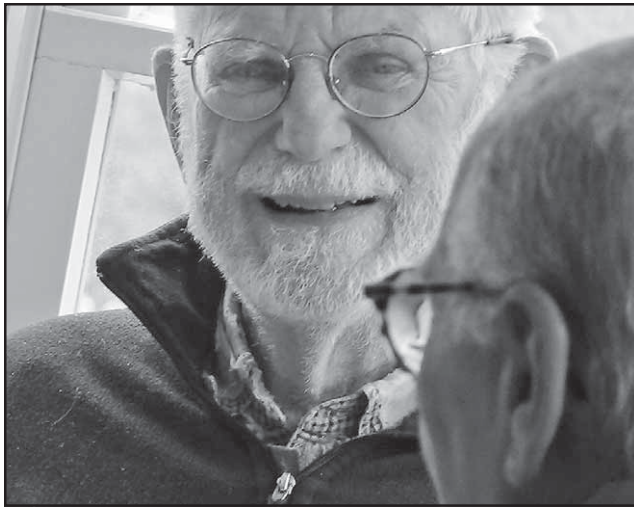


Photo by Victoria Merkle, Twp. of Washington, NJ

Your Perfect Daughter

by Rachael Daniel, Portage, MI

"Honey, would you please pass the corn?"
"Mom, I like girls."

I heard you cried once when I was born and again when I murdered your perfect daughter
The daughter who would marry a cleanly shaven, witty young gentleman in a church that poked the sun
The daughter who would give you a handful

of grandbabies
with their father's nose and your dimples
I'm terrified I might have killed you too

You shredded my posters of One Direction
along with my faith in our relationship
as you screamed about every lie you believed I told you.
As if being a fan of a boy band meant
I was banned from falling in love with a girl.
I knew your ears, along with your mind, were shut tight
when I yelled back
"You're breaking my heart"
and your judgment just drowned me out
with the pops and crackles of its burning

You grasped to flimsy causation
and my bones disintegrated
with every clichéd assumption you whipped at me
"But you're so pretty"
"You're too young to know who you are"
"You just haven't met *him* yet"
"It must be a phase. God, let it be a phase"
But I promise you
my God won't listen
because despite how you read Leviticus
my heart tells me every day
that He crafted me into this beautiful little dyke
and Jesus loves me just as much
as he loves my straight best friends

Mom, I'm sorry my hair is long
and that I wear dresses sometimes
And I know it must be confusing
because yesterday I had a shiny boy on my arm
And today I briefly opened my soul
to show you the girls who live there
And I know you can't swallow it all just yet

But at least try to taste a bit of this:

The eyes you saw that April morning in '96
are still the same big, brown, curious eyes that are today
begging you to like even my gay parts.
I still love writing
and dancing like a three-legged reindeer
Singing made-up lyrics with you
to songs we've heard more times than we've
watched "Honey Boo-Boo" together
And I promise my dream is still to have a gaudy wedding
with the love of my life
and to give my daughter
the dimples you gave to me

I don't need you to wave a rainbow flag
But I do need you to wrap your strong arms around me
when she says good-bye
And to cry for a third time
when she says I do

Mom,
I just need you to love me the way you used to. ♦

The F-Word

by Jasmine Hart, Willmar, MN

Feminism.

That one word can stir up an unbelievable amount of controversy. When I tell people I'm a feminist, it seems as though I get nothing but negative reactions. An angry look and an outraged "Why do you hate men?" A repulsed look and a disgusted "Does that mean you don't shave?" Even an eye roll and a mutter about teen angst is a common – and annoying – response. Many people seem to think that feminists are man-hating, hairy women who have jumped on the bandwagon just to rebel. What does it actually mean to be a feminist?

Feminism, by definition, is the theory of political, economic, and social equality of the sexes. Many people will say, "If that's the definition, then why isn't it called something like 'equalism'?" Feminism sounds like a movement for and about women only." In reality, feminism is in no way just for women, because gender inequality is everyone's problem. In fact, there is an abundance of male feminists. The term "feminism" is used because, historically and currently, women are uniquely oppressed by society and subject to unjust treatment because of their gender.

Our culture is a patriarchy – a society or government in which men have the power and women are largely excluded. After grasping the meaning of patriarchy and feminism's opposition to it, many will say, "We don't live in a patriarchy; isn't it obvious we've already achieved gender equality? I mean, women can vote!"

Certainly we, as a society, have come a long way. Over the course of history, for example, young girls were often forcibly married to grown men. In ancient Rome, men had full control of their wives and

50, he married a 17-year-old girl.

Nevertheless, we still have a long way to go. Less than ten years ago, the Southern Baptist Convention – with 16 million members – revised a statement of faith to read, "A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband."

If we have in fact achieved gender equality, why is it that U.S. women earn 78 cents for every dollar made by their male counterparts? Why is it that over half of the U.S. population is female but women make up less than 20 percent of Congress? Why do male politicians try to pass laws regulating women's bodies? Why do only 16 percent of mainstream films have a female protagonist, and why are many of these women shown primarily as sex objects? Can someone please explain why we regulate the way girls dress in schools to "prevent boys and faculty from getting distracted," instead of teaching males not to objectify women and oversexualize their bodies?

These questions show that we live in a patriarchy, and their answers lie in feminist principles and beliefs. No, we haven't yet achieved gender equality, and women don't just want an excuse to hate men.

In fact, the majority of women don't hate men, but are scared of them. The prevalent attitudes and practices that normalize, excuse, tolerate, and even condone male violence against women – especially sexual assault – are summed up in the term "rape culture." What does this mean? Sixty percent of sexual assaults in the past five years went unreported. Could this be because only 10 percent of rapists are arrested, 8 percent prosecuted, and 4 percent charged with a felony?

Rape culture is the fact that, in a survey of college-aged men, one in three said he would commit rape if he believed he could get away with it. One in three. Rape culture is the fact that 99 percent of rapists are male, yet rape is somehow a women's issue. Rape culture is the fact that a 41-year-old man abused a 13-year-old girl and walked because the judge said, "The girl was predatory, and she was egging you on." Rape culture is a 31-year-old man serving just 30 days in prison for raping a 14-year-old girl who later took her life. Rape culture is the fact that after a video was posted online of 16-year-old rape victim Jada sprawled out on the ground,

unconscious, so many people posted pictures of themselves on Twitter lying in the same position with the hashtag "#jadapose" that it was trending. Rape culture is blaming the victim.

I am a feminist because I'm terrified when I walk home alone. I am a feminist because I hear more rape jokes than knock-knock jokes. I am a feminist because when I've complained about being harassed on the street, people have responded, "Well, at least someone thinks you're attractive." I am a feminist because I too am a sexual assault victim, and my rapist is walking the streets, living his life in peace, because I believed that reporting it would do no

What does it actually mean to be a feminist?



Photo by Quin Tyler, Rochester, NY

could punish them to the point of death. In medieval Europe, a woman who killed her husband could be charged with petty treason and burned alive; for any other type of murder – including a husband killing his wife – the punishment was hanging. In medieval Europe, courts wouldn't convict a rapist if the victim became pregnant, because they believed the pregnancy symbolized God's approval. Christian doctrine of the 1500s and 1600s taught that women were, from birth, instruments of the devil who lured men into sin. John Knox, leader of the Protestant Reformation, wrote, "Woman in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man." At the age of

Dear Legged People

Dear legged people,
Why do I make you uncomfortable?
Why is it that you look for a way to understand me,
to be with me,
like I'm some kind of equation
that doesn't seem quite right?

Dear legged people,
I don't know if you realize this,
but your stares burn through my skin.
They cling to my insides and sizzle,
slowly making bitter what was once
sweet and forgiving.

Dear legged people,
The fact that I'm only as tall
as a five-year-old
doesn't mean you have to speak to me like one.

Dear legged people,
When did "disability"
and "disabled"
become the same thing?

Dear legged girls who wish they had a thigh gap,
If I had your legs
I would flap those babies together
with every step.

Dear legged people,
Yes, I have a job.
Being alone in a wheelchair is not a novelty.
I am not a novelty.

Dear legged guy who told me I inspire you,
I don't quite understand what you mean.
You're inspired by the fact that I'm having
coffee?

Dear legged people,
Has society come to a place where so little
is expected from wheelchair people?

Dear legged people,
I am not here to inspire you.

Dear legged people,
I am more disabled by a society
that sells disability like handouts
to make you feel better about your lives
than by my body.

Dear legged people,
Quit expanding the differences
between me and you.
Our lives are not as different as they seem.
I should know.
I was once
one of you.

by Alejandra Marquez, Monterrey, Mexico

good. I am a feminist because after I started speaking out about my assault, people asked what I was wearing and whether I had been drinking.

There's a fence with people on both sides. On one side are people fighting for gender equality, fighting against patriarchy and rape culture – primarily the feminists. On the other side are people stereotyping feminists and saying we don't need feminism. If you are balanced precariously atop this fence, on which side will you fall? ♦

pride & prejudice

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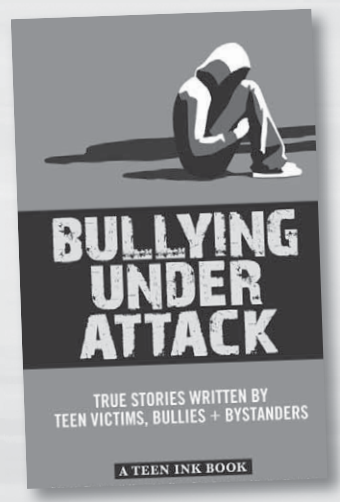
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GMOs: What Do You Know?

by Madeline Scott, Seattle, WA

Frankenfood. GM-No. Teenage Mutant Ninja Soybeans. Such is the typical consumer's opinion of genetically modified, or GM, produce. So when I first heard about GM food, I was intrigued – but also more than a little skeptical. Change the chemical makeup of food? The idea sounded like a Julia Child-inspired sci-fi story. I could also see its potential, however: hardier, more nutritious food for less money. So I did some research and found that, thankfully, genetically modified produce is more blessing than curse.

The biggest misconception about genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is that they are untested and unsafe. In fact, genetically modified food has been tested and approved for consumption by over 2,000 studies performed worldwide, according to the Genetic Literacy Project. “GM crops are the most

extensively tested crops ever,” says the American Association for the Advancement of Science. And in all those tests “no effects on human health have been shown as a result of the consumption of such foods,” according to the World Health Organization.

Another common misconception is that genetically modified food is harmful to the environment. A review for *Landes Bioscience* refutes this by arguing that “commercialized GM crops have reduced the impacts of agriculture on biodiversity.” But how? Well, some genetically modified food has been altered to be poisonous only to certain undesirable (non-human) pests, as an article for the University of Kentucky explains. This reduces the need for broad pesticides that will run off into rivers and streams and destroy ecosystems.

Some GM crops have been altered to enable them to grow in environments with little water and poor soil, according to the University of Michigan. This means that when growing GMOs, farmers can irrigate less and use fewer chemicals than they would on regular crops. In addition, GM produce can be cultivated more easily in third-world countries where agricultural pesticides are less available.

Given that science supports the safety of GMOs, it might not make sense that GM crop-producing companies funded the “No on Initiative 522” campaign (in opposition of labeling GMO foods). According to the American Association for the Advancement

of Science, however, legally mandating labels on GMOs could “mislead and falsely alarm customers,” because customers with misconceptions about GMOs wouldn't buy the labeled food.

Another reason that GMOs are under attack is their association with the companies that produce them – primarily Monsanto, the largest producer of GM seeds. Tarnishing the name of GM food as well as its own, Monsanto has committed countless agricultural atrocities. Its worst offenses include producing cancer-inducing pesticides, according to the Chemical Injury Network, and prosecuting farmers who have accidentally grown GM crops in their fields, according to *Food Inc.* The stains on Monsanto's reputation have unfortunately rubbed off on GMOs as a whole, and consumers are at risk of throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

Fortunately, Monsanto is not the only group genetically modifying food. In 1999, scientists in Switzerland modified rice to contain vitamin A, a vital nutrient for eyesight. According to the World Health Organization, over 250 million preschool-aged children suffer from vitamin A deficiency. This GM rice can help solve that problem. Or it could have – before the funders of the rice project pulled their grant after harsh anti-GMO campaigns. But with new support, the Golden Rice Project, as well as other beneficial GM projects, could help millions of people.

There are many great aspects of genetically modified food, from easier cultivation to helping malnourished children in third-world countries. So before you start campaigning to eliminate GM food, make sure that you know the facts. ♦

A blessing or a curse?



Photo by Rosa Lopez, San Diego, CA

The Quest to Eradicate Malaria

by Isabella Fulford, London, England

Malaria, a parasitic infection transmitted by the night-biting female *Anopheles* mosquito, is still causing significant deaths in the tropics and sub-tropics; approximately 3.2 billion people are exposed to the illness every year. The World Health Organization estimated that approximately 207 million people developed symptomatic malaria in 2012. Malaria deaths peaked at 1.82 million in 2004 and fell to 1.24 million in 2010. Over 80 percent of these occur in sub-Saharan Africa, with most cases attributed to *Plasmodium falciparum*, the deadliest form of malaria parasite. To understand why malaria hasn't yet been eradicated across the globe, it's necessary to consider three important factors – the mosquito, the illness-causing parasite, and human behavior.

The mosquito itself is one of the main reasons that malaria has not been eradicated. Of the approximately 400 known species of *Anopheles* mosquitoes, 30 to 40 species transmit malaria. Different species live in

different ecosystems, so there is no one method of eradication, and they are becoming increasingly resistant to pesticides. Even if there were one pesticide that could eradicate all mosquitoes, spraying it over their habitats would have a large adverse effect on other organisms living in or near the sprayed area. Because all members of the food chain would be affected, mass spraying is not a feasible option.

Modifying human behavior to avoid mosquito bites is a more feasible method for eradication. This includes using insecticide-treated bed nets that provide a physical and chemical barrier, and spraying insecticide on indoor walls and ceilings. However, neither of these are permanent solutions; while they can control malaria, they won't eradicate it.

Although *Plasmodium falciparum* is the most common and deadly species to cause malaria, there are four other species that can affect humans,

each with different life cycles and antigens. The parasites that cause malaria also pass through multiple distinct forms during their life cycle and have evolved to evade the mammalian immune system; some have even become resistant to the drugs normally used to treat the illness. The ideal drug would protect humans from

malaria at any stage in the parasites' development, but current treatments only target them during one part of their life cycle. All these variables make it significantly more challenging to develop medications and vaccines that are effective against every stage and

species of malaria. In addition, the effectiveness of antimalarial drugs can be compromised for several reasons. Resistance to these drugs in humans can occur because of inappropriate prescribing and overuse; in many countries antimalarials can be bought over the counter. Often drugs are counterfeited, and

people may be unaware that they are not taking the correct medication.

Social unrest affects many countries where the disease is common, so controlling malaria sometimes becomes a secondary issue. A successful effort to eradicate the illness would probably involve restricting travel, because refugees, immigrants, and tourists transport malaria into new areas and make it harder to contain. But the infrastructure in these countries is often poor, and other basic needs (food and water) are prioritized over the control of malaria.

The best chance for successful eradication lies in the development of a truly effective vaccine with a high efficiency that provides lifelong immunity and doesn't require a booster. Cooperation between governments, social services, pharmaceutical companies and charities is critical for any successful program. Without simultaneously targeting the mosquito, the unique features of the parasite, and human behavior, eradication will remain a distant goal. ♦

Malaria is still causing millions of deaths

art gallery



Photo by Josh Charow, Summit, NJ



Art by Laura Chapman, Pleasantville, NY



Photo by Emily Weaver, Westernville, NY



Photo by Ethel Nalule, Niagara Falls, ON, Canada



Art by Jerry Zeng, Portola Valley, CA



Art by Fajr Alam, Gujranwala, Pakistan



Art by Carissa Chen, San Jose, CA



Photo by Emma Mortellaro, Granville, OH



Photo by Mitra Ghaffari, Boulder, CO

A Second Chance

by Kathryn Fournier, Plainfield, CT

I lie there staring at ceiling tiles, my body firmly pinned against the table. Fire ignites in the crease of my arm, then crawls through my veins, slowly engulfing my body. The room begins to spin, and my eyes lose focus. Panic overwhelms me. *Did I just say good-bye to my parents for the last time? Will my best friend ever know that I love him? What if I never wake up?* But my eyelids continue to grow heavy; within seconds, I'm out.

It's hard to believe that two months ago, my life was completely normal. Well, normal by my standards, at least. At 15, I was trapped in the monotonous rut of cross-country practices, year-book meetings, and perpetual homework. Too often I isolated myself from my family, even skipping meals to slave away at problem sets and essays. The need for perfection consumed me. I devoted my life to school.

Then, within a few weeks, my secure grip on my perfectly planned life slipped out of my hands. I was zipped from hospital to hospital in a race against time to remove the foreign entity thriving inside my skull.

Dr. Allen entered with a quick knock.

"Good afternoon. How are you feeling, Kathryn?" she asked. Her puppy eyes already conveyed the inevitable news.

"I'm fine," I lied.

She opened my folder to search for paperwork.

"As I explained before, there was a slight possibility that the deafness in Kathryn's left ear could be caused by a rare tumor. To eliminate this possibility, I sent her for an MRI with contrast. The results are back, and unfortunately, Kathryn, you have a brain tumor. Although large for its kind ..."

My father abruptly stood and walked out of the room.

"... it's likely an acoustic neuroma, a benign brain tumor encompassing the hearing, facial, and balance nerve. Because of its size ..."

Dr. Allen's voice faded into the background as I noticed my mother's reaction. She tightly grasped her hands, focusing her attention on the doctor, her glossy eyes desperately begging, pleading, searching for any glimmer of optimism in the diagnosis.

"Do you understand, Kathryn?" the doctor asked.

"I'm sorry. What?"

My dad reentered just in time to hear the details.

"Elderly patients with acoustic neuromas are simply given periodic scans to monitor growth

because these tumors are so slow-growing they're unlikely to cause any negative side effects before the end of their lives. Because of your age and the abnormal size of the tumor, observation is not an option. A certain type of radiation can be used to break down the growth, but this works best for smaller tumors. Unfortunately, surgery seems to be the best option for you."

"Oh," I said. "Okay."

"Okay?" Dr. Allen asked. She and my parents seemed to be shocked by my reaction. "You're a 15-year-old girl who was just unexpectedly told you have a tumor and need brain surgery. 'Okay' is your reply?"

The doctor's remark still echoes in my mind. Why *wasn't* I more emotional about the diagnosis? Saying I was numb would be a lie. Naturally I was curious, anxious, overwhelmed, and terrified. After all, I was a teen – a hormonal roller coaster. Thus

the real question is not "Why wasn't I emotional over the situation?" but "Why didn't I express my emotions?" Why did I feel compelled to hide my feelings?

I grew up the only child: my father's "baby girl" and my mother's best friend, the center of their love and attention.

Fifteen years of being an only child made me want to protect my parents from this agony.

Because of its location, removal of the mass proved complicated, which is why I am currently suffering from unilateral hearing loss. It's the reason why I now suffer from facial paralysis. But most

importantly, it's responsible for the change in who I am today.

Strenuous surgeries to remove the tumor left me feeling like a puppet; with both arms outstretched, I was brutally whipped between states of absolute bitterness and guilt. I knew I should be grateful, but I couldn't help but feel furious at the world and at God. I was only 15, yet my trademark smile had been stolen (replaced with a droopy smirk), my hearing abruptly failed, and I was falling behind in school.

I became a self-pitying monster.

Then, as if my blindfold suddenly vanished, I finally saw how truly blessed I was. I was tumor-free. Cancer-free. I had a loving family and supportive friends. Even though I'd partially lost movement in my face, at least I could function normally. Although I lost hearing in one ear, I wasn't completely deaf. And school? In the grand scheme of things, I realized it was the least of my concerns. God had graciously provided me with a second chance at life; that was nothing to complain about.

Although I never dreamed I would admit this, my experience has been a blessing in disguise. I desperately needed to realize that life is not perfect – that I'm not perfect. No longer am I the meek, shy girl wasting her school years in the solitude of her bedroom. I've branched out, even joined a theater group. When I step on stage in front of thousands of people, I'm no longer ashamed of my disfigured face. Now I view it as a sign of bravery – it proves that with enough perseverance, I can overcome any obstacle. ♦

"Your deafness could be caused by a tumor"

"Surgery seems to be the best option for you"

Body Algebra

by Ariella Carmell, Los Angeles, CA

If you must know
I've sucked in
my abdomen for so
long that it concaves
like the crescent moon

and I cannot tell if
it tucks in that way
naturally anymore

all I know is that
when I was a ballerina
I pursed my stomach out

it all began when I feared
I'd lost my ribs

when mounds grew on
my chest
once a prairie landscape
houses, unwanted, built

I found some
self-flagellation in
my pocket

and punished my renegade
form, stunting horizontal
growth

But this is merely roundabout
back to your question:

"How much do
you weigh?" does not

yield a simple answer
like easy division
the algebra of the
body must be
whipped into the brain

For example:

Factor in the subtraction
of breakfast when you first
step on the scale
in the morning

meals are
standard deviation

chip off those few
pounds from the
electric numbers

take into account
the mornings, the nights,
the meals in between

all the water the body
is loath to part with

the separation anxiety

I pine for the scale
that bears the load
of a calculating mind
in a burgeoning body

gazing down at the

numbers trickling up
teetering between
double and triple digits

I talk it over with my friends

who cut their food
as Democritus would
dicing until they hit
the atoms

they rearrange the mangled
particles
until they resemble
a mosaic of organs
much like ourselves

I run my hand across
a protruding collarbone
to remind myself
why I see
more plate than food

and laugh about
what pigs we are
alongside these girls

thinking all the while
that if I should ever
have a daughter
I would tell her

to find the bone
beneath the skin
wherever it may be



Photo by Lily Bolton, Trumansburg, NY

Hurdling My Mental Block

by Caitlynn Frontz, Nova, OH

sports

I focused on the mat in front of me. Dark blue lines, evenly spaced on the light blue surface, showed the path of my tumbling pass. Loud thumps on the mats let me know that others around me were honing the skill we all loved.

“Warm up all tumbling! We’ll be running the routine full out!” Coach Mike yelled, and the squad of almost 30 cheerleaders groaned at the thought of yet another practice run. But we did as we were told and went to our corners for tumbling.

“We need to warm up our stunt too,” Kenzie said. I turned to look at the small 11-year-old, my “flyer,” whose weight I’d help support as I lifted her high above the mats. “I’m not very confident with the switch-up.”

She rubbed her palms together and chewed her lip. I nodded and tried to give her a reassuring smile before I turned back to face the blue mat. I knew exactly what I was supposed to do, so I didn’t hesitate. I shifted my weight to the right foot, went through a simple eight count in my head, ran two steps, and hurdled.

As my hands fell to the mat, my body went into autopilot. First the roundoff, then the back handspring, then, finally, a tuck. I threw my arms out and leaped off the mat. My body turned in the air and, as I always do during a tumbling pass, I closed my eyes. I fell from almost five feet up, my feet landing on the mat with a loud thud. Adrenaline rushed through me, and I felt the familiar craving to do it again.

After Kenzie warmed up her tumbling, she dragged me and her other bases – Kelsey and Haley – to a corner to practice our stunt. Everyone in our group had a job. I was the main base, so I would hold most of Kenzie’s weight and keep her foot steady as we held her up. After running through the sequence and going over counts, Coach had us line up and get ready to run the full routine.

The practice was a boring one, and we were all growing tired. The cheer squad started moping through the countless, tiring run-throughs. My feet skidded across the mat as my body became more and more fatigued. We lined up for yet another run-through, but all I wanted to do was lie down and give my overworked muscles a break.

Before I was ready, the music for the routine blared from the speakers. Our routine was not hard, but it’s easy to get lost when there are 30 other girls on the mats with you. Still, I’d learned to zero in on one spot on the wall and focus on what I needed to do. As we finished, Kenzie did a full down and we cradled her in our arms. We let her down gently, then transitioned to tumbling.

My very first pass was only a roundoff to a tuck. Not hard at all. Once I landed, I had to move quickly to the corner. I watched as Lacy did her pass, then Riley and Kenzie, then, finally, Louran.

My pass was next. I shifted my weight to my right foot and took my first step. My roundoff felt fine, but when I went into the back handspring, I could feel that something was wrong. My body felt loose, as though I didn’t have control over my muscles. I had to pull it together; if I messed up I would get the whole team push-ups. As soon as I set into the tuck I knew that it was a mistake. I wasn’t tight, I threw my head back, but I didn’t have enough rotation.

Upside down, I felt myself start to fall. My face hit the mat first. Then my body landed with a loud thud and the wind was knocked out of my lungs. A sharp pain registered in my nose as I peeled myself off the floor. The skin on the bridge of my nose, my upper lip,

and my chin felt stretched beyond limits. The music stopped and I was buried in the shadows of my teammates as they gathered around me.

“What happened?”

“She fell.”

“She’s bleeding!” Kelsey whispered to the coach.

The realization finally hit: I had fallen in my tuck. I’d never fallen this badly before. My stomach twisted and turned as I got to my feet. Coach Mike told me to go clean myself up in the bathroom.

When I glanced in the mirror my stomach did its own tumbling pass. A steady flow of warm blood streamed from my nose and chin. I spit into the sink and scrambled to get a paper towel for my nose. After what felt like forever, I finally stopped the bleeding. I cleaned my face with warm water, exposing my mat burns, which throbbled. The parts of my face that stung were rubbed raw, cracked, and still bleeding. I could feel my pulse in my head. The stinging was unbearable!

That week was a long and agonizing experience. My face scabbed up, and I had to tell the story a million times. That weekend we had a competition, but I now had a mental block. Every time I tried to do my tuck, my brain screamed to stop. The competition was even worse than the practice! I fell on my knees on the stage! I couldn’t have been more embarrassed. I wanted to do my tuck so much, but my body just wouldn’t let me. Every time I tried, I got sweaty, my heart raced, and I felt extremely discouraged. When I faced the long drives to the gym, I knew I’d only leave feeling worse. I decided to stop competitive cheerleading.

I quit, feeling discouraged and unsatisfied. But soon after, I felt amazing relief. Suddenly a weight was lifted from my shoulders. I no longer had to pressure myself with tumbling. I no longer had to face my teammates every day feeling as though I would let them down again.

The only thing that had me nervous now was high school cheer tryouts. I was bombarded with the cheers and dances to memorize. The pressure was nothing, though, compared to what I had experienced. At least now I could do whatever tumbling pass I wanted.

After long hours of practicing the cheers and dance routines, tryouts finally arrived. My nerves made me shake and sweat as I waited to be called into the gym for my individual tryout. I spirited in and forced a smile as I faced the five judges. I performed my cheer and chants; then it was time for my jumps and tumbling.

The tumbling went great: an easy and well-executed roundoff back handspring. But as I spirited out of the gym, I started to beat myself up about how horrid I did. I thought I wasn’t loud enough, my motions were not tight, and I messed up on my cheer. In my mind, everything that could have gone wrong did.

When my mom picked me up, I had lost hope that I would make varsity, which I had wanted since fifth grade. That night everyone who’d tried out would receive a phone call telling us whether we made the squad or got cut. The wait was agonizing. My phone sat on my lap, and I kept stealing glances at the black screen. It was 11 when I finally heard my ringtone. I answered and was greeted by the coach, Mrs. Carey.

“Congratulations! You made varsity,” she said. I felt as light as air at that moment.

That summer we started practicing, and the practices included tumbling classes. I was excited to tumble on a spring mat again, but terrified to do my tuck. As

we walked through the door, my head filled with memories; some were good, but others made my face hurt. We were introduced to our new coach, Clark, who was from Alaska and supposed to be amazing. I had high hopes he would help me get over my mental block.

I explained my fear to Clark, and he didn’t seem fazed. “You’ll get over it,” he said. Then we began tumbling. As we went through simple tumbles like cartwheels, handstands, rolls, and round-offs, the humidity was thick, making it hard to take steady breaths. My skin started to get sticky with sweat as we lined up to start corner tumbling.

When Clark told me he would spot me, I thought that I would feel scared, but I only felt more confident in myself. *If the coach thinks I can do it, then I must be able to*, I thought. I shifted my weight to my right foot and took a deep breath. *Don’t overthink this.*



Photo by Esmeralda Esparza, Bremen, IN

I took my first step into it and cleared my head. My next thought didn’t register until my feet hit the ground at the end of my pass. I opened my eyes and released the fists I hadn’t realized I was squeezing. I looked up to see the smiling faces of my friends running toward me.

“You did it!” Emma shouted.

“That was so pretty!” Sam squealed

“I’m so proud of you!” Kenzie cheered.

I felt an incredible rush of excitement as I hugged my teammates. After six months of stress and sorrow whenever I thought about tumbling, I finally felt fulfilled, excited, and incredibly proud.

As the cheer season began, my tumbling was put into the routine. I tumbled at our first varsity game and cheered with a new happiness. Tumbling no longer felt like an

unbearable task.

Wednesday is now my favorite day of the week because I get to go to the gym and tumble with the coach who helped me conquer my mental block. Now that I can tumble without freaking myself out, I carry myself differently and interact with people in a new way that reflects my positive attitude. Now that my tucks are no longer an obstacle, I can work on other skills and become a better tumbler.

Thinking back on my mental block, I know that without the support and the confidence that my friends gave me, I would never have gotten over it. Clark’s coaching helped me fix my technique. I know I won’t fall like that again. ♦

I had never fallen this badly before

I quit, feeling discouraged and unsatisfied

Space: The Future of Humanity

by Narrelle Gilchrist,
Royal Palm Beach, FL

Since ancient times, humans have dreamed of “reaching for the stars.” During the past few decades, men and women have taken the first steps into a new frontier of possibility: outer space. Yet people have wondered whether the benefits of exploring outer space outweigh the massive costs. I believe that they do. Space exploration has provided the world with amazing innovations in engineering, technology, and science, and promoted the unity and interconnectedness of humanity. Despite the risks, I believe that space exploration will lead us into a peaceful future sustained by new resources and technologies. Space exploration holds great possibilities for society and our future.

Already, the effort put into space exploration has produced innovations in engineering and technology. The space race led to one of the greatest explosions of technological advancement in history. In the 1950s, rocket scientists had only begun to venture past the stratosphere. In 1957, a rocket launched the first artificial satellite, Sputnik, into outer space. By 1969, a spacecraft had landed on the moon and returned safely. By setting our sights on the moon, we made achievements that any other generation would have thought impossible; space programs around the world made the greatest strides in science and engineering ever known to humanity.

Reaching for the stars landed a man on the moon, but it also had a profound impact on our lives here on Earth. Approximately 60,000 products made by NASA, including memory foam, LEDs, and solar panels, are the result. Today, we rely on satellites for weather, navigation, television, communication, and much more. Without satellites and LEDs, cell phones, social media, television, and the worldwide communication we enjoy today would not be possible.

Exploring outer space has greatly expanded the realm of our scientific knowledge. During the Apollo missions, geologists discovered that the moon has

than they ever dreamed possible. And, there is still so much more to learn.

Space exploration is more than just the next step in the field of science; it is the next era of human development. Over five hundred years ago, Europeans crossed the Atlantic Ocean and first explored the Americas. They discovered another part of their world; by venturing into outer space, I believe humanity will also find another part of our universe. Christopher Columbus realized that his people were not alone on Earth, just as I hope we will realize we are not alone in this galaxy. The universe is so much larger than this solar system and this one planet, it seems only logical that we are just one among many advanced civilizations. I hope that through space exploration we can enter another era in human history, the beginning of a future that will take humanity into outer space. As a *New York Times* journalist put it, “[Space exploration] is more than a step in history; it is a step in evolution.”

Since we began exploring outer space, humanity has become more connected as a species sharing our great planet, rather than people divided by borders and ethnicity. Seeing Earth from outer space unites humans in a way that nothing else can. It reminds us of the planet we all share and the many things we have in common, not what separates us. From outer space, Russians saw the United States for the first time, and Americans saw Russia for the first time. And suddenly, neither could remember why the countries had such conflict when they were really not that different. “We were flying over America and suddenly I saw snow, the first snow we ever saw from orbit. I have never visited America, but I imagined that the arrival of autumn and winter is the same there as in other places. And then it struck me that we are all children of our Earth,” cosmonaut Aleksandr Aleksandrov reflected.

When Apollo astronauts brought home images of Earth from the orbit of the moon, humans were amazed by the fragility and beauty of our planet. James Lovell, an Apollo 8 and 13 astronaut, recalled his awe when he gazed upon Earth from thousands of miles away: “Everything that I ever knew – my life, my loved ones, the Navy – everything, the whole world was behind my thumb.” Similarly, Apollo 11 astronaut Neil Armstrong remarked, “It suddenly struck me that that tiny pea, pretty and blue, was the Earth. I put up my thumb and shut one eye, and my thumb blotted out the planet Earth. I didn’t feel like a giant. I felt very, very small.”

From outer space, Earth seems so insignificant compared to the vastness of the galaxy. Suddenly, we remember that we are one people sharing one planet, and that our planet is only one of billions. When we realize the magnificence and the magnitude of the unexplored, our problems on Earth seem less significant. I believe that as we delve further into outer space, humans will become more united and will strive to evolve into a better people. As sci-



Art by Shelby Granger, Hoosick Falls, NY

ence writer Willy Ley put it, “a giant leap into space can be a giant leap toward peace down below.”

Opponents think the resources we put into exploring the universe could be better spent fixing the problems on Earth. But what they don’t realize is that space holds answers to many of these problems. While we are running out of resources on Earth, space holds infinite resources. Energy from the Sun or fuels from other planets could become new sources of energy, ones that don’t require vast amounts of fossil fuel or produce nuclear radiation. As our population expands, Earth is becoming too small for us. Confined to this world, we will constantly run into dead ends trying to fix our problems. In space, we will evolve past worrying about the problems of today.

Opponents of space exploration also say that the risk of sending humans into outer space is too great. They suggest we satisfy our curiosity using unmanned probes and satellites. But probes and satellites cannot do the work of humans. Centuries ago, European sailors risked their lives to explore the unknown. Today we must do the same in outer space. Although traveling into space is risky, one day it will be as safe as crossing the Atlantic is today.

We take risks every day. If we are not willing to take risks, we will never reach our full potential. In 1962, President John F. Kennedy firmly committed the nation to the goals

of space exploration. He declared, “But why, some say, the moon? Why choose this as our goal? And they may well ask; why climb the highest mountain? Why, thirty-five years ago, fly the Atlantic? ... We choose to go to the moon and do the other things not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win.” The measure of our capacity is the measure of our will to challenge ourselves to climb the next highest mountain and to be better than we are today. Using the same spirit in which John F. Kennedy encouraged travel to the moon, we must venture into deep space, setting our sights for Mars and beyond.

When I look at the stars, I dream of the future space exploration will bring. I believe it will usher in an era of peaceful cooperation. By expanding our minds and horizons, we can achieve anything we dream of. Humanity has done more than reach for the stars; we have flown among them. The future that space exploration will bring us holds great possibilities for humanity. ♦

Space holds answers to many of the problems on Earth

Je Suis Charlie

When I was one I could walk
When I was two I could talk
All these years I’ve been learning
These things without meaning
But today I understand
The reason I learnt to stand
It was all so I could see
That they want me to flee
They want me to be quiet
But today, we all riot
We use the only weapon
That won’t fall into oblivion
We hold tightly our pen
And despite these two men,
We write the one word
That shall always be heard
A shout into the void
A shout in the crowd
A deafening silence
Better than any sentence
I learnt to walk
I learnt to talk
So I could defend and preach
What is called freedom of speech

by Enora Cospérec,
Nogent-sur-Marne, France

a molten core, a fact that had before been a topic of speculation and debate. Moon rocks that astronauts collected had similar minerals to Earth and showed signs of impact, supporting the impact-collision theory of the moon’s formation.

As a result of the Hubble Telescope, Kepler spacecraft, and International Space Station, we have discovered new solar systems and galaxies. By observing other planets, astrophysicists have refined their theories on the mysteries of the universe and have discovered new anomalies, including dark matter and dark energy. In a short time, humans have learned far more about their universe

Why I Hated "The Fault in Our Stars"

by Emily Garber,
Havertown, PA

We've all heard of John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*. But on the off chance you've been living under a rock, I will give you Goodreads' description of the book: "Despite the tumor-shrinking medical miracle that has bought her a few years, Hazel has never been anything but terminal, her final chapter inscribed upon diagnosis. But when a gorgeous plot twist named Augustus Waters suddenly appears at Cancer Kid Support Group, Hazel's story is about to be completely rewritten." Sounds sad, right? It is. Was it a bawl-my-eyes-out story? No. Not for me.

My friend who read *The Fault in Our Stars* for ninth-grade English recommended it to me, so I thought, *Why not? I might as well see what all of the hubbub is about.* So I did. And I have to admit the book was good. Not amazing, but good. I did not cry, however. Everyone I talked to was shocked. Everyone who read the book cried, and I hadn't even been close to tears. But the book isn't where my rant begins.

When the "Fault in Our Stars" movie was released, my friend Cassidy and I walked into the theater very excited. I thought I would cry and want to see it a dozen times, but I didn't. Not even close. Cassidy and I were the only two people in the theater who weren't sobbing loudly; we weren't even tearing up. Yes, it was sad, but it definitely wasn't

**We were the
only people in
the theater who
weren't sobbing**

the saddest movie I have ever seen.

As someone who knows what it's like to live with someone who has cancer, I hated "The Fault in Our Stars," because it glorified the illness. My dad had stage IV glioblastoma – the most malignant type of brain cancer. After his brain surgery, he couldn't walk, use the bathroom without help, or dress himself. Pretty much everything had to be done by a nurse or my mom; I like to joke that if that isn't

true love, I don't know what is. I know firsthand how sad terminal illness can be, especially since my dad's cancer was in his brain. At least Hazel and Augustus could talk, walk, and think normally. After his brain surgery, my dad was never the same again. He yelled at us more often, and sometimes we

weren't even sure if he knew that he was going to die. If they based their knowledge of cancer on the movie alone, no one in that theater would have a clue how hard it really is to live with.

I didn't cry during "The Fault in Our Stars" because what my dad and my family experienced was far worse than what Augustus and Hazel did. I hate saying that, but it's true. I cried so much when my dad cursed me out or yelled at me. I

wonder what the people in the movie theater would have thought if they'd watched my father deteriorate without even realizing what was happening to him. What if they had seen what he looked like right after he died – his lifeless body more peaceful than it had been in months? If only they knew what my father went through, then the story of Hazel Lancaster and Augustus Waters would have seemed like a cake-walk. ♦



Photo by Kailey Harris, Portland, ME

Electric Chair

by Nadia Tivvis, Baltimore, MD

I saw them two white girls on their way past me
and my sister letting our cow graze
and they asked us where the maypops grow
but we didn't know. We knew our place.

But when all those hundreds went searching
that night all over the countryside
and found them underwater in the ditch
beaten with a railroad spike

they came for me. They came to my house
and my tear-eyed baby sister watched
them tear me away. The police screamed
until their faces turned red, said I killed them
two white girls. But I knew my place.

I wasn't gonna be able to see my family,
they said, unless I said I did it.
Them three big white men all crowded me
and for an hour they shouted at me,
and wrote down some notes saying I confessed.

Two weeks I waited in jail and knew.
Them three big white men said I done it.
A lynch mob gathered outside the jail
and wanted to get in at me to kill me.
When they pulled me out into the courtroom
the white man talked to all the other white men
and then the ones who would decide went away
for ten minutes. I didn't look up when the judge
said I'd die. The white men all went home for dinner.

The Governor came to watch me the night before.
I watched the floor and remember the face of my sister
and the face of my brother and my mother and my

father
who had to leave or be lynched
after they took me away.

Last I saw them their faces were
all wet and bloated
like the faces of them little girls
must have been
in that ditch full of water. But I
don't know really
because I never seen them girls
when they were dead.

That Governor must have been
thinking
how I was black as the sin I did
killing two little white girls picking flowers
pure as anything but maybe he didn't know
that my baby sister is pure as anything too.

When they took me out of the little room
to take me to another, I held a Bible
in my right hand. It was evening but
I couldn't know that. I'd been in the dark
for eighty-one days.

The chair was too big for me. I sat
on the Bible to make me taller
and the straps fell loose from my arms
and ankles. The wires wouldn't stay.

Like God was telling them they'd made
a mistake.
But they didn't listen like they didn't listen
when I said I never killed those girls.

Author's note: "This poem is about George Stinney, a 14-year-old African-American boy accused of killing two white girls, who was the youngest person executed under the death penalty in the U.S. in the 20th century.

The only evidence against him was the testimony of three police officers who claimed he had confessed but had no record of him having done so. Sentenced to death in 1944 after the jury deliberated just ten minutes, he was finally exonerated by a South Carolina judge in December 2014."

They put a mask over my face and it smelled
like the place I was going and back there
I let my eyes cry for those little white girls
and for my poor pure little sister

but when they got the wires in place
and flicked the switch and the power
jolted through me like a burning fire
the mask fell away and I screamed
to the heavens and my arms and my legs
thrashed like a dance I never could catch up to
and my head jammed back and into my chest
and I bit my tongue and the blood was all in my throat
and I saw the stars in my eyes bursting, wide open
like it felt – my blood from my skin and all feeling
but pain and it went through me with the men watching
as the drool pooled from my mouth,
and my eyes staring forward
with each jolt, three of them, for four minutes
that were my whole lifetime. ♦

The Price of Generosity

by Amrita Bhasin, San Francisco, CA

The sun was setting and the tiny shops were starting to close their wooden doors. But elsewhere, everything was just getting started; Madrid, the capital city of Spain, was coming to life. On the large historic plaza, performers and skaters were doing daring acts that made me gasp with disbelief.

But what really got my attention were the men in the shadows hawking knockoff purses and cheap sunglasses. They were desperately trying to sell their wares, shouting their low prices to American tourists. Soon, though, the police came – and the men ran, shoving everything into drawstring trash bags, ignoring the stray sunglasses and paper fans that cluttered the ground. The police officer got out of his car, took a few steps, and then drove off. As soon as the patrol car was out of sight, the men cautiously set up their wares again. The plaza was back to normal within minutes.

It occurred to me that these men probably couldn't afford, or didn't have the paperwork necessary to acquire, the permits to sell souvenirs legally on the streets. Here I was vacationing with my family, enjoying the sights and not thinking about much else. But seeing men struggling to sell fake Prada handbags in order to provide themselves with dinner made me realize how much inequality exists in the world and how little I can do about it.

It made me sad to think that these people came thousands of miles from their homelands in Africa in search of a better life only to be running from

the authorities in order to make ends meet. I felt grateful for what I had, and although I didn't want to acknowledge others' hardships, I knew I needed to think about my life differently.

Even as teens, we can do things to help others. Suppose your parents give you a \$5 allowance each week. Maybe you use the money to buy a Starbucks Frappuccino. But after that sugary drink gives you pleasure for twenty minutes, both the money and the drink are gone. What if you used that \$5 differently?

According to the United Nations Food Program, \$50 can feed one child in a developing country for an entire year. The money spent on just one Frappuccino could feed a hungry child for a month. Depriving myself of one Frappuccino in exchange for feeding a hungry child is a small sacrifice for a huge result. It's amazing that giving up something so small can have such a

tremendous impact on another's life.

The truth is, people resist giving away what they have, especially hard-earned money. I enjoy Frappuccinos and I wouldn't want to stop drinking them completely. But generosity doesn't necessarily take everything away from you.

Many people believe that only the extremely wealthy can impact the world, but contrary to popular belief, people in the middle class actually donate a larger percentage of their money than the affluent. In 2013 people who earned \$50,000 donated on average 3.5 percent of their income to charities, while those who earned \$500,000 donated just 2.5 percent, according to the National Center for Charitable

Statistics. People who have less often have a better awareness of life's hardships and are more willing to help others.

It's also been proven that altruism boosts an individual's personal contentment and that a "connection to others" satisfies us. Generosity doesn't have to be about money. We can be generous with our time or even our thoughts. Everyone can be generous. Even the smallest act of generosity can make the world a better place. ♦

The cost of one Frappuccino could feed a hungry child for a month



Photo by Pjoi Santos, Pampanga, Philippines

Nonprofit Entrepreneurs

by Devon Fox, Wheat Ridge, CO

I didn't set out to build my friends' confidence when I asked them to get involved in community service, but that has been the result. My cousin Tyler Trujillo and I cofounded Reach the Sky, a nonprofit organi-



Photo by Burgandy Braun, Lowell, IN

zation created by kids to help kids. As the leader, I wanted to involve lots of my teen friends. It has been amazing to see their confidence grow. We have learned that even though we are young people, we can make a difference.

One of our goals is to provide dental and hygiene education and products to kids. We reached out to local dentists for money and support. My board members and volunteers (friends, classmates, and neighbors) met to develop a PowerPoint presentation to educate kids about taking care of their teeth.

Soliciting money by mail and phone is not terribly effective, so we try to be creative with our fundraising. Since film and photography are my hobbies and my friends love movies, we raise money for Reach the Sky by hosting an annual Oscar Party and Silent Auction. We have raised a few thousand dollars to buy dental supplies and educational materials to

distribute to elementary schools with the most need.

Reach the Sky also participates in the Sam Sandos project, where we pack boxes with nonperishable food. The boxes are then delivered to needy families during the holidays. I am excited to participate again next year when I will be able to drive!

Whether it is participating in a 5-K

Run for the Homeless, bringing dental supplies to kids, or delivering food to those in need, I am so fortunate that I can share my time with people I care about. Being together with friends and giving back to our com-

munity gives us a sense of accomplishment and teaches us to empower each other. And we have been able to develop leadership and organizational skills while giving back.

My strong sense of community comes from my grandmother and my mother. My grandmother, Mama Lisa, was a single mother who left her native Mexico with three young daughters. She sought to create a

We educate kids about taking care of their teeth

better life for my mother, and now for me. Because Mama Lisa only completed the third grade and speaks only Spanish, she had to work as a migrant farmworker in this country to support her family. She did not want her daughters to face the limitations she faced. My mother was only eight when she moved to the United States. As a migrant farmworker's child, she moved each season from town to town and school to school, endeavoring to do better.

Although my life is far easier, it remains difficult to balance my school responsibilities and community service. I have no intention, however, of wasting my grandmother's and my mother's sacrifices.

Each day, I hope my words and actions show how much I value my friends and the people we help. I will continue to share the opportunity of service with other teens so that they also receive those gifts. I cannot think of a better way to help my friends realize their value than by including them in the joy that community service provides. ♦

Eva Foxwell by Lindsay Wolfe, Wilmington, DE

It was my first day of Business Technology class in sixth grade, and I was petrified: everyone said the teacher was one of the hardest in my school. Now I know what they were talking about. Mrs. Foxwell is a person determined to succeed at everything she does. She told us that by the time we graduated eighth grade, our class would complete various Microsoft PowerPoints, be at the top of our typing game, create our own business and put on a networking event, and have a simulated job interview. She is the educator who taught me the absolute most and pushed me to be at the top of my game no matter how big or small the task.

Mrs. Foxwell taught us what it is like to be in the business world. Before she became a teacher she worked for a big company and was high up in the chain of command. As soon as you walk into her decorated classroom, it feels like you are a grown-up in the real world. She never treats her

students like kids. She has a great personality and is very helpful and caring. Her motto: Be like Nike and “Just Do It.” This means that there’s no use complaining about anything, because one way or another, it has to be done. And if you have to accomplish a task, you might as well have fun with it. She repeated this phrase many times during class, and it really was a motivator for us.

Her class gave me skills I will use forever

Mrs. Foxwell had many amazing life experiences to share with us. In a way, she was like a therapist and life coach. She was there for everyone. If you had an issue, whether at home, with a friend or in the classroom, she would listen for as long as you needed and then give advice. And let me tell you, her advice was always right on point. There was never a time when she wouldn’t help someone if she could. She always did everything in her power to make things better for her students.

Every class period, we did so much work! Mrs. Foxwell ran the class

smoothly so there was never a moment when we just sat there. We always had something productive to do, and if not, then she would give us a task. “Use your time wisely” is another quote she used frequently in her class. Whether it was working on an assignment or practicing our typing, there was always something to do.

At the beginning of each month, Mrs. Foxwell’s classes had a contest called Typing to the Top to determine who was the quickest and most accurate typist. To make sure we didn’t look at the keyboard, Mrs. Foxwell would put a piece of construction paper over our hands. The winner got his or her name posted in the classroom.

Business Technology with Mrs. Foxwell is a class that gave me skills I will use forever. She taught me so much in the months I had her as a teacher: how to write checks, pay bills, be successful in a job inter-



Photo by Sarah Chieng, Austin, TX

view, dress to impress, work well under pressure, and most importantly “Just Do It.” I feel like I am ready and well prepared for the real world. Mrs. Foxwell had a great impact on me. I hope that one day I can make a difference in someone’s life like she did for me. ♦

Social Studies • North Shore Middle School

Marie Fricker by Anna Van Neck, Hartland, WI

When you think about seventh grade, you probably think of faces filled with pimples, smelly boys, and recess. But when I think of seventh grade, I think of my Social Studies teacher, Mrs. Fricker.

I remember walking into class that first day and a tall woman with frizzy hair yelled, “Hello! Welcome to class!” She was as tall as a giant but had the temperament of a dove. Although she could be loud, she had a voice of silk that set my mind at ease. Her room was filled with posters of all the different units we’d cover, and a life-sized Austin Powers cutout stood in the corner.

Mrs. Fricker is a quirky teacher with a love of learning and kids. She had such a joyful personality that there wasn’t a day that I didn’t want to go to her class.

If I ever needed help, Mrs. Fricker would tell me to come to her during lunch. One day when I went to her room for help on a project, the lights were off so I figured maybe she had forgotten I was coming. Then, suddenly, I heard Lady Gaga blasting and saw Mrs. Fricker dancing. You haven’t lived until you’ve seen a frizzy-haired lady with long legs dance around a classroom!

Mrs. Fricker is a teacher who really cares about her students’ future. She takes time to talk to every student and help them strive to reach their goals. One particular story will stick with me forever. For our first major project, she had us pick a contro-

versial topic, write a letter to a senator, survey our classmates, and presentation of our findings in class. I had trouble deciding on a topic, so Mrs. Fricker suggested one that I’ll never forget.

She had me do my project on same-sex marriage, which I’d never heard of before. I thought the idea was strange. My parents had never taught me that it was okay to love whomever you love – boy or girl.

I’d had crushes on girls ever since third grade, but I thought my feelings were unnatural and wrong. When Mrs. Fricker assigned me that project, she opened my eyes to a community of people just like me. Without her, I’d probably still be denying and feeling ashamed of who I am.

Mrs. Fricker is a very wise teacher. One day we had to present projects on countries, and when it was my group’s turn, I asked to use the restroom. She saw right through me and wouldn’t let me go. She knew I needed to face my stage fright. Now I can get up in front of the class and give a speech without hesitation, and I am forever thankful to her.

Looking back at seventh grade, I remember Mrs. Fricker with her quirks, wisdom, and affinity for Lady Gaga. I feel thankful to her for teaching me and hundreds of other students to be ourselves – no matter if we are smelly boys, have faces filled with pimples, or are struggling to accept who we truly are. ♦

She opened my eyes to a community that accepts me

The 24th Annual

Teen Ink Educator of the Year Contest

Do you have an outstanding teacher, coach, guidance counselor, librarian, or principal?

- 1) Tell us why your nominee is special. What has your educator done for your class, you, another student, or the community? Be specific.
 - 2) Essays should be about 250 words.
 - 3) **Only middle school/junior high and high school educators are eligible.**
 - 4) Include your nominee’s first and last name, position or subject taught, and the school where he/she teaches.
 - 5) Submit it online at www.TeenInk.com/Submit
- Winners will be announced in the Summer issue.

Deadline: May 1

The Roads of Ghana

by Catherine Emanuel, Oak Ridge, TN

Obruni! Obruni! As I walked out of the crowded airport, weary from the long flight and time difference, three small children in tattered, oversized shirts yelled this familiar phrase and pointed at our awkward group of Americans surrounded by a sea of Ghanaians. Since this was my second trip to Ghana, I was used to hearing the common term for “white person” yelled every time a young local saw me and my missionary group.

It was in 2010 that my parents first decided to travel with my sisters and me to help set up a medical clinic in the small village of Nkonya-Wurupong. We all fit into two large vans – the kind used by the locals, called *tro-tros*. Our group of six kids, five doctors, a few college students, a priest, a deacon, and a couple of other volunteers grew extremely close during that 14-day trip. We drove across the country multiple times, and once we exited the capital, Accra, we began to get a sense of the poverty.

More people die in car accidents than from AIDS and malaria

That first trip to Ghana opened my eyes to the real world. It showed me how fortunate I am. For example, road quality in the United States is completely underrated and underappreciated. Outside of the capital, Ghanaian roads are made of dirt and are full of potholes. Only expert drivers can navigate them, and it is extremely

dangerous. That first time, my mother was convinced we were going to die. There are neither signs nor traffic lights, and it seems as though nobody pays attention to which side of the road they drive on. We passed a huge billboard stating that more people die in Ghana from car accidents than HIV/AIDS and malaria combined. Although using a car is unsafe, it’s the only way to get around, and we soon grew used to the dangerous conditions.

Our second trip we had almost twice the number of volunteers, so our leader rented a large bus with windows stretching from floor to ceiling. This created a big change in how

the Ghanaians reacted to us. Instead of being taken as Americans coming to experience their culture, which they respected, we had inadvertently presented ourselves as Americans showing off our wealth, which they hated.

On our first visit, as our two vans drove through villages, all the small children would yell and laugh and smile. We waved back and smiled, and often the Ghanaian adults would wave as well. They saw us as friendly rather than condescending. However, the next trip resulted in more negative reactions, and the contrast was astounding. In our huge, coach-like bus that many of the locals had never seen before, they assumed we were flaunting our wealth. I was embarrassed to ride in that bus since the adults would glare at us and the children’s faces broke my heart.

Although we did receive negative reactions on that second journey, the locals’ gratitude for the clinic was shocking. People in Nkoya-Wurupong camped out for days in order to receive medical treatment. Our last day we had an extra box of hand sanitizer. The people we’d met in Ghana rec-

ognized the small bottles as a way to prevent fatal infections. A riot started over the 50 travel-size bottles.

I learned a lot about myself and the world when I compared my experiences in Ghana with what I knew of home. As I sat in the van, leaning my head against the moist window, I saw kids as young as four mashing cassava root for their dinner, and girls happily walking miles to school because they valued their education. Nobody was sitting around wasting time on their iPhones or laptops, but rather bonding with their community, hunting grasscutters (a large rodent that is in demand for its meat), playing soccer with friends, running small convenience stands on the side of the road, or doing some other productive task. These people have so little money, but unlike us, their world doesn’t revolve around wealth.

Although I did discover much about the culture and society of this West African country during both trips, I feel learned the most by simply looking out the window during those long road trips. ♦

The Five Pillars of Islam

by Lauren Girouard, Greenville, SC

Sawm My first night in Istanbul I dream about my father, a torpedo-man aboard the USS Cowpens who had been deployed to the Persian Gulf. A small child again, I sit on his knee and beg him to tell me my favorite story, one I will not understand until I am much older, will not appreciate until I have seen the bazaars of Istanbul. He describes with relish his latest port of call. The ship docks in a Muslim country, the town wrapped in the festive clothing of Ramadan. As the soldiers walk the streets, unarmed in this peaceful time, their growling stomachs beg them to eat the steaming plates of saffron and sage, couscous and kebab offered by women smiling toothless smiles, but like the men whose wives and sisters offer food so willingly, the soldiers will wait until the sun has kissed the earth to put food to their lips.

Shahada

“Where are the churches?” Our guide regards the girl who has asked this question, in the middle of a Mosque, her indignation evident in the downturned corners of her mouth. I wonder if later our guide will describe us as a bad joke (“Nineteen white Anglo Saxon Protestants and a bad Catholic walk into a Mosque ...”) that provided its own punchline: “Where are the churches?” Muslims converted Christian churches to Mosques in the name of Allah and Muhammad, his prophet, but that did not make the space less of a church. I consider explaining this, but I know she will not understand the continuity of sacred space, that our God and their God need not be qualified by possessive pronouns. I pray to God that she will see it for herself.

Zakat

By the end of our first week in Istanbul, The beggar woman knows my tour group’s daily route into the city. She stands and shakes her cup at us. She says nothing. One of the women among us, Sally, lives with her heart wide open, feeling the pain and suffering of others keenly. We tease Sally that she is too blonde, too beautiful, too American to have donated her leftover *kurus* to the woman after our first trip to the Turkish ice cream stand. The woman’s ankles – the only part of her body visible from under the folds of her clothing – are swollen and dark. Her eyes plead from under her hijab for the mercy that Sally once showed. One of the men, asserting his machismo, tries to shoo her away from our group. “Can’t you see we’re in a hurry? Stay away, you b****. We don’t have anything for

you. Do you hear me?” As though English swear words could touch this woman.

On the last day, I empty my wallet into her cup.

Hajj

Two days before my group returns to Istanbul, I sit on the starboard side of a Turkish *gulet*, anchored just off the coast of Bodrum, staring out into the great expanse of the Aegean. My professor sits next to me, quoting Zorba the Greek: *Happy is he, who, before dying has the fortune of sailing the Aegean*. I ask him if he has found happiness. His beard and bushy eyebrows wriggle under the weight of my question, and he is slow to answer. Later he tells me that every year, Turkish people elect to make

the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca in such great numbers that the government has to hold a lottery. He has found happiness, he explains, in the sheer serendipity that his sight of pilgrimage is somewhere between faith and reason, and that he can make that journey any time he wants.

Salat

At ten in the evening, I once again hear the call to worship. My roommate and I are lying on top of our beds, stripped to our underwear by the oppressive summer heat of Istanbul, listening to each other’s breathing in the darkness. I can feel her raise her hand, count on her fingertips the number of times (one, two, three, four, five) we hear the warbling cry emitted from the highest spire of the Blue Mosque. Around the city, the Muslim men given the honor of crying into the night are scaling towers in the name of Allah. I envy them their strength of conviction. In the morning, we will leave Istanbul and I will miss being awoken by the sound of God singing through humanity and falling asleep to His evenly chanted cadence echoing in the night. ♦

Muslim men are scaling towers in the name of Allah

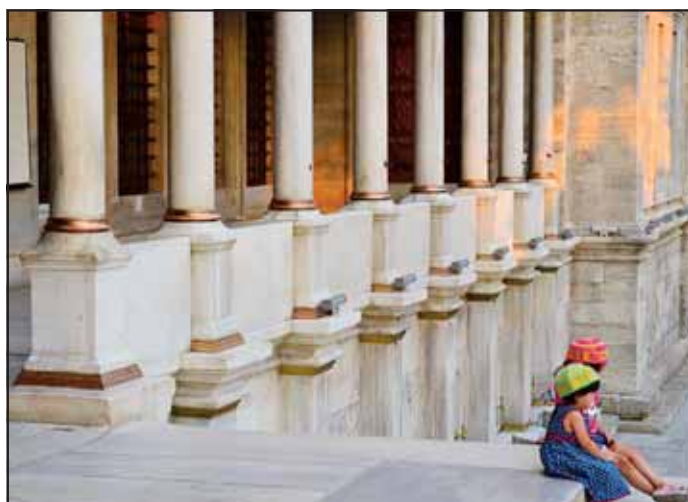


Photo by Halah Butt, Milton, ON, Canada

Japanese and Me

by Kohei Akiba, Kennett Square, PA

I can still remember how it felt to arrive in the U.S. as a five-year-old boy from Japan: like suddenly being in an entirely different world. Dazed by the trip halfway around the earth, I failed to fully take in my surroundings. Although the airport was filled with the sounds of various languages, English seemed to be the most prevalent. Store signs spelled out words I could not read. The airport's intercom chattered directions I could not understand. As I followed my parents through the enormous building to find our next flight, I realized that this bizarre country was now my home.

My first experiences in an American classroom were equally disorienting. The racial diversity in my class was staggering and a bit isolating. White kids, Chinese kids, and Hispanic kids, but not another Japanese kid. No one was there to listen to my not-yet-translatable thoughts. When the teacher asked me a question, I didn't understand enough to answer. Even the help of my classmates could not solve my confusion. The innocent kindergarten classroom felt like a hostile territory.

The only place where I found any solace those first few months in America was the Japanese language school my parents had enrolled me and my siblings in as a way to retain our cultural identity. There I could easily chat with classmates and had no issues understanding the lessons. During that first year, this school felt more like home than the American environment that surrounded me.

Eleven years have passed since I first arrived in

the United States, and those early memories feel incredibly distant to me. Now I have no problem understanding my teachers' questions, I participate in class, and writing in English is second nature. Although I am proud of my ability to assimilate into American society, at the same time it is alarming to my Japanese identity.

The weekly Japanese school I continued to attend became more of a burden as the years passed. My constant exposure to the English language and American culture forced the Japanese part of my life to take a back seat. As a result, my development in speaking and writing Japanese slowed. I found it more and more difficult to communicate with Japanese peers and family, because I spoke English all day. I'd lost the enthusiasm for the Japanese portion of my life.

For a long time, I blew off Japanese school as much as possible. I loathed having to get up early on Saturdays, I rarely paid attention in class, and I constantly expressed my desire to drop out. As a result, I learned little. I continued to attend long after I told everyone in my class that I was going to quit, and I'm still enrolled to this day. I could never pinpoint the exact reason why I stayed; I attributed it to bad timing and the fact that my parents never offered me the chance to quit. However, it has lately become clear why I never stopped showing up to Japanese school: I wanted to stay as Japanese as I could.

When I look around my house, I

I'd lost the enthusiasm for the Japanese portion of my life

see a lot of Japanese influence. Dozens of Japanese movies, novels, and comics fill our shelves. My parents go out of their way to purchase products at Asian markets. My father subscribes to two television providers in order to watch Japanese programs. My mother cooks Japanese food every day and even prepares traditional feasts on Japanese holidays. Clearly, my parents were not willing to give up their traditional way of life just because it is harder in another country. Their enthusiasm for staying Japanese influenced me. Although I struggled to speak and write Japanese, trying to learn and improve was at least worth a try.

I wonder what my life would have been like had my parents not moved us to the United States, but I usually fail to come up with any sort of scenario. I feel truly grateful to live in America, and I would not have it any other way. Moving to America allowed me to solidify my Japanese identity and appreciate my culture more than I probably would have had we stayed in Japan. When I think back to the first few months of living in America, I remember my constant sense of confusion, of being lost in translation. I didn't yet know how the small five-year-old Japanese boy struggling to understand a single English sentence would eventually realize the importance of both of his cultural identities. ♦



Art by Margaret Siu, Dallas, TX

32 States, 202 Countries

I have seen the Atlantic Ocean, glistening in the dimming light of a July sunset,
Gazed at the rolling hills of West Virginia, reds and yellows whirling
in the presence of an autumn breeze,

Questioned the never-ending green that only the Midwest offers,
miles of grass and fields and farm,

Trekking the dry, cracked earth of Arizona, where snakes and
tarantulas are friends, not foes,

Jumped in the clearest blue water that Jamaica has, snorkeling
over a reef of bright corals and glittering fish,

Lounged behind a Dominican waterfall, surrounded by the small
trickle of a stream in a hidden oasis of trees,

Greeted crowds of people with a smile and handshake in Haiti,
easily conversing and telling jokes through a language barrier.

18 years, 18 states, 4 countries.

I feel as if I have seen the whole world, end to end,

And the beautiful thing is that I am nowhere near close to done.

One day, I will drift in a gondola down an Italian waterway,

Ski on a fresh sheet of snow in the peaks of a Colorado mountain range,

Buy handmade treasures from a marketplace in India,

See an aerial view of the Space Needle and drink black coffee
in Washington,

Build a preschool for the underprivileged children of Benin
in Africa,

Stand next to the Great Pyramids of Egypt, and realize how
small I am compared to the world,

Revel at the Grand Canyon, vast and unchanging after all of
these years,

Listen for a message that only I can hear over the ever rush
of water at Niagara Falls.

My time is limited, but I'm not worried.

I'll get around to it all eventually.

Only 32 states and 202 countries left.

by Paige Peplow, Bridgeton, NJ

The Bathrooms in Japan

by Nana Karayama, Yokohama, Japan

What is essential in life? Food and shelter, of course, but don't forget bathrooms!

Many people take for granted that bathrooms are always there to suit our needs, no matter where we are. However, behind all of that convenience is a lot of hard work, especially in Japan, where the *otearai*, or bathrooms, are among the cleanest and most convenient in the world. By looking at something as mundane as a country's bathrooms, you can get a sense of the people who live there.

I lived in America for six years, and when I returned to Japan, I noticed that the restrooms here are unique compared to the States. Perhaps the most notable difference is the washlet. This type of toilet has a heated seat and a built-in bidet; the water pressure and temperature can be adjusted by a colorful array of buttons. By cleaning the user, it makes them feel refreshed and comfortable. Nearly 70 percent of Japanese households have a washlet, so it is considered the "normal" toilet.

Also, almost every public bathroom in Japan – whether in a library, train station, or park – contains a list of people who clean the bathroom and when they cleaned it. Bathrooms are normally cleaned hourly, so I rarely see a dirty public bathroom. Even restrooms that are not used often are kept clean, so anyone can feel comfortable using it.

By looking at Japanese bathrooms, it can be inferred that the Japanese people value cleanliness. The word *kirei*, which means "clean" in Japanese, can also be defined as "pretty, beautiful, and orderly." "Clean" is a part of many words with positive meanings,

which shows the importance of sanitation.

Japanese bathrooms not only reflect our appreciation for cleanliness, but our consideration toward others. In a world where more and more people are only thinking of themselves, there are still those who do something as humble as keeping a bathroom clean for others whom they will never meet. ♦

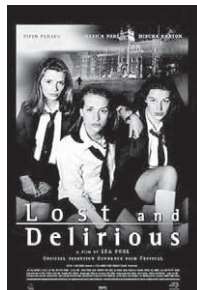
A country's bathrooms can give you a sense of the people

DRAMA

Lost and Delirious

“**L**ost and Delirious,” a film very loosely based on Susan Swan’s novel *The Wives of Bath*, is a beautifully crafted story about the loss of love. The narrator, Mary “Mouse” Bedford (Mischa Barton), is in her first year at an all-girls boarding school. She observes her roommates, Tori and Paulie (portrayed by Jessica Paré and Piper Perabo) as their passionate romance slowly disintegrates, crushing Paulie’s spirit in the process. Mouse provides emotional support for Paulie while finding her own support in the school’s funny and wise gardener, who becomes her sole parental figure.

Although the story is told by Mouse, she plays a relatively small role in the movie. She brings a far more detached perspective to the table, allowing the audience to decide with whom they will side: Paulie or Tori. This freedom to choose, in turn, makes the story a great deal more intense; Paulie, Tori, and Mouse have quite distinct internal struggles.



Emotional depth, despite the clichés

Mischa Barton does an artful job portraying Mouse. She emphasizes her utter emotional isolation without overplaying the innocence central to her personality, and her craft particularly shines when she shows Mouse’s pain regarding the death of her mother.

Despite a number of situational clichés, the story brings depth to Paulie’s emotional journey. Perabo’s performance ranges from subtle demonstrations of the chaos in Paulie’s mind to a truly convincing outburst in the school’s cafeteria. Her interactions with Tori feel tender and vulnerable. As Paulie attempts to win back the love of her life, her pain is apparent and makes clear to the audience what is at stake for her.

Jessica Paré’s performance as Tori evokes equally strong emotions. Her character’s sympathy for Paulie’s pain shows through the facade that she hides behind, giving complexity to a character who could easily have come off as a fickle teenager. Her delivery feels honest throughout the film.

Overall, “Lost and Delirious” is a highly recommendable movie with stellar acting that truly demonstrates how to make romance feel new, deep, and interesting. ♦

by Veronica Ortiz, Surfside, FL

This film is rated R.

FANTASY

Mood Indigo

More than anything else, the long-delayed French film “Mood Indigo” by Michel Gondry (“Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind”) captures the sensation of when an ordinary dream transitions into a nightmare. Beginning as a mind-bogglingly surreal romantic comedy and ending as a grim reflection on the triviality of materialism and social class by means of bizarre dark humor, “Mood Indigo” gradually shifts from one movie into another, all while maintaining the same environment and internal logic dictated only by dreams.



Over two hours of pure dream logic

At first, this whimsical logic is applied only to goofy situations and circumstances: door buzzers become mechanical bugs that only stop buzzing after being crushed with a shoe; weddings can only take place after the bride and groom are able to defeat another couple in a go-kart race; a button can be pushed to make it rain on one side of a picnic blanket while it’s sunny on the other.

However, the nightmare logic eventually becomes more prevalent, most notably in a scene

halfway through, when the humanoid bird MC at a roller rink claims that whoever grabs a dangling ring first will have their last words announced on a loudspeaker. After a minute montage of the protagonists goofing around, half-heartedly attempting to grab the ring, the camera is pulled back to reveal a mosh pit of dead bodies in the center of the rink. A pile up of ring-seeking skaters resulted in the death of hundreds, and the corpses are pushed aside by a Zamboni driven by another humanoid bird.

If anything described in the previous paragraph seems interesting, “Mood Indigo” will be a good fit for you. It’s over two hours of pure dream logic tied together with the loose plot of a formerly wealthy husband working a series of odd jobs to afford medicine to prolong his wife’s unusual disease. It features enough moments of invention and originality to fuel daydreams for months to come. For better or worse, depending on your perspective, there has never been a movie quite like it. ♦

by David Unterberger, Wilmington, DE

SCI-FI

In Time

We’ve all heard the saying “time is money”; Andrew Niccol’s science-fiction movie brings this ubiquitous phrase to life. Set in the next century, the film features characters who are born with just 25 years to live and must work to gain more time. They spend their precious minutes on food, clothes, housing, and for a lucky few, luxury.

Will Salas (a ghetto resident excellently incarnated by Justin Timberlake) is given 116 years by a rich but suicidal man. Will, who has now become a murder suspect, takes leave for the affluent district of New Greenwich, where he meets a wealthy banker and falls in love with Sylvia, the magnate’s daughter. Coming from a neighborhood where people regularly run out of time and drop dead, Will is astounded by New Greenwich – as well as revolted. So, accompanied by his new mistress, he sets off to do

justice by pillaging Sylvia’s father’s banks and distributing time to the plebeians of his neighborhood.

Turning fantasy into philosophy, “In Time” shows both our dependence on money and its blatantly unequal distribution (compacted into the memorable line “For a few to be immortal, many must die”).



Its fictive society eerily resembles our own

The plot’s metamorphosis into a love story between two do-gooders was unfortunate, though. It seemed so predictable that I wasn’t expecting it to actually happen, and it left me slightly annoyed. The film’s originality and message, however, remained intact. Whether you’re a sci-fi geek or

prefer intellectual Palme d’Or winners, I would recommend “In Time.” Its fictive society eerily resembles our own. ♦

by Virginie Caspard, Chevy Chase, MD

ANIMATED

Legend of Kung Fu Rabbit

Let’s face it: to make a quick buck, companies like Video Brinquedo and The Asylum are making horrendous mock-busters of popular major motion pictures. They have lots in common: amateur special effects and animation, rushed plots, and horrible acting. Well, there are better and far less painful rip-offs out there, and “Legend of Kung Fu Rabbit,” released in China in 2011 as “Tu Xia Chuan Qi” (“Legend of a Rabbit”), is one of them. But that doesn’t necessarily mean the movie is any good.

Clearly this is a shameless rip-off of Dreamworks’ “Kung Fu Panda.” Let’s start with the plot, which is all over the place. The story is that a fat rabbit cook named Fu (voiced by Jon Heder) is given kung fu powers by a dying master, a monkey named Shifu (voiced by Tom Arnold, and yes, that is also the same name of the master in the “Kung Fu Panda” films), so he can destroy the master’s enemy, Slash (Michael Clarke Duncan), a panda ... you know, like in that other movie.



A shameless rip-off

Most of the characters, even Fu, are unlikable, with the exception of Slash and Shifu’s daughter, Penny (Rebecca Black). There are also major plot holes, and Fu doesn’t even do any kung fu fighting until the very end. Other than Michael Clarke Duncan as Slash, the main characters’ voice acting isn’t very good in its English dub. In fact, the film didn’t even credit the people who voiced the minor characters, which I feel bad about; those actors were the only ones who seemed to be putting in effort!

While the film’s animation looks nice, it’s hard to believe that it took more than three years and 500 animators. It feels like something you see in a video game (but at least a great video game) or a Nick show, which you would expect to take only a few months to do. The character models are cute, and the score is well chosen, with one exception: an especially poorly done cover of the popular disco track “Kung Fu Fighting” by Carl Douglas in the end credits.

“Legend of Kung Fu Rabbit” does have decent animation and music, but the movie’s bad plot, flat voice acting, unfunny humor, and poorly done character development bring it down significantly. Skip it at all costs. ♦

by Erik Fickhesen, Eggertsville, NY

CONCERT

Buskirk-Chumley Theater • Anaïs Mitchell and Patty Griffin

With mountains of snow falling in a typical Midwestern blizzard outside, Bloomington, Indiana's Buskirk-Chumley Theater had the pleasure of hosting two amazingly talented female folk singers, Anaïs Mitchell and Patty Griffin. Those brave enough to trudge through the blustery winter weather were well rewarded for their effort.

The Chumley Theater is relatively small, so it offers its audience an intimate experience. The performers didn't feel like distant beings we idolized from afar, but like family members who had invited us into their living rooms for an evening round of stories spun into song.

Anaïs Mitchell, a young woman with a very old soul, opened the show at 8 p.m. Her songs spin tales of despair and heartache that are reminiscent of storytelling Appalachian folk songs. Clearly she had a distinct impact on the crowd

— they sat on the edge of their seats, listening with a rapt attention generally not given to opening acts. Though her songs are often spiced with a maudlin tinge and breezy guitar technique, it is Mitchell's innocence and genial stage presence that make audiences love her.

Patty Griffin arrived onstage at 9 p.m. for her 90-minute set, accompanied only by her guitar player and producer, Craig Ross. With quick grins to the crowd, they strapped on their guitars and went immediately into the first song.

Following the success of Griffin's recent albums "American Kid" and

"Silver Bell," a bulk of the set was dedicated to bringing those songs to the forefront, which Griffin did spectacularly. Of course, different songs were thrown into the mix, including a brand new one tentatively titled "Winter's Lullaby." With Griffin's gentle vocals weaving in and out of the soft chords of the piano, the audience was immediately under her spell for the rest of the night.

Griffin is petite, and when she stands amidst her equipment, she almost disappears. But

if you see her perform in person, don't let her gentle or delicate appearance fool you. As soon as the show began, I forgot everything else and focused only

on the musical dynamo before me.

With her breathtaking, achingly beautiful powerhouse of a voice, Griffin captivated her audience from the first words of her songs. The lyrics evoked a strong emotional response and gave the set a very intimate feel.

The instrumentation provided by Ross and Griffin was top-notch; Griffin's long, delicate fingers flew over the frets of her guitar in wild but controlled abandon. Her fiery red hair bounced in time to the beat as she stomped her feet on the wooden stage and her voice crescendoed to reach the final note.

The audience was enraptured, completely caught up in her performance. I think we all realized we were in the presence of a true master — a music legend. ♦

by McKenzie Isom, Bedford, IN



The audience was enraptured

ALTERNATIVE

Supermodel

Foster the People

Foster the People has become one of the biggest names in alternative music as a result of its breakout single, "Pumped Up Kicks." The song topped the charts, and the album "Torches" was critically acclaimed across the board. Now, three years later, Foster the People is back with a sophomore album, "Supermodel." It's clear that the band has aged, but the question is, have they aged well?

"Supermodel" does start strong: "Coming of Age," the lead single, is a driving summer rock anthem. Its highlights include piano sections sprinkled throughout and the killer bass guitar solo that comes after the first verse. The second single, "Pseudologica Fantastica," is drenched with shoegaze and psychedelic guitars and synths. This track is one of the longest on the album but has an interesting hook.

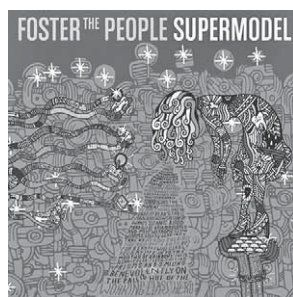
"Best Friend," the third single, is easily one of the band's best to date. It has a funky beat and a melody that is sure to get stuck in your head. The best part is the choirlike layered vocals that ring out at the end of the phrases. The dark lyrics contrast with the upbeat tone artfully, making this a thoughtfully constructed pop tune.

Other notable tracks include "Are You What You Wanna Be?" — the fun opener with an African-inspired beat — and "A Beginner's Guide to Destroying the Moon," in which the band takes a darker, heavy metal route.

On "Supermodel," Foster the People experiments with a variety of sounds and ideas from across many genres. Because of this, though, it is hard to find links between the tracks, so the album lacks cohesion. It's full of smart social commentary that pokes fun at capitalist consumption, but falls into the trap of mimicking other groups' sounds and struggles to find its own identity.

That said, Foster the People delivers an album with several standout tunes that won't make you press skip. If you enjoy fun yet thoughtful indie pop, "Supermodel" is the album for you. ♦

by Kennedy Simone Marx, Dallas, TX



Full of smart social commentary

PROGRESSIVE ROCK

In the Court of the Crimson King

King Crimson

King Crimson's debut album, "In the Court of the Crimson King" (1969), has become a staple in almost every progressive rock fan's library. Released three years before Pink Floyd's hit "The Dark Side of the Moon," it was a debut by a rather new band in the rather new genre of prog rock. Pete Townshend of The Who called it "an uncanny masterpiece," and I couldn't agree more. It's a concept album, a single piece divided into five movements. King Crimson's jazz and classical influences, plus its cynical and politically aware lyrics, hold listeners rapt for the entire five-movement, 44-minute record.

The album opens with the chaotic and frenzied first movement "21st Century Schizoid Man," which explores themes of the Vietnam War and political corruption over piercing guitar and saxophone riffs. It is likely the most memorable and avant-garde track, due in part to the swinging, frantic, instrumental middle section titled "Mirrors."

The next movement, "I Talk to the Wind," is an abrupt change, beginning with a flute solo that transitions into the slower pace of the rest of the album. The song is about being an outsider, unable to change the ways of society: "I talk to the wind/the wind cannot hear." The wind is the world around lyricist Peter Sinfield, filled with "much confusion, disillusion" that causes him to feel regret at being unable to change it. The song, though the shortest on the album at 6:11, leaves an impression with its sorrowful chorus.

"Epitaph" is the third movement. Like the first, its lyrics are jaded and cynical, and like "I Talk to the Wind," they have a sad and longing tone. The subject is the Cold War and nuclear disarmament. It is my favorite due to its use of changing time signatures, drummer Michael Giles's powerful performance, and the acute sense of feeling lost in a dystopian future.

"Confusion will be my epitaph," states lead singer Greg Lake, after the world is torn apart by the foolish arguing of politicians and the use of weapons of mass destruction.

The fourth and longest movement is "Moonchild" at 12:33. It is the only part of the record that drags. It begins well with a unique alteration of symbols by Giles, and interesting lyrics describing a "gentle Moonchild" looking for a smile from a "sunchild." However, two minutes in, it becomes a free-form jam session with short phrases from each musician that seem random. While "Moonchild" is the weakest track, I still never want to skip it.

The finale is the title track. It's a culmination of the themes of the previous movements, personified as guests arriving at the court of the fictional Crimson King. It is one of the band's two charting songs (the other being "Heartbeat" in 1982) and is a fitting climax. With its fantastic images of fire witches, yellow jesters, and purple pipers, it is one of the more "far out" songs. Its end, a flute reprise called "Dance of the Puppets" and another free-time jam session, is a fitting conclusion to the album.

While definitely not everyone's cup of tea, "In the Court of the Crimson King" is an intriguing concept album that I think deserves a listen from any fan of '70s rock. Music scholar Edward Macan said that it "may be the most influential progressive rock album ever released," and I can see why. Rating: 8/10.

Better than: "Selling England by the Pound," "Foreigner."

Not as good as: "The Dark Side of the Moon," "Led Zeppelin IV."

You might also like: "Close to the Edge," "Days of Future Passed." ♦

by Mitchell Mobley, McDonough, GA



An intriguing concept album

ROMANCE

Me Before You • by Jojo Moyes

Shouldn't it be "You Before Me"? I've never been madly in love, but general knowledge tells me that you're supposed to wish for your true love's happiness before your own. Jojo Moyes thinks differently; she views love in a more realistic light.

All the romance novels I've read end one of two ways. Option 1, the happy ending: despite hard circumstances, the couple realizes that love is most important. Option 2, the tragic ending: the couple is madly in love, but there are obstacles (inevitable death, almost always) that keep them apart.

The ending of *Me Before You* is tragic, and yes, it involves death. So how is it different from every other tragic romance story? Tragedy is a matter of choice here.

Will Traynor is a quadriplegic who wants to die. After meeting Louisa, however, he is faced with the choice to live somewhat happily ever after with the woman he loves and who loves him back. Nevertheless, Will chooses death. He makes

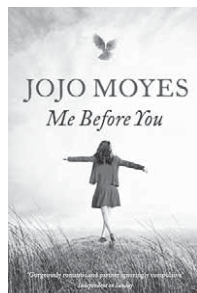
the selfish decision, disappointing his family and most importantly, Lou. His reason is simple: love is great, but not enough. He says "I can't do this because I can't ... can't be the man I want to be with you. And that means that this – this just becomes ... another reminder of what I am not."

This conclusion shocked me. I thought, if I were ever given the same choice, I would choose the somewhat happy life over death a million times, despite the frustration and pain that would come with it. Also, I probably couldn't bear to see the ones I love suffer in watching me go.

What would you choose? Will leaves Louisa a posthumous letter that says "Push yourself. Don't settle. Just live well. Just LIVE." For him, the pain of not being able to live the way he wanted to was greater than the fear of leaving his beloved and dying.

Do you think he made the right decision? ♦

by Minji Cho, Concord, NH



What would you choose?

NONFICTION

Five Days at Memorial

by Sheri Fink

Sheri Fink's *Five Days at Memorial: Life and Death in a Storm Ravaged Hospital* is a stunning piece of journalism that shows the best and worst of humanity in the 21st century. For most of the world, spending one's entire life in a society structured by laws and morals is the norm and anything different is barbaric. However, within five days, the survivors of Hurricane Katrina trapped



Stunning journalism

wants the reader to see by changing the frame of reference from one person to another so the reader is able to view all sides of the disastrous story.

Five Days at Memorial, though very good, should not be read by anyone who is looking for a cheerful book. If it happens to be on your to-read list, be warned: there are many gloomy realities on its pages. ♦

by "Eric," Scottsdale, AZ

inside Memorial Hospital quickly lose connection with the way the outside world works. They resort to acting in what they see as the most appropriate line of action.

Unfortunately, medicine today is extremely dependent on modern technology, leaving care in an almost prehistoric state when power and water are cut off. Memorial Hospital had been flooded during a previous hurricane, but the plans to move the generators from the basement to an above-ground level never progressed past the blueprint stage. If those plans had been followed, how many people would have survived?

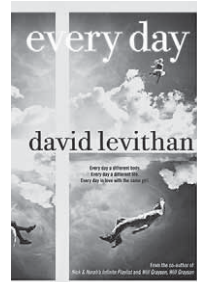
This book really draws the reader's attention to what the world is unfortunately like in a very clear, easy-to-follow manner. Fink makes reading her work simple through her unique choice of words and sentence structure. She has a clever way of describing what she

ROMANCE

Every Day • by David Levithan

A wakes up in a new body every morning, destined to live out one day in the life of the person to whom the body belongs. "It has always been this way," he says.

But things begin to change when A falls in love with a girl named Rhiannon. Every single day he remains in love with the same girl, whether he wakes up four or 400 miles away. A has never let himself linger with one life, but now he is desperate to hang on to the love he has never been allowed. And his life, one stitched together by thousands, begins to change.



A jewel in its wisdom

With its precise prose and unemotional, stirring voice, *Every Day* is a welcome and pleasing change from too much action on the literary field. A is a hero you root for and feel for in the very end.

Not only are this book's characters wonderfully formed and developed, but *Every Day* also expands every creative boundary of realistic fiction known to readers.

As A drops into different lives, Levithan gives a startlingly realistic account of diverse environments, and describes many trials and tribulations you rarely experience in books. There is so much dimension, story, and dazzling insight from the many different worlds and the people who inhabit them.

This book blew me into the clouds. Already a deserving nominee of the Abraham Lincoln 2014 Illinois High School Book Award, *Every Day* is a valuable jewel in its wisdom, beauty, and sheer magnificence. You will laugh and cry. You will feel your heart break more times than possible, and adore it all the while. ♦

by Angelina Lee, Naperville, IL

ROMANCE

Anna and the French Kiss

by Stephanie Perkins

Many of us look forward to the day we leave home to live in our own apartment or college dorm room. Being alone. Being independent. No parents to listen to, no curfew; you can make and break your own rules. Yet when that day suddenly arrives a bit earlier than you thought – well, it can send you into a whirlwind. This is what Anna experiences when her father decides to enroll her in a boarding school in France for her senior year of high school. Having no choice, Anna leaves everything she loves and knows to attend an American school in Paris.

Anna doesn't know any French. At all. Consequently, she must take beginner French with the freshmen. That's the downside – but on the upside, she quickly makes friends with Mer, Josh, Rashmi, and Étienne, who goes by his last name, St. Clair.

Anna struggles to learn the language and find herself. As her heart and brain fight, one thing is clear from the start: she is in love with St. Clair. But their relationship is anything but clear, because St. Clair has a long-term girlfriend, Ellie. On the border between being friends and more than friends with St. Clair, Anna realizes other things too, like that

the lives of her old friend and her former love interest did not stay on pause while she was away. This book truly captures the feeling of being in love.

Anna and the French Kiss is not one of the best romance stories I have ever read, but it's not a flop either. The writing is ordinary and a lot of the details seem unnecessary and irrelevant. The story is definitely not worth its almost



Captures the feeling of being in love

four hundred pages. One aspect that I like, and that makes *Anna and the French Kiss* stand out, is that Anna does not get the guy immediately. Most stories follow the beginning of the relationship, the fallout, crying over the boy, and then the moment when the couple get together – and then end. Anna eventually goes through all these steps, but multiple times. When she and St. Clair hit the peak of their relationship, they have a tragic fall out but eventually go back to step

one only to repeat the process. Even though the ending is predictable, *Anna and the French Kiss* is a nice read. I would recommend it to teenage girls who are interested in Paris, since the book does include descriptions of the culture of the city. ♦

by Megan Ansems, Kentville, NS, Canada

The Coffee Shop

by Lilian Wang, Arlington, MA

H^{im} Every Sunday morning, there she is, reading the newspaper in the same window seat, notepad and macchiato in front of her.

He likes the way she flips the pages, her long fingers turning them with a brisk, elegant flick. Her bright orange earphones are a striking contrast against her dark hair, piled up in a messy bun, a red pen stuck through the center. Tiny feet, always clad in the most fascinating boots – fuchsia suede, camouflage and spikes, electric blue leather – tap along to the beat. Occasionally she removes the pen and scribbles on her notepad before casually sticking it back in place. He likes how her lovely blue eyes scan the pages with focus, absorbing the words with an intense ferocity. Her face is an open book, and the emotions play out across her delicate features, easily giving away the mood of the article: sad, exciting, upsetting.

When she finishes her paper, she folds it neatly and goes to work on her notepad, sketching. She can go on for hours, pencil dancing across paper, and he can't tear his eyes away from the graceful rhythm of her hands. He wants to go over, ask her what she thought of the news, what she's drawing, if she is an artist, if she would like to have coffee with him. But he stays frozen, rooted in the seat diagonal to hers, unable to strike up the courage. So instead he ignores his upcoming manuscript deadlines and writes letters to her on his laptop, hoping to one day read them aloud.

*They sit in
the same seats
and peek at
each other*

Her

He arrives after she does, but she is never sure exactly when, because by the time she looks up from her paper he is already in the seat diagonal to hers. He often seems lost in thought, his gray eyes gazing out the window as he absentmindedly sips his coffee. Unlike her own creamy macchiato, his is a bitter black.

She wonders if he is a journalist or a reporter from the way his eyes roam the shop, calm and curious as he types on his laptop. She likes how his fingers fly over the keyboard, tapping out a delicate beat, which her feet involuntarily tap along to. There's also the way his eyes gleam with concentration, a gleam that she has tried many times to capture on her notepad. But despite countless attempts, each sketch is as unfinished as the rest. No matter how hard she tries, she can't seem to capture the intensity of his gaze, the arch of his eyebrows, or the elegant cheekbones she so admires.

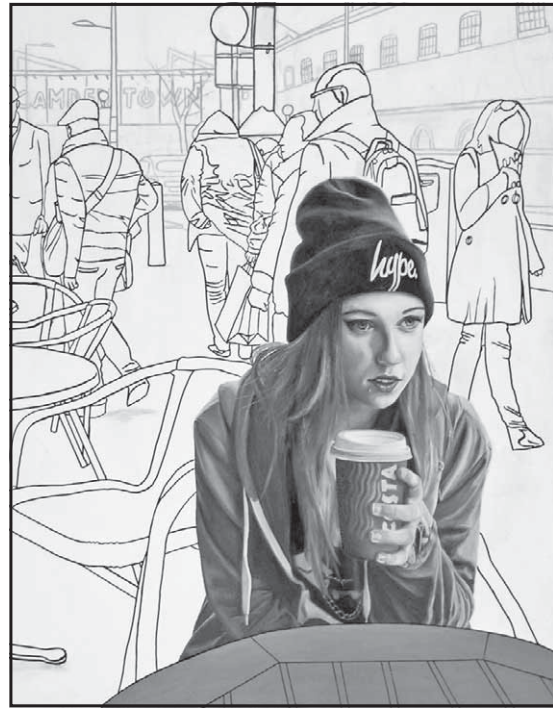
Oh, how she wants to sit in front of him so she can properly sketch his features. Then she can finally capture the curve of his jaw and draw in the dimples of his gentle smile. But he would find it strange if she approached him for that reason. So she just sips her coffee, pencil dancing across paper, hoping that one day she will finally finish the portrait.

Barista

There are these two regulars at the coffee shop. Every Sunday morning, they sit in the same seats

and peek at each other, constantly missing the other's glances. It's been going on for weeks, and even though it's obvious that they're into each other, neither has made a move. It's infuriating.

So today, on a gray Sunday morning, I walk over and hand him a frothy macchiato, then place the steaming black espresso by her notepad. ♦



Art by D'Arcy Darilmaz, Amersham, England

Lights Like Windows

by Rebecca Lessie,
Tucson, AZ

You asked me if I loved you as we shared cheeseburgers in the back of your 1994 Chevy truck. The air was heavy with August humidity, and there was ketchup smeared on the corner of your mouth. My eyes fixed on the paper bag sitting near my shoe.

"Do you love me?" you repeated earnestly. My eyes caught yours and I took a breath.

It was windy the day we met. A rogue paper blew out of your hands, flying through the air before spotting me and plastering itself against my leg. You followed after it, cheeks flushed from the wind and what might have been embarrassment. You spoke quietly and in a rambling sort of way that left me wondering if I had really heard what you said. The wind swept you away again before I had the chance to ask your name. You left behind your paper and a perplexing first impression.

The second time we met, you smelled like cigarettes and danger. You picked me up in your truck (the one I would later become so familiar with). When you had asked me if I wanted to go for a ride, I was too intrigued to say no, as the boy with the flyaway paper seemed to have disappeared. That night we drove to the top of a road overlooking the city lights. We must have sat for an hour before I finally said that looking out over the city made me think of the sky, with its pinpoint lights in that great sea of black.

"No," you told me, "it looks like a ship. A great ship, fading out into the distance." We didn't speak

*I amassed
a collection
of worthless
memorabilia*

anymore, but when you dropped me off that night, I took a cigarette butt with me.

That morning, when I woke up, there were forget-me-nots on my doorstep. I placed them on my bedside table and promptly forgot they were there. It wasn't until a week later that I noticed they had wilted. The shallow bends of their veiled heads made them look almost contemplative. I swept them into the trash; no use in keeping things that wouldn't last, or so I told myself. But I couldn't keep from reaching back into the bin and taking out a single, dry flower so that I wouldn't forget.

By the end of three months (and one week and four days) I had amassed a collection of practically worthless memorabilia. A note creased hard around the edges; a rock that caught my eye as we walked together; a page of notebook paper that I stole from your desk after fantasizing that

you would later write my name like silent hope in its margins.

I began to understand about the ships.

You took me back to the hill, the one that we had shared when we first looked out over the city. We ate cheeseburgers in the back of your 1994 Chevy truck, and you asked me if I loved you.

I thought of my collection. I thought of the memories I held in jars and the ones that would some day drift away. I remembered how hard you were to pin down and my feelings of disappointment when I finally did. And after feeling the sum of all of our parts, I knew what my answer would be. ♦

Night Giants

Everything and everyone you know is made of stardust ...

except for the night giants – no one is quite sure what they are.

They're a quiet, contemplative people by nature with a curious taste for Indian food.

Giants are also quite fond of luxury handbags.

They use them as socks for each individual toe, which is nice until they step on someone's car keys.

The Richter scale does not even begin to cover the types of earthquakes that occur due to incidents involving car keys.

A word of advice: never look a giant directly in the teeth. They will blind you with their pristine brilliance.

My great uncle was a night giant.

His name was Claude, and he made watercolors.

No canvas was large or strong enough for Claude, so he satisfied himself by painting the sky.

(The sky used to be white, you know)

I inherited his curious taste for Indian food and fondness of luxury handbags, though my teeth are nowhere near blinding.

Popular homes for giants include

stadiums,

theaters,

airports,

fields,

and large Indian restaurants,

though they are quite content with camping out

or sleeping on couches, if they can fit.

by Audrey Mills, Houston, TX

Cyber

by Chloe Wilson, Waterford, CT

I look over the sleek metal paneling uncertainly. Channels of blue run down the sides, pathways for electronic messages to flow from my brain to the makeshift foot, not yet connected to my temporarily mangled leg. It's nothing special, really, just another state-of-the-art cybernetic prosthetic. It'll replace a crippled foot that's too misshapen and broken to carry my weight.

They say it will work perfectly. I honestly don't believe them.

The surgery should be quick. I will be unconscious the whole time, unfeeling, unconnected, unaware. I won't feel the computerized foot's metal tendrils snaking into my nerves and latching on. I won't feel its connectors flowing through my veins and snaking up through my leg, my torso, my neck, and finally, my brain. I won't feel anything except the sudden wholeness as I am completed once again: part human, part cyber.

They say it will work like new. I'm really not sure what to make of that. I haven't heard of any severe cases of cybernetics going haywire, but it's still a possibility. If the wiring doesn't connect properly to my brain, if it misses the nerves by less than a millimeter, it might not work at all.

If it misses by more than a millimeter, I could have severe brain damage.

They, of course, say everything will be fine.

I seriously doubt that.

Becoming a cyber will render my status halved. I won't be viewed as I am now: as a human. Being a cyber means less pay, less respect, less everything, and because the connectors in my brain could potentially be hacked, I could also be out of a job. The Royals can't have any loose ends in their ranks, ends that the enemy could easily take advantage of. I am a liability. I'll probably be cast out, never to see my lover's face again. Chances are, after this, I won't even remember him.

No loose ends, after all.

I have their secrets, and if I get hacked, the enemy could easily sabotage the Royals' plans. Leaving me alive means leaving an open door to their secrets, and that could turn the war in our opponents' favor. Killing me, though, would be too obvious, too dirty. Better just to clear my memory, secrets and all, and be done.

They said they won't do it. For once, I know for certain that they are lying.

When I get that foot on my leg, I won't remember who I am. I won't remember the countless nights staying up to study for exams, the tests I had

to pass in order to reach my status in the Royal Guild. I won't remember that priceless moment when they first approached me with the offer – for a job that would take me places I couldn't yet imagine. I won't remember my parents, my younger brother, my friends. Heck, I won't even remember my name.

I lie on the examination table, run my fingers across the cold metal, and shiver under the harsh lights. I'm trying not to look at the sophisticated machine that is going to remove my

foot – the foot that was caught under a burning pillar that collapsed during my escape after I stole critical information about the enemy's new weapon. The foot I lost for the

bloody Royals, who I know are going to wipe everything I know about them away. If they have any courtesy, they might leave me my personal history. But it will never be the same. I will never be myself again, and I can only hope that my new self will realize that.

I can only hope that she searches with everything she has to figure out why.

Life has been good to me. My parents were good people with steady jobs that kept the family out of the slums. My younger brother was so sweet, the most lovable nuisance in the world. I got through school easily enough – not a perfect student, but not a bad one, either. I had good friends who I trusted and who trusted me in return.

When the Royals approached me, offering the job of a lifetime – I'd decode ciphers, spy on the enemy, occasionally steal their plans – I didn't know what to think. Apparently, I was prime material, but that wasn't really what interested me; I was, after all, fresh out of college, and I hadn't scored an amazing education there anyway. All I really wanted was a job with good pay that I wouldn't mind committing to, and here one was. Of course I accepted.

That was probably the best thing I had ever done in my whole life.

Almost immediately after initiation, my world got crazy. It didn't take long for me to realize what they had left out of the job description – fieldwork. Every mission sounded so simple on paper, but as soon as you stepped into enemy territory, the threat of being shot in the back of the head complicated things. I can't count how many times I nearly died stealing enemy information. Yet I was always successful.

And then I met him, the man who should have shot me as soon as he realized who I was. The man I should

have shot on sight, knowing perfectly well what side he was on. The man who revealed to me the truth about the Royals, about myself, about everything I knew. The man who would shift my loyalties forever.

His name was Anthony.

• • •

I was on a mission to intercept a transmission of orders directly from the enemy's counsel, but in order to do so, I needed direct contact with one of their radios. Ever since they revived the use of radio waves and figured out how to isolate a single wavelength to be inaccessible to any communicators except ones directly connected, no one could hack in. Unless someone like me listened in on the transmission directly.

Clad in black, with a technological cloak that confused others' perception of me, I found that breaking in and getting the transmission was the easy part. Getting out should have been even easier, and it would have been if they hadn't planted a bug in the wavelength. It disabled my cloak and made me visible to anyone – and I didn't notice the flaw in the cloak's functionality.

We bumped into each other, literally. I was in a self-assured haste to get out of the base before the theft was discovered; he was off to complete some mundane delivery. The collision knocked the small box out of his hands. Out of instinct, I bent down to pick it up and handed it to him politely – then realized my mistake.

"Excuse me," I muttered, trying to push past him.

He turned toward me.

I heard him call out a single word: "Wait."

And slowly, ever so slowly, my heart thumping in a panic, I turned to face him. I'd never been caught in the act before. I'm a terrible liar – always have been – and my acting skills are no better.

"Where are you off to? You do realize the rendezvous is this way?" He flashed a smirk, then gestured in the direction he was heading – the opposite of where I needed to go.

I nodded. "Of course. I just need to drop something off first, sir."

It took less than a second for me to catch the brief flash of confusion in his face. Apparently people didn't refer to him as sir.

"What exactly are you planning to drop off?" he asked. I caught his eyes searching me for a package or supplies, and I blushed.

"Um ... pick up. I need to pick something up, not drop off."

"Right. And that would be?"

I bit my lip. "Uniform?" The word



Art by Katie Prior, Oklahoma City, OK

slipped out with a faint squeak, and I was perfectly aware how dubious it sounded.

"Do you need help? You look lost."

I opened my mouth to reply, but no sound came out. It took me a moment to warm up to the idea, but eventually I closed my mouth and gave a shallow nod. If I were discovered, it would all be for nothing, but if not, maybe I could get some real information. The sort of thing that would change the war entirely.

He smiled weakly and shuffled the box in his hands. "This way."

I know it was dumb. You just don't follow your enemy through his own compound after giving him a bucketload of obvious lies, hoping to still remain undercover. I wasn't planning on him finding out. I wasn't planning on falling in love with him. I wasn't planning on finding something that really would change the war completely, myself with it.

None of it was supposed to happen. But it did.

• • •

I lean against the table, ready for whatever is going to happen next. My life will be torn away;

while my outer body remains almost the same, on the inside, a new person with new memories will walk in my footsteps. I will never have existed. Some stranger will take my place.

For some reason, I'm not afraid. I've lived my life. I've been everything I have wanted to be and found more than I ever could have expected to find. I made my loyalties, made my betrayals, chose my side.

The Royals can figure out who I really was, what I really did, without my help. They can pretend to understand my choice to fight against them rather than follow the blueprints that I helped create. They can try to unravel the knots I tied around their plans. They can try to fight, but I cuffed their hands behind their backs years ago. They can keep on >>>

Every mission
sounded so
simple on paper

Not That Romantic

by Calli Pollock, Cedar City, UT

I may not be able to swing a baseball bat or use a paintbrush, but I can wield a wooden spoon with deadly precision and force, as Max had the painful experience of learning.

"Hands off," I told him firmly as I turned back to my mixing bowl. "These are not for you."

Max grimaced. "Ouch, Nessa! Was that really necessary? I think you gave me a welt!"

I smirked and patted him on the back before returning to the mixing bowl. "Serves you right for trying to sneak something that's not yours."

Max pouted and leaned against the wall. Even though I couldn't see him, I could tell that he was eyeing my famous triple-fudge cookies. "Come on. This kitchen is filled with desserts as far as the eye can see! What difference would one less make? Besides, I'm a growing boy who needs all the nutrients he can get."

"You stopped growing somewhere around the ninth grade. And if I gave you even one lemon bar, the rest of the plate – not to mention the whole kitchen – would be devoured before I could blink. Then you would have the privilege of explaining to my mother why I have no treats for the bake sale. Do you really want to face the wrath of my mother?"

Max was silent.

"That's what I thought," I crowed. I cracked a couple of eggs into the bowl.

But he still didn't bother with a reply, and I looked back suspiciously to see what he was doing. My cheeks flamed as I realized he was leafing through the romance novel I had carelessly left on the table. He read a few pages, then raised his eyebrows without looking up. "What is this?"

"Um ..." I searched for the right words. "That's not mine, it's Bree's." I felt guilty tossing my roommate under the bus, but sometimes sacrifices have to be made.

"Uh-huh." Max turned another page. I was debating between leaping across the room and ripping it from his hands – or just turning around and pretending nothing had happened – when he closed the book and tossed it back onto the table. "Do girls really think that is romantic?"

I couldn't help but bristle a little. "What do you mean?"

"Do girls really think that is romantic?"

Max sighed and ran his fingers through his hair. "You know, guys spouting off undying declarations of love and planning surprise candlelit picnics at every turn ... it just doesn't seem all that romantic to me."

Okay, so maybe some of the things in books and movies don't happen in real life, but that doesn't mean I appreciated my boyfriend critiquing my reading preferences. "Okay then, Romeo." I crossed my arms over my chest and glared at him. The wooden spoon in my hand was a subtle threat: I meant business. "If you're such an expert on love, what do you call romantic?"

"Anything can be romantic," Max said finally, folding his arms, mirroring my defiant pose, although he towered a good six inches over me. "It doesn't have to be some over-the-top scene from a chick flick."

"Prove it."

"With pleasure." He leaned in close.

"Max ..." I warned, trying but failing to keep the tremble out of my voice. "What are you doing?"

For a minute I thought he was about to kiss me, but at the last moment he lunged behind me, grabbed the mixing bowl, and dumped its contents on top of my head. I screamed as the gooey eggs I had just cracked slid down my hair and over my face before taking a dive to the kitchen floor.

"Max!" I was about to take a step forward but was intercepted – by a cloud of flour hitting me in the face. I dragged an arm across my face to wipe the white film from my eyes. When I could see again, I was met with Max's impish grin.

Without thinking, I grabbed the milk carton, and tossed it in his direction. It landed on the floor by his feet, exploding on impact, dousing him from head to toe. Instead of getting angry as I expected, he gave a resounding bark of laughter. While he was preoccupied, I snatched the bag of flour and deposited its remains over his head. He coughed on the fine powder, and it was my turn to laugh. It sounded more like a deranged cackle.

"I just tarred and feathered you!" I announced, flashing him an evil smile. "Actually, it's more like milked and floured, but the idea is the same."

"I forgot how crazy you can be," Max murmured. He took a step toward me. Unfortunately, he failed to remember the carnage of milk, eggs, and flour spread across the floor. He slipped and hurtled into me, sending both of us to the floor in an awkward, not at all romantic pile of limbs.

Before we could untangle ourselves, a shriek reverberated around my small apartment. Max and I both looked up to see Bree standing in the doorway, grocery bags hanging forgotten from her arms.

"What happened here?" she stuttered. "It's like



Photo by Rebecca Huang, Taipei, Taiwan

the baby of a tornado and a hurricane threw a party in our kitchen!"

"Well," I began. "Max was just ..." I trailed off and glanced at a sheepish Max.

"Being romantic?" he offered weakly.

Goopy eggs slid down my hair and over my face

My roommate opened her mouth as if to speak but closed it. "I don't even want to know," she said as she left the room. "Just make sure that you have this cleaned up by the time I come back."

Max and I exchanged a glance. "So what do you think?" he asked. "Was that romantic enough for you?"

I studied his white-clad figure and felt my dripping hair. The flour had combined with the egg whites, forming sticky clumps.

"Definitely better than any book," I agreed. ♦



Art by Elaine Lo, Bellevue, WA

going, pretending that they will win, yet never knowing why this war even started. They can keep on believing in a goal that isn't there, fighting a fight that they were programmed to create.

I don't care anymore, because I know something that they can only wistfully feel but never understand. They will never comprehend that they are only puppets. Puppets that were strung without resistance, puppets that have forgotten the wiring etched into their souls. They will never be able to remember what the world was before they woke up on one of these examination tables,

They will never comprehend that they are only puppets

without meaning, without purpose.

They will never know who they were before they woke, and how that ignorance has turned them into who – what – they are now.

I don't remember who I was the first time, but I do know who I am now. A malfunction. A puppet who fought against the lies and cut the strings that controlled me, and found the humanity tucked away within myself. Now that resistance must be forgotten through new strings so strong and unbreakable that I need an exterior piece that will control my every action, my every move, my

every thought. It's not about liability, it's about humanity. But to them, it's the same thing.

While they pretend to feel, pretend to live as souls uncontrolled and unstolen, while I slowly lose the very humanity I fought so desperately to find, while they rely on the cybernetics that trace their veins, I will have known the truth. About myself, the world, them.

Even though I will forget, I will also know, deep down, that for a little while I was more human than they ever were. And I know, deep down, that there is a chance that I will find myself again.

The sedative is cold as it seeps into my blood, and softly, everything goes black. ♦

Elephant in the Room

by Leah Kmosko, Maiden, NC

Our English teacher has crooked teeth, which is terribly distracting, but the worst part is that the entire anthology I purchased is highlighted in various ugly neon colors.

"That's what you get for buying used," you sneer.

I ignore you for a multitude of reasons, the main one being I am pretending that I don't know you, and if a stranger had made that comment I would ignore him too.

Of course, I do know you. That's something I can never change. I know what you will say next and I know what you would say to begin with and I know what you will say in the end. I know that if I told you any of this you would narrow your eyes and shake your head, and I know that you know that I know. So, as we all do, I tweet something that is meant for you but doesn't mention you.

"I'm sad," I tweet. Very broad but very specific.

"I wish people would stop whining on Twitter and get a life," you tweet.

"I never did anything to hurt you," I tweet.

"I really don't care," you tweet.

"I thought you were different," I tweet.

We go on like that for an hour, tweeting general tweets to each other. You won't talk to me any other way. I have to admit, the fact that we share a teacher feels so good to me. Whether you like it or not, we have something in common, and you can't change that.

We get assigned to a project together, because since we started the year as friends, our seats are permanently beside one another. I think this is my chance.

"Hi." I bite my lip because you said that was cute once. "So what do you think ...?"

But you cut me off with silence, the kind of silence that speaks volumes, more than words ever could. For the first time ever I understand the expression "elephant in the room."

In my mind I call our elephant Paul. Before, when we were together, it was just me and you. But now

Paul is sitting between us, crushing us both. And neither one of us knows how to talk to Paul and ask him to move and leave us alone and never come back. So he just stays there, awkwardly crushing us and keeping us far, far apart. Honestly, I think you know how to make Paul leave, but you don't want to.

At the end of the day, you are waiting to go home. "Time repeats itself a lot, doesn't it?" I say, because this scenario has been played out a million times and has always ended pretty well. Except this time Paul is here, staring me in the

face.

"You should be a philosopher," you say.

"Why did you kiss me?" I blurt out, even though that was never ever part of the plan.

You stare at me. "I don't know."

"That's bull," I say. "I have a problem with thinking about how things used to be, and I hate it when things happen that change everything even

though they shouldn't because they aren't that big a deal."

You smile a bit. "Not everything changed. All the good stuff still happened. Just don't expect it to happen again. Think back on it and be happy while remembering. Then look for something else."

"I am looking." I don't cry. "I was looking all this time."

"For what?" you ask.

"Something else," I say. That is code.

"Well, I hope you find what you're looking for."

In that moment, I realize it is over. We won't be anything, not even friends, because you've come to terms with what happened and you've gotten over it. Paul only exists in my mind. You don't want to talk to me or see me because you got what you wanted. You are still looking because I'm not your something else.

I don't say any of that, though. What I do say is "Oh, I will. I will find it."

But I doubt it, because what I'm looking for is you. ♦

Whether you like it or not, we have something in common

There Was a Boy

by Sarah Dauer, Lawrenceville, NJ

There was a boy.

A skinny boy with thick-framed glasses and long hair that popped off his shoulders when he walked. He was not that physically attractive. At least, not as physically attractive as the movies made out high school boys to be. Particularly because I was under the impression that my first day of high school I would walk through the doors and see the world in slow motion. I would nod to my peers because waving was totally and utterly geeky. As I waited to go to my first period class I would observe all the untouchable senior boys who would be gorgeous blond athletic types or quiet, dreamy bookworms. But he was neither. He was a perfect in between. Don't get me wrong. I wasn't looking to be that freshman who gets taken advantage of by some flirtatious scooter enthusiast her first week. In fact, I was not looking for a boy at all. I'd known I liked girls since the fourth grade. But there was a boy. And he was fantastically intriguing. I'm not sure why I was captivated by this boy at first. He was a senior taking first period Economics, a required course, in a class that showed a majority of freshmen and sophomores. He kept to himself,

always scribbling in his notebook instead of taking notes. Perhaps it was when we all had to grace the front of the class with our presence for the obligatory "about me" presentations. Perhaps it was in the way he spoke, like snow. His voice fell softly into a hardened chuckle. And there was an accidental cracking too, like he was not telling us everything and felt uncomfortable either way. Perhaps it was when the bell rang, and he was pushed by the crowd rushing through the door. His checkered notebook fell onto the floor, opening to a page with detailed pencil drawings of rabbits, and upon trying to pick it up from the floor for him, we just narrowly avoided bumping heads. He managed a crooked smile and adjusted his glasses as I closed it, gently handing it to him as if it were a wounded creature. The boy regained his composure and looked at me with seemingly forced eye contact.

"I always wanted a rabbit," he told me with a deep breath. "Never got one."

You see, there was a boy.



Photo by Liliana Bollinger, El Cajon, CA

And although the universe refused to recognize his existence as extraordinary, I saw him as such. I saw him as extraordinary even when his shoulders grew tense after he answered a question wrong. I saw him as extraordinary because on the very first day, pushing through the gorgeous blond athletic types and the quiet, dreamy bookworms, I saw only him. In that moment, I knew that I would see his rhythmic bobble of a walk again, and I was okay with that. ♦

The View From the Lake

by Lizzie Meister, Mundelein, IL

Nobody was supposed to get hurt.
Nobody was supposed to get hurt.

Nobody was supposed to get hurt.
The words pulsed and throbbed in my head, making a hard task now impossible. I licked my lips and



Photo by Moriah Doepken, Seward, AK

avoided the expectant stares of those in the room.

"We were pretty stupid," I finally got out, fidgeting and inhaling sharply. "I ... we met when I was seven. I was crying."

I closed my eyes and allowed the memory to envelop me. The common chaos of slurred profanities being screeched. The lake's liquid dazzle from the grass in the yard.

"And he picked a daisy for me from my neighbor's garden and sat down next to me and said, 'My favorite color is red. What's yours?' And I smiled gently and cautiously took the stolen gift and we both pretended not to hear the constant curses through the open window. And then he just kept coming back. Every day. Once we went swimming in the lake. It was gross." I laughed.

"But I loved it. We swam all day. Underwater you can't hear any yelling, so it was just him and me and the lake's blue reflection, like our safe place. When he was sixteen he bought this beat-up convertible and he'd drive me anywhere."

I choked, invoking memories of ribbons of wind whipping through my hair, his sun-kissed face smiling down at mine, feigning freedom for a few hours and staying drunk on those moments to breathe through the pain. His eyes filling with warm concern whenever he picked me up.

I choked, invoking memories of ribbons of wind whipping through my hair, his sun-kissed face smiling down at mine, feigning freedom for a few hours and staying drunk on those moments to breathe through the pain. His eyes filling with warm concern whenever he picked me up.

His careless but candid "I love you" whenever he dropped me off. I never returned it. I was far too flighty for such a commitment.

"I don't even know why he kept coming back. I just pushed him away."

They needed to know about how he only drank his coffee laced with French vanilla, because he knew that's how I liked it. They needed to know about how he always left his job early to pick me up during the pastel midday when he knew Daddy got home. They needed to know how he came back even after I fought him.

"He was so much better than me," I said. The silhouettes of my grief were folding in on themselves, closing up my throat. I desperately grasped for composure, but the world was already growing hazy, sorrow encasing me.

And then I could see it all: the bronzed planes of his face as we looked up at the stars, smiling sleepily at me as we warded off the cold in the back seat of his convertible, me with more than my fair share of the blankets, and him happy to be chilled as long as it meant I was warm.

I took a quick reach from my cocoon to gesture up at the sky. "The big dipper," I whispered, snuggling back in. He hummed in response and I shifted my vision to the next constellation. "Little dipper." I continued until I had exhausted my limited knowledge. "Don't you know any?" I asked when I'd finished.

His voice rasped with disuse and fatigue. "No. I never called them any name. My momma just called them pockets of light before she died. Guess that's where she is now. Pocket of light somewhere."

I considered this theory with a slight smirk, then accepted when he offered his arm for me to rest my

head on. Both of us were momentarily indifferent to reality, him so convinced that he was in love with me, and me selfishly allowing his delusion. I had never found someone who cared so wholly.

I could hear the yelling from the time I had last spoken to him – my own obtrusive cries that he couldn't fix all the problems, that I didn't love him. He had stood, lip pressed between his teeth, hands grazing through his hair, internally battling himself but never retaliating at me. It ended in an unwavering embrace, the remnants of tears trailing down my cheeks and pooling onto his shirt, his tenacious vow to try to paste my pieces back together.

But my shards were sharp, and somewhere in trying to tend me, he got cut on my edge.

He had thought I was still somewhere inside when he saw it, heroically blinded from all logic that there were professionals and they would take care of me. He had a promise to keep, and he rushed into the burning house, frantically searching for me.

I had sat in the backyard, clutching a daisy from my neighbor's garden, staring at the lake and inhaling the smoke from the unrelenting flames. I had come home to the orange inferno. A fireman pushed me toward the water, claiming it to be safest.

I know. The water has always been my safe place.

And in my overwhelming sense of loss, I had consoled myself that I still had him.

Now I know I have nothing.

When they recovered his body and I was left trying to pick up the pieces in his apartment, I found he had sentenced his sentiments in crippled cursive in a thousand letters I was never supposed to see. He'd scattered them around his room.

"I always thought that you loved me too, but I guess not. Maybe your eyes were like the lake that we used to look at from your yard when we were younger, always reflecting the stars, and I foolishly thought that maybe you were my pocket of light. Maybe I can at least be yours. I promise to try."

I sobbed, trying to regain control, as I saw the world with new clarity through my tears. I wanted to tell him I did love him, that all of my furious vociferations were never meant for him.

"I couldn't stay away, even if you hated me. You'd just waltz into the room again with your mellifluous voice and there was nothing but white noise. Your smile sanded all the stresses away."

I was aware of the long silence the congregation had endured while I reminisced, and I fought to force something intelligible out.

"And then he died."

"I mean, you never even told me your favorite color. I guess it's just one of the mysteries that made you so simply complex. I was never good enough for you anyway. So I guess, if I can't be your stars, I can be the daisies that grow by your neighbor's house."

When I had first found out, when

I'd gotten the call, I'd been driving in my mom's van under the steady knocking of precipitation. The past twenty-four hours had been awful; I'd been scrambling to reassemble my remaining belongings, driving to stores to purchase what was lost. I had been so selfishly enraged. He'd left me alone when he knew I needed him.

I glared out the window at the rain, far too mad to cry, grateful to the sky for doing so for me.

I've misplaced my anger now. I'm left with ringing, bitter lamentations instead.

Stupid, stupid boy. Why would you do that?

I felt so heavy and empty all at once, struggling to set the bouquet of daisies down on the cold stone. It was as if their emotional weight was physical too. Curling my hand into a fist and sliding it slowly to support my head, I intentionally met all the fixed eyes I had tried to avoid. Their intense regard held calculated condolences, trying in vain to soothe my messy state.

I strained to see his complexion in the summer, to hear his pronounced laugh, to fix his ruffled, unkempt hair. But I couldn't, because all of that had been sealed six feet beneath the earth, and I was left imagining his death, overwrought with terror not for himself but for me, sweaty from the intense heat, inhaling a cloud of gray, allowing embers to viciously bite into his skin until the conflagration consumed him, while I obliviously drowned in the ripples of the water.

"It's all I can think about when I look at his grave."

Nobody was supposed to get hurt. ♦



Photo by Ali Gregory, Edgewater Park, NJ

Boring Boy

by Hannah Gonzalez, San Diego, CA

He was blond and blue-eyed, muscled and tanned from his years of football (he was the quarterback, naturally). Features of note included his tall stature and strong jawline. Throughout our grade, his sense of humor and lack of sense were renowned. Unsurprisingly, he disliked studying, but, most notoriously, he liked smiling.

I, Cassidy Markham, a young woman who prided herself on her adherence to the ways of the counterculture, found him dull.

He grinned in art class as he pretended to erase my sketch. I screwed up my mouth into a stiff smile and took the eraser back. The next day he winked at me when he captured my pencil, acting as though he meant to draw over my art. I bit the inside of my cheek as I wrestled the item out of his predictably large and manly hand.

And, without fail, every time I reclaimed my utensils, his smile would brighten to a godly grade of heavenly light.

How typical, I thought.

Eventually he evolved enough to attempt verbal harassment as well. “What kind of music do you listen to?” he asked, pausing in his work five minutes after starting. The assigned project involved interlocking shapes filled in with Sharpie in a complex alternating pattern. His drawings were scribbles.

Nothing you would recognize, I thought. “Oh, you know, Phosphorescent ... bands like that.” I shot him the tight smile I had perfected in the month of sitting next to him. *Leave me alone.*

But of course he grinned right back. *Stop smiling, I thought.* “Never heard of them,” he replied.

“Oh.” I turned back to my project.

After school, I happened upon him among a group of his friends. The posse blocked the hallway with the sheer strength of their number. I pushed my way through the mob,

clutching my books tight against my chest as I muttered, “’Scuse me, ’scuse me, please don’t notice me.”

“Hey, it’s Cassidy!”

I looked up. Girls clung to him like in a cheesy music video with some mainstream rapper. But his bright blue eyes were on me.

And for a moment, as they sparkled like sunlight glittering on the surface of the ocean, like he was, I don’t know, glad to see me, or something, those eyes caught my interest.

“Huh? Who’s Cassidy?” The celestial being that formed his left flank tilted her head prettily.

So I shied away, hiding myself in the glare of the other shining divinities. Caught my interest? In what way are those eyeballs interesting? It’s not like they’re that unique or anything, and the ocean-sunlight simile was hardly original. Stupid Cassidy.

“Cassidy Markham. She’s in my art class, and she’s really good,” came his cheerful rejoinder.

I didn’t see his expression, but I could picture his immutable smile.

His actions were easily predictable that Wednesday. He grinned and asked about my family. And Thursday he positively beamed as he demanded information on my hobbies. Friday he put his face an inch from mine and refused to budge until I gave him my phone number.

I should have said no, I thought to myself the rest of the day. I could have said no. But the memory of his eyes and his voice and his grin and his breath – soft and warm on my skin as he coaxed – was enough to suggest that no, maybe I couldn’t have.

The next morning I felt strange. Uncomfortable, itchy from the inside, like my subconscious had done something my conscious mind wouldn’t appreciate. Like I’d just had a dream I was better off not remembering.

Doing my utmost not to recall a thing, I lay on my bed and checked my Instagram for the first time in months. I scrolled until a picture of him and his dazzling friends (posted by our one mutual acquaintance, a cute girl I hadn’t spoken to in a year) filled the screen. It was clear that they were close, he and his otherworldly associates, and they were smiling. He was smiling. Beaming. Through my mind flashed an image of the collection streaking across the sky in Apollo’s chariot, the source of the world’s light.

I closed the app. *Why do I have an Instagram, anyway? Aren’t I supposed to be counterculture? My fingers tightened around the phone until my knuckles turned white. I*

**Notoriously,
he liked smiling**



Photo by Cloey Robertson, Oxford, AL

can’t even remember why I ...

I looked at my phone, the one that I’d owned for just a few months. It was a decidedly conformist iPhone. And suddenly I realized I was never so single-mindedly allegiant to the counterculture until the day he smiled at me.

Oh. I stared blankly at the phone. I get it now.

I considered my background, which I had changed to Vampire Weekend just this past week.

I’ve been making excuses, huh?

The screen faded to black. For five minutes I had been goggling, but only one thought was forthcoming.

I guess I’ve just been scared.

The display flared to life of its own volition, and I nearly fell out of bed.

Heyy its me :) read the new text message. His first time texting me, and he didn’t even bother to leave his name.

But I knew who it was, and, though it irked me, I knew that the emotion responsible for the swelling in my chest was more than irritation. I knew that, somewhere along the line, these feelings had expanded past the point of viable suppression or ignorance. And, most embarrassingly, I knew my heart rate wasn’t going to slow anytime soon.

I scrolled up and hit Call. And when the voice at the other end tickled my ear, I said, “Hey. It’s Cassidy.”

And he said, “What’s up?”

“Um,” I replied eloquently, and wondered what exactly had possessed me to be so spontaneous. He must be rubbing off on me. “Just, you know, wanted to chat.”

It was quiet for a full second.

Then he laughed; I let the trapped breath out of my lungs. “You’re hilarious. I’m glad you called, ’cause I literally just woke up, and you were in my dream. It was crazy.”

I clutched the phone with both hands. They shook. His eyes and his smile and now his voice were in my head, image and sound ricocheting off the walls, the extent of my own honesty driving me to the point of distraction. *His eyes are beautiful. I love his smile. His voice makes me weak.*

“Cass? You still there?”

Cass.

“Cass,” he said.

“Oh, yeah, sorry. You, uh, dreamed about me?”

“Yeah, it was crazy!” I could hear him crack a grin even over the phone. “You wanna hear about it?”

I thought about his friends, the gods and goddesses. I thought about myself, Cassidy Markham, a spineless, sort of counterculture girl with, apparently, an embarrassing (and growing) interest in someone who was, well, out of my league.

And I thought about him and his infinite brilliance and his endless questions and his continual smiling. “You’re hilarious,” he had said. “She’s in my art class, and she’s really good,” he had said. “What kind of music do you listen to?” he had asked.

And now did I want to hear about his dream?

“Yeah,” I murmured. Then I straightened. But that wasn’t enough. I stood up, right on the bed, my head two feet from the ceiling, my brows furrowed in defiant determination, and I proclaimed to him, to his shiny friends, to the entire world, and to myself, “Yeah, I’m interested!” ♦

**I could hear
him crack a
grin even over
the phone**

Enlightenment

Don’t let me fall into
the little beams of sunshine
dancing across your skin
and I’ll swallow
the world whole and spit it back out
with a smirk and the sun and an idea
of where the city alleys lead off to.

by Presley Hargis, Hebron, KY

Grasshopper Green

by Tennessee Hill, Dickinson, TX

fiction

“Can you see me?”
“No.”
Your words blew cold air in my face, and I could see the heat of your breath in a cloud lingering by your mouth.

“Do you want to?”
You paused, and that scared me a bit, or maybe I was just really cold. Either way, a shiver zipped down my spine. “No,” you finally muttered.

We sat on the roof outside your old window. Green paint chips lay on the wood panels. That was the color you’d wanted it, the most disgusting green I’d ever seen, but I paid \$14.96 for it anyway. And when your mom yelled at us for painting the side of her house green, I didn’t care, because you liked it.

“It’s kinda cold.” My fingers were busy peeling paint. My mind was the most peaceful and nervous blank I could imagine.

“Yeah.” I heard the effort it took your body to breathe deep in and out, huffing to stay alive. “Warm front’s supposed to blow through Thursday.”

“Oh,” I said. I didn’t want it to get warmer. I liked the cold you always seemed to bring in your back pocket.

You were visiting that first week of January because your sister stayed here when the rest of your family left. She said, “I’m not done watching the sun rise on this side of the world just yet.” I liked that. Sometimes when I missed you really bad I would whisper that too. I shut my eyes and thought of you a few feet taller, sitting on the roof of your new house, watching the sun rise on your side of the world. I always imagined the sun was prettier where you were, but I think that might have been a lie I told myself to keep from crying.

During the hot summer nights that made me wish it was socially acceptable to walk around in just underwear, I would sneak over to your sister’s house and sit on the roof outside the window of your old bedroom that she’d made a library. I watched the sky turn black and blue like the bruises you didn’t mean to leave behind, but then it swelled with pink and orange, which made me believe you were thinking of me, when really I knew you were asleep, not thinking of me at all.

I feel asleep on your sister’s roof one night and woke up confused on her couch, green paint chips in my hair. She never said a word, even though I know she heard me slip out the front door. I never said anything either, but she knew more than I could ever put into words.

I saw your dad’s rusty Ford in her driveway Tuesday morning when I was jogging with my dog. I saw the ADTR bumper sticker and knew it was your rusty truck now. I also knew you were

back, but I kept on running anyway. It was your turn to chase me, I was the mouse this time. And you did.

“I didn’t think you’d show up,” you confessed quietly.

“I didn’t either.”
You sucked in all the cold air your body could handle. “I’m glad you did.”

I said nothing.
“You’re taller than I expected.” Your fingers moved to my old shoes, flipping the laces between two fingers.

“I’m five foot nine.”

“I guessed that.” The silence between us was so intense that it made my ears ring.

“You have muscles. I didn’t expect that.” It was true. I thought you’d play chess, not lacrosse.

“I play lacrosse.”
“I guessed that.” I hadn’t, though. Your sister had told me a week into sophomore year.

Your sister told me a lot about you, but I didn’t want to say anything about me. I knew she’d just tell you over the phone, and I didn’t want that. I wanted you to wonder, like you left me wondering.

“The sun’s coming up,” I announced as if you couldn’t tell.

“Here,” you said. You pushed the fuzzy blanket over me and moved closer. “Can I ask you something?” Your voice was deep – a man’s. That was weird to me. I’d seen you cry when your hamster died, and now you were a man. I wanted to hate the way your face was symmetrical and acne-free, but I couldn’t make myself hate you. Instead, I hated myself for wanting you.

“Sure.”

“Did you miss me?”
I coughed. “You know the answer to that.”

“I just want to hear you say it.”

My voice was tense. “I missed you more than you know.” I searched for your hand in the dark and found it 8¾ centimeters from my thigh. “I used to come up here when I missed you, but that just made me hate you for leaving me, and I didn’t want to hate you, so I stopped. I stopped thinking about you. I figured you can’t miss someone you don’t think about.”

“You didn’t think about me?”

“I thought about you every day, all the time.” My words hated coming from my mouth, but they needed to be said.

“I kept your old baseball hat, the one you got from Minute Maid Park.” You laughed.

“I know. You posted a picture of you wearing it on Instagram.” It killed me to see it sit so perfectly on your head, tilted to the side because you thought it made you look cool.

It was your turn to chase me

“You follow me on Instagram?”
“No.”

You chuckled a bit and laced your fingers in mine. I relaxed and let you bend them the way you wanted. You were always manipulating me.

“I think I love you,” you whispered into the pink sky.

“Then why did you leave without telling me that?” I could picture my middle school self, peering out the bedroom window, watching you ride away from me in the back of a red Ford that you drove now. I cried for weeks in the bathroom with the faucet running, but my

mom knew anyway.

“Because I loved you.”

“That’s a stupid answer.”

“It’s the truth.” You grazed your thumb across my palm swiftly. I didn’t flinch. You wouldn’t win this one, I swore it.

“The truth is stupid. I hate the truth.” The last syllables of my sentence echoed. I thought that was ironic.

“Tell me the truth,” you pleaded.

“I loved you.”

“How do I know that’s the truth?” You were weary of me. I didn’t blame you.

“What color is the side of this house?” I asked.

You hesitated.

“Green.”

“What’s my favorite color?”

You knew this; you knew me. “Robin’s egg blue.” Your voice was low, and I sensed your embarrassment in the way you enunciated.

“That’s love,” I said.

“Painting a house an ugly green when your favorite color is blue?”

I could tell you had something to add, but I didn’t want to hear it. “You thought it was an ugly green?” I asked instead. I was surprised. You’d convinced me and the paint guy at Home Depot that you had to have it.

“Yes.”

I didn’t have words to spit back, so I sat silently.

You went on, “Remember when we went to the zoo in second grade?”

“Yeah.” I did. Your favorite animal was the zebra. You’d said, “God couldn’t decide which color he liked best, so they got both.” I liked that.

“You pointed to a grasshopper and said, ‘I love that color.’”

Oh yeah, I did say that.

“Do you know what my favorite color is?” you asked.

Of course I did. “Hunter green.”

“That’s love.” You smiled. Even

though I couldn’t see it, I felt it.

“They’re both green,” I told you.

“Grasshopper green and hunter green are completely different.”

“I guess so.”

“I still love you, you know.” You said it quietly, like I wouldn’t agree.

“I know.”

“How do you know?” You swallowed loudly.

“Your sister showed me a picture of your bedroom in the new house.”

“And?”

I knew it was true when I said it, but I hated this irrefutably sobering truth about the distance between you and me.

“Grasshopper green.”

You and I were sitting in the January cold, figuring out the distance in centimeters of how far apart we were, in heart and in truth. We were 8¾ centimeters apart on the roof that night, and I fell asleep searching for you in between the shades of purple and pink in the rising



Photo by Leah Choe, Burke, VA

sun on my side of the world.

“Do you like it?”

“What?” I asked, caught up in my own thoughts.

“The green.”

“No. I hate it.”

“Me too.” You laughed. I laughed too.

Your hands were really soft, covering mine from the sting of the cold wind. We were closer than ever, in proximity, I mean. I’d found the idea of you more alluring when I was pouting and longing for you on neighbors’ roofs. But having you next to me was pretty great too. I didn’t hate you, come to think of it. I loved all of you, even the jerk parts that didn’t call me back when you knew I missed you. I loved you enough to overlook that and sit on a roof with you in shorts and a thin blanket in the dead of winter. That’s love, and so is grasshopper green, I’ve come to find out. ♦

“Do you know what my favorite color is?”

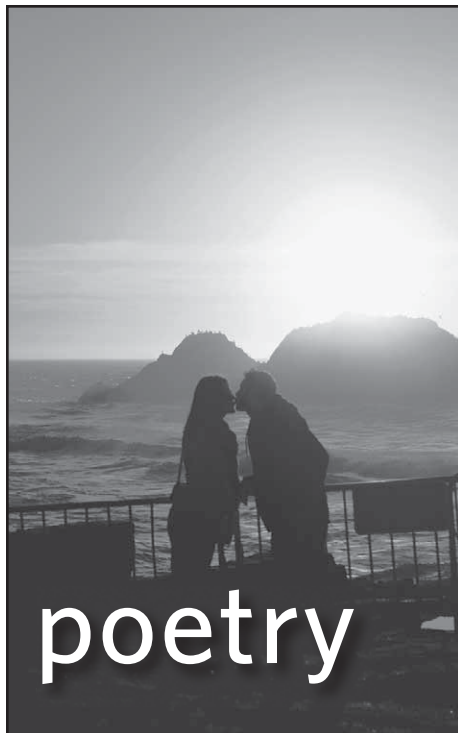


Photo by Laya Wyatt, Marysville, CA

Apples and Heartbreak

I tread lightly when I talk about him.

When a knife slices an apple,
it makes a very clean cut.
And there are exactly two things
you can clearly hear.
The sound of the blade
against the core of the fruit.
Fleshy, swift, gliding smoothly.
Cutting deep.
And the sound of the blade
against the wooden board.
Stiff and quick.
The aftermath.

That's how it felt with him.
That's how I describe the past
3.5 months.

But in reality, it was a lot more stained
and tangled.

Because after you cut an apple,
its taste is ultimately succulent.

But breaking up with someone is raw.

by Malavika Rajagopal,
Princeton, NJ

Tangled

Trembling skies and open eyes.
We're 1,000 miles apart. And through the
thump thump of the bass in the hall
I can feel the *thump thump* of your heart.
Open air and tangled hair
Goes the *vroom vrooming* of the car.
But I'd *vroom vroom* back in the blink
of an eye
Just to capture those big brown stars.
Tangled up in experiences;
Tangled up in rhythm and blues;
Tangled up in new and tangled up in old;
I'm still tangled up in you.

by Megan Grossi, Malden, MA

Alabaster

1:25 a.m. The sky exhales rosy clouds.
The mountains rage softly in their
pearly cloaks.
I tip my head back and all of a sudden his
lips are on mine. His smile is the color of
electric blue nail polish and Aerosmith CDs.
He thinks I am beautiful and
I think I am ordinary. We drink
to blue dahlias and Eskimo kisses.
It's Friday night
I'm in love.

Now we are running. We are in a dirty gray
pickup truck that wheezes and whoops
clouds of
cauliflower. He smells like rain and
midnight meteor showers and
peppermint soap.

He thinks I am tired and
offers his shoulder. While I sleep
he pitches me to the stars and
they dye my fingertips purple.
It's Friday night
I'm in love.

We are underwater. Everything is alive.
The moon, the color of milk, washes
over us like
flames dripping into a thick pool of wax.
His eyes are
everywhere like broken glass spinning
in a kaleidoscope.
He thinks I am asleep and
tries to talk with God. I listen quietly.
He cries alabaster tears and chuckles
to himself.
A broken keyboard sings a song of sadness.
It's Friday night
I'm in love.

Tonight I lie here alone. Red lips and
tiny shoes
and soft dirt. The fog seems thicker here.
The trees
seem whiter. The sky churns with the
eyes of a
hundred flaming coils.
He thinks I have forgotten and
drowns Memory in a viscous oil of
affliction.
I close my eyes and imagine lips flickering
under the moonlight, lips that do not
speak but
tell me a story of dreams and sprightly love
and slippery fingertips,
nothing but cool palms weeping in the wind.

1:29 a.m. The sky sputters quietly in its
charcoal tomb.
I tip my head back and the stars bend
to kiss me good night. It's not the same.
I think he is beautiful and close my eyes.
He is with me for a second.
It's Friday night.

by Claire Wang, Farmington Hills, MI

Never To, get, her

Life, a, comma, tries,
to, separate, us, keeping
a, silence, between.

by Tara Troiano, Frisco, TX

What Is Love?

What is love? *What is love?*
"Baby, don't hurt me"? No
That's a song
That's not love

There are a lot of songs
About love
However, none are very informative
Nor specific on the characteristics
Of love itself.

Aches in hearts
Hearts in throats
Butterflies in stomachs
Dizziness in heads
Are these love?
No! These are symptoms!

You can make love
So I guess it's some kind of dish
But no one will tell me the ingredients
Or what you do with them
Do you stir them
Or sauté?
Are they grilled or baked or raw?
Where are the recipes for making love?
I have Googled them
And the search results
Make *no sense*

Is love something you need?
Or is it something you want?
Is it a right or a privilege?

It seems like something other people
have, but
Do I have love?
Would I know if I did?
Maybe I do, but I haven't realized
I've just taken it for granted.

"Love sucks!"
They say
"Love is wondrous!"
They also say
They have to get their opinions straight
This is why They are not in politics
And why I have trust issues.

No, but seriously, guys, what is love?
Like, now I'm really curious.
And no more of this wishy-washy stuff
This ushy-gushy-mushy stuff
This "it's that feeling in your heart" stuff
Or this "you'll know it if you're smart" stuff

I want solid concrete science stuff
Scholarly thesis lecture stuff
Hypothesis conclusion stuff.
Ah, screw it, no one knows this stuff.
And I've used the word "stuff" enough.

Love must be indefinable
Like that dark matter stuff
Stephen Hawking was talking about.

But no!
In all our years of history
Math, science, anthropology
You honestly think that I'll believe
That love is still a mystery?

Oh wait, right here, a dictionary ...
"An intense feeling of deep affection."

Well, okay then,
That wasn't hard.
Problem solved, guys,
Moving on.

by Otis Roffman, Yonkers, NY

could you

If I told you that you have tainted me,
That you plagued my system with
every bit of
Your existence, could you take it all back?
Could you crack open my bones and remove
Every last drop of yourself that was
left inside?
Could you filter out my blood to
separate you
From me before it decides that both
are better
Together than they are apart?
Could you scrape out your name from
my throat
So it does not find a way onto the tip
of my tongue
Or attach itself to every word that escapes
from my lips?
Could you pump my system to remove
all of the
Butterflies you let loose inside of me
the last time I was
Fortunate enough to see you?
Could you rewire my brain to forget the way
your hands
Felt against my skin, how your voice
sounded when
You said my name, and the way it felt
when you said it
With such complete adoration?
Could you please, please, remove every
"I love you" that
Is lodged into me, and could you make
sure my heart,
As well as my stomach, do not know that
the reason they
Feel so empty and incomplete is because
of you?

by Isabelle Rios,
Lewisville, TX

Thursday Night (Although You Were Exclusive)

The shapes you traced on my back
(stars and diamonds, I think)
are shapes I hope I never forget.
Your fortune-cookie tongue on mine
is a taste I hope I never brush away.
Your hands climbing my ribs
beneath my shirt melted my skin
and now your handprints
are on my bones.

Somehow I forgave your silly lips,
which have locked with a thin-mouthed
girl's.
And then I forgave your clumsy hands,
which grazed the thigh of a
long-legged blonde.
And once again, I forgave your confused
mind as you uttered my name,
Babe,
to a girl who had her fingernails
painted blue.

and I forgave and f o r g a v e and f o r g a v e.
and now I am washing your scent
off my skin.

by Reese Fischer, Charleston, SC

Don't Go to Sleep

It's night.
The stars are pouring into my retinas
In slow motion
Like molasses or any dream.
My phone screen is black
And I'm waiting to hear your voice
Across eons of dirt and distance.
Don't go to sleep.

You moved to California
And it was ten o'clock your time
Don't go to sleep.

I'm getting scared. You said you'd call.
I'm getting scared that
Someone else's hands are doing
What I'm too far away to do.
Don't go to sleep.

I'm picturing your nails dug into his back.
Don't go to sleep.

I see your phone on his nightstand.
Don't go to sleep.

I see my face evaporating from your
consciousness.
Don't go to sleep.

I see you forgetting me.
Don't go to sleep.
I consider driving to you.
I consider getting behind the wheel
And driving till
The eons fall blank
The highway melts
Just to quell the fear.
Don't go to sleep.

My eyes can't keep open anymore.
Don't go to sleep.

I go to sleep.
Images of you flicker like flint
Behind my eyelids.
Your mouth becomes a receiver
And all that comes out is a dial tone.
I'm scared that I forgot your voice.

I wake up in the morning.
Sunlight knocking on my eyelids.
No missed calls.

by Joseph Waldrop, So. Plainfield, NJ

Supernova

I'm trying to forget you, trying
To make you relinquish your unknowing
Monopoly on my mind, trying to live
Without that voice in my head
Which reminds me that I'm
A tiny moon in your universe
While you're a supernova who
Lights up the world for me and
countless others.
I can't help the brightest star in the sky
Without burning myself up as well, so
The cycle continues. In the winter,
needles fall
As I pine for you until you arrive, fresh
From saving the world to rescue me as well.
I sit warm in your glow for a while before
You spin away, your light fading
To leave me cold. I keep rotating on my axis.

by Caroline Kubzansky,
Washington, DC

Chris

Humans are made of billions upon
billions of cells
But did you know ours were affixed
to one another?
Maybe it's in the fine print of our
birth certificates
and like an atom, when our cells severed,
there was an explosion
a shell of smoke splitting open to a sorbet
sun that is all the buildings and bodies
you knew were possible to burn
at once

Our love is you chewing at my waist with
tired fingers
They couldn't define this love in a textbook,
but I commend them for trying
Because they can't write you
and you're all the good they'll never know
You are dedicated songs, because I'm too
dumb to tell you how I feel
You're the ceiling of my heart and, baby,
it looks like the night sky – a mouth
swallowing me and all I can see inside
are the chromosomes of galaxy,
veins of white gold, tangled and elegant
like jellyfish
You built the Milky Way in my heart, but
it isn't smooth like the name, it's born
with prickly stars and silver shine
But they're bad at naming things,
remember?
I want to compare you to those stars,
those precious freckles of science,
but I wouldn't know how, so I'll
probably find another song

My legs are noodles – but that's too cliché,
so I'll have to explain:
My legs are noodles made from the rope
tendons fingering up your neck
then cooked al dente
because the water's heat was supposed to
replace your warmth
and I needed it all over me, I needed
to drown in it
so now I'm boiling in stove bubbles
and you're saying
"maybe five more minutes"

I know "mutual" isn't the way to define this
we are the calf dropped too early in spring
and swinging a blind loosened head in
the snow

I'm the head, searching wildly for the
warmth of something familiar
and you are the wet legs, the sticky stomach
already heavy with the cold
already dying
waiting for the rest of the body to catch up
soon the calf will be a snow sculpture
and the ground will be at peace with
this new stillness

I named this poem "Chris" so I wouldn't
have to write your name
Because the "J" looks like "I miss you"
And the "o" reminds me that I will be
feeling that way for a long time
Jordan
There, I said it
But you're still gone, and I'm still lonely
god's laughing
do you hear him?

by Chambri Swartz, Telluride, CO

My Knees Hurt From Praying to You

I wish I went to church so I could
take you with me
and we could sit in the pews
side by side thighs touching.
I want to hear you flipping pages
to keep along with the service
I want you to hear my muttered
effort at remembering what to say.
And when the Father says to hand
out peace like candy with
joy on our faces and love in our
eyes even for strangers
I want to turn to you first
grab you by the hand
I want to be the first person
to kiss you on the cheek
I want you to hear my words
and hear the meaning underneath
peace be with you.

by Athena Berreles-Luna, Buda, TX



Photo by Rachel Sakakeeny, Colleyville, TX

You Are Not a Tree

You are not a tree
His words are not your roots curling their
toes under
Locking you into the soil that is his embrace
You are not stuck

In elementary school, there was a crepe myr-
tle next to the tennis courts that all
the kids would run to just to tear apart
We would rip off pieces of bark just to see
them dry up and change color the next day
We decided that this was our tree and carved
our names into what was left as a reminder

But you are not a crepe myrtle
You can't let him rip pieces of you away
until you feel like you're rotting from the
inside and your skin starts to change color
You can't let him carve his name into your
chest to remind you that he was there
That he left you with pieces of yourself
lying on the ground around you and
arms too short to pick them up again

This winter he was the bitter wind that
stripped your branches and pushed you
over until you could no longer stand up
And I know that when he kisses you
it's the spring rain that makes you
forget winter even happened and
your roots are still reaching out for him
But please, remember this
You are not a tree
If you aren't happy
Leave

by Cassie James, Robbins, NC

blood brothers

The summer I turned seventeen I fell
in love with the boy
with swollen lips and freckles
spayed across his nose.

He set off firecrackers nightly
within my heart, soft sparks spewing
at the places where his fingers
left tender marks on my
lily-white skin.

We shared fragments of sick,
infected bones, like the time we dove
off the cliff by the ocean, resulting
in your shattered arm and my
wildly palpitating heart, mere
seconds from bursting.

We mixed our blood, vowing to
be soul mates for life, blade to thumb
watching the swirling
of you – German, English, Polish – and
me – Indian, Mexican, Swede – our
souls eager to blend
into one.

by Katie Witte, Pilot Point, TX

reversal/survival/ bones

i.
speeding backwards through burnt skeletons
of life
that used to be
painted rust and green
necks turned to look in ways previously
lost to us
at paths previously crossed by us
hands tight on gods and machines that
have tried to kill us;
yes, we survived and live to turn
around though fires burn
and stare down storms and silence of a
thousand lives before us
that we've loved

ii.
and how we love
as if we've never felt the sting of being
young and facing ending,
bravely,
stars like freckles on our noses and the
sun still red from smoke,
bravely,
crossing wooden bridges with our heavy
shouldered loads,
bravely,
drinking in our beaches and our booze
until we drown
in the caves of summer mouths
that stand so wide and empty,
full of grace and full of doubt

iii.
who are we
to try and fill our hands
with the ashes of our former homes?
who are we
to claim we'll still be so
long after our bones are blackened
by the truth
we think we know?

by Morgan Chesley, Kasilof, AK

Ophelia

my mother thinks i'm a whore
because i loan my love out
to boys who would rather borrow than buy.

i trapped my heart in a jar to watch
it flutter in formaldehyde, the small breaths
it takes (inhaling at tricuspid, exhaling
at pulmonary)

i took it down to show you how
it sputtered at the distant touch
of your hands, and you held it
for three hours, carried far away and
left in the dark under your bed.
i stopped breathing.

sometimes you tell me
good hearing from you
and i run to the bathroom to wash my hands,
re-teach them how to be untouched, how to
sink instead of reach for the surface where
your voice breaks clearly.
i scrub my hands until they are raw, until i
expose skin that does not know
how to spell your name, how to hear
anything above an ocean of white noise.

my skin smells like iodine, the sallow stains
of old surgeries when i removed
the remaining
pieces, pickled them in jars stacked
over windows;
they choke on light.
now my room smells of salt, of fossilized
autumn,
and the hollows under my skin are lined
with dust.

my mother thinks i'm a whore
because i only cry out love
in letters addressed to no one.

my emptiness is resonant
and every word reverberates
in sound waves crashing on my tongue's
shore,
filling my throat with an ocean of
your noise between us.
i haven't heard my voice in months.

sometimes your voice sounds like
running water,
like a river rushing over me, and it echoes,
a heartbeat, beneath the scar tissue sealing
me closed. now i dream
of leaving the water running
until it overflows;
of wading into your river
with pockets full of stones.

this is an ocean
between me and you, an ocean
of violence – the violence of
clean skin, open mouths, open highways,
and i fell like a raindrop on its teeth,
swallowed
to a cold and quiet place preserving
my tongue and all the memories
i couldn't drown in the bathroom sink.

i have never been kissed so sweetly
as that cold and curious ocean
(you never kissed me
so deeply)

by Kelsey Schmitt,
Dallas, TX

Replies

When my little sister asked me about the
scars on my thighs
I didn't know how to tell an 8-year-old that
sometimes cat calls came with claws
Or that little boys color outside the lines
so when they are older they can justify
crossing borders and destroying a piece of
artwork that was never theirs to begin with
So I said nothing

Before my boyfriend saw me naked for
the first time, I told him,
*I know people are not medicine, but you
are making me forget this*
I begged him to promise me
*A week from now and six shots later I won't
be staring at my trembling hands trying to
forget what it felt like to touch you*
And he said nothing

Two months later I called him crying
I told him I spent hours tracing my veins
like road maps,
Hoping they would lead me back to him
And he told me I was being dramatic
I asked him, *Is it even possible to be too
much on the days I feel so empty?*
This time at least the dial tone answered
me back

The worst thing about betrayal is that it
never comes from your enemies
Now I wear lipstick not for beauty but
as a disclaimer

Warning: Don't get too close, I would hate
for my broken heart to cut someone else
Warning: Please don't leave me alone,
I don't want to have time to remember
Warning: You will never be with me when
the lights are off; I refuse to let another
man hide from his shadow
Warning: I am aware I am the skeleton
in my closet, and we all learned at
a young age not to touch dead things
Warning, Warning, Warning
I am not used to being wanted, so I need
you to tell me

by Addison Sawyer, Seattle, WA

Wooden Eyes

Through these eyes, I will watch and
be there
Even I'm not in the flesh. My eyes will
never leave
You and never blink. No matter what
happens,
My eyes are always watching over you.

Even though my eyes are made from wood
And my feathers may be wood, they will
Still carry me to where and when
Ever you may need me – in
Mind and voice and soul.

My body may be wood; it will
Follow you where you may be
I will follow
As fast as my wooden body
Will allow me to,

With, also, my wooden
Wings, glide me to you.

by Warren Devaney, Genesee, ID

Fire and Ice

I guess the only time I hated
you was when I needed you to love me.
And I guess I'm kind of cold. I wish
you could feel the winter in my bones.
Because it aches.

Fire and ice are opposites and each can
overpower the other when given
enough strength.

Like when two people fall in love, and
I'd hate to make this about love. Because
poetry is something too beautiful to ruin
with love, it might not make sense to you.
Just like I never made sense to you.

But I won't make this about me because
poetry is too beautiful to ruin with
self-titled autobiographies.

You know you're the reason I can't listen
to the same songs I used to and you're
the reason I can't look at myself the way
that I used to. Because the way you said
beautiful wasn't beautiful. Because after
two months you got tired of saying it.

And I know I'm making it about love again,
but I wish you could feel the winter
in my bones. It was winter when you
decided maybe you loved me again.
And it was summer when you realized
maybe you never loved me at all.
So maybe I'm lucky I got one season.

Maybe you were just lonely.

Maybe your fire needed some of my ice.

Maybe your ego needed some of my pride,
because for some reason, you thought
I had so much of it.

And maybe this poem isn't any good, but
maybe you weren't any good.

by Destinie Rivera, Rochester, NY

Snow Globe

The world came to its
End
But there was no eclipse or any
Earthquakes,
The only trembling was your fingers
on my skin like
You were tapping out Morse
Code
That only I could hear,
And in our snow globe of a world,
the end was
Binding in its iso-
lation,
Because united we conquer, but divided
We fall,
And we couldn't merge our multifarious
Perspectives,
And I never did translate your
Dot-dot-dot
I thought it spelled out "eclipse" when it
Was an ellipsis, you
Wanted
A "to be continued" when I was
Saying
"The End."

by Callie Zimmerman, Fishers, IN

Freckled

My first kiss
was the sunrise,
arching its knees
on the boughs of the earth
to greet my lips with
golden passion
and pastel rays,
like the inside of a seashell,
or the fuzz of a
not-quite-ready peach.
It kissed and pecked
each cheek.
Each shoulder.
A dozen times.
Each freckle a promise
that it would be back shortly
and rise to find my lips again ...
and again, and again
'round my collarbone,
like a strand of burnt pearls
dangling from my skin.
Courting jewels.
Or cursed reminders of
my only love.
The sunrise leaves me restless;
these marks whisper to me through
the night,
"Wake, girl!"
"Watch your window."
"Greet your love as faithfully as he rises
for you."
My last kiss will be
the sunrise.
For I stubbornly refuse
to die
under those distant stars
when my love is simply 'round
the other side,
waiting to greet my freckled skin.

by Sarah Shaw, King of Prussia, PA



Photo by Allison McConnell, Boise, ID

3 a.m.

If the cry of midnight is but
A shadow in your rearview mirror, slowly
Tiptoeing across a distant horizon
Folding itself between the stars

If hazy figures fill your mind, if they
Dance on the windshield of your thoughts
Waltzing to tunes of hope and lust
On a road engraved with moonlit scars

And if dawn rears its ugly head
Over your weary, bloodshot eyes, you
Are possessed by love or loneliness
Both casualties of an equal kind.

by Anna Prisco, Upper Saddle River, NJ

Never Understood

Growing up, I never understood the concept of love.

I didn't understand how
Sometimes it was a beautiful work of art.
I didn't understand how
Sometimes it was the one accident that ruins the work.
I didn't understand why
So many people wanted it despite the pain it brings
And the everlasting mark it leaves on your heart.

Love was a tattoo;
I never wanted a tattoo.

I grew up. I never understood the concept of love.

I didn't understand how
A spark could turn to wild flames.
I didn't understand how
The smoke could be so blinding.
I didn't understand why
So many people wanted to be burned by the red-hot
That consumed minds and bodies
As if they were twigs and leaves.

Love was a fire;
I never liked fire.

I met you. I never understood the concept of love.

I didn't understand how
I felt so light when I thought of you.
I didn't understand how
I felt so high whenever you were near me.
I didn't understand why
When you left, rain would pour from my blue skies
Until you came back around
Like the bright, hopeful sun on a sad, dark day.

Love was a cloud;
I was scared of heights.

You grew apart from me. I suddenly understood the concept of love.
I suddenly understood how
Someone could easily wade into water so deep.

I suddenly understood how
A strong current could pull two people
Toward a dangerous rip tide.
I suddenly understood why
It was so peaceful being held
Under the water helplessly
As salty tears mix with salty waves.

Love was an ocean.
I liked to drown.

by Amia Fatale, Williamsburg, VA

Dyspnea

Each labored breath wasted on you
brings me one step closer to
the edge of the Earth;
I don't know how much
more of you
my lungs
can take.

by "Kayley," Ormond Beach, FL

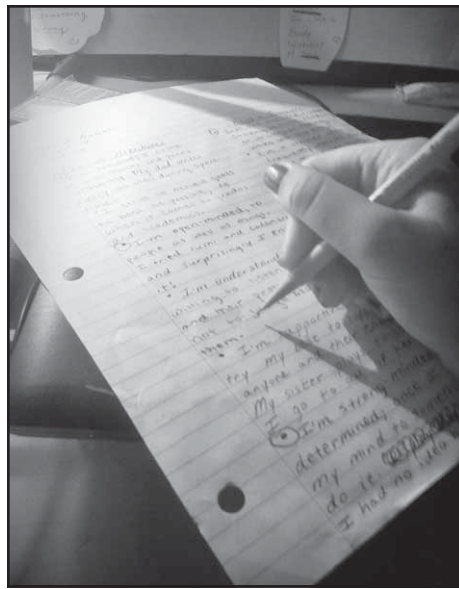


Photo by Hannah Butcher, Lake Worth, FL

You are not the (only) reason I wanted to be published

I write because someday I want you to stumble upon my name in a bookstore years from now and look at your husband next to you scanning biographies of civil war generals and I want you to sit down pull my book off the shelf and read every poem not knowing that all these years every blot of ink has been for you and then you'll remember the way my laugh sounded and the map of my chest and I want you to sit there for a minute or two and feel how I've felt my entire life

by Jack Coyle, Elburn, IL

similarities repulse

i am your cigarette.
you ignite a flame in my morale.
soon you bring me up to your lips and take me in;
i'm letting you.
you're the wrong person, but i'm giving you all my right pieces.
i'm running out of things to give you, and the smoke is clearing.
i collapse onto the floor,
and with one last goodbye,
you put me out with the heel of your notorious doc martens.
it is so painful to listen to the cadence of your steps away from me.
what's even more agonizing
is watching you pull out another from your pack of cancer
and lighting her the same way you lit me.
but then again,
i was never good for you, either.

by Mercedes Ramanathan, Miramar, FL

Angel

My legs, they skip over river rapids.
My feet, they burn with a long-lived desire to run.
My shoulders, they ache with feathers too heavy.
My neck craned, to match my winged shoulders.
My fingers, they are all frozen.
My fingers, they're so cold.
My arms, they are strongest in all the right ways.
My lungs, they whisper denials.
My eyes, they catch the light as if ignited with green flame.
My eyes, which match a gem on fire.
My eyes, if gems could burn.
My stomach, it's used to being lonely.
My heart is not.

by Madeline Campbell, Sturgis, SD

The Smart One

It hurts to remember how broken we were, that the reason we ended was never exact. I don't know why you walked away, what drove you to think packing your bags was the better option over talking things through.
Then I remember how sad we were, consumed in our own problems, struggling to sort needs from wants, fighting to stay alive when we both wanted to end it all, and I realize that you were the smart one. It was better to abandon ship when you knew it was sinking because nothing would save us from the truth.
I stayed on that ship until I was ten feet under water, whispering *I love you* to the darkness as my lungs filled and I sunk to the bottom. You swam to shore. It must've taken all your strength to leave me drowning in the middle of nowhere while you ran so far inland that your thoughts of me stayed on the beach.

by Hanna Vander Ploeg, Hudsonville, MI

Letting Go

My eyes unwavering like steady Christmas lights,
watching you drift away like balloons, and my fingertips,
fingernails bitten down to the very tips, stretch in an absolute attempt to reach you. Our chapped lips puckered up to make O's that reverberate and rebound off these bland walls,
the ones our echoes used to color. Now the only color I see from the corner of my iris is your misshapen form, like a balloon drifting to infinity.
I crane my neck, cramps forming in the hollows of my throat and chest; you are a dot against cumulonimbus clouds.

by Ellen Zhang, Troy, MI

Morning

My favorite moment is when I see the contrast of your skin against the crumpled white sheets after waking from dreams about your lips on mine and seeing your eyes open in slow motion with the sleepy morning sun pouring in through the blinds behind you and making me feel like I just woke up in heaven and I know you feel it too because your lips curl at the edges and I'm reminded of my dream and I can't help but want to relive it again in amongst these white sheets that feel like home

by Hannah Moses, Llandeilo, Wales

Remembrance

Never thought that I would ever pause or revisit this part of my life again.

I was plasma seething with rebellion
But the baby blue tugged at me

needing the hand to grasp
needing the voice to see
Because the eyes can't.

There was no mix, no descent into ambiguity
Never froze in place as my conscience churned
The pen aims for his neck
my hands go for words to cushion the blow
Draw the sword – then wonder “Do I have the right?”

Now I am disillusioned
callous
and tired.

Where am I now?

I stand among the ghosts the hormonal zombies and I want no more.
The work flies in a viable breeze and I can't take heart and shield myself.

Can you see the writhing bodies in the ashes of the bomb the viscera of the sin?

Can you see the bottle take its toll?
Can you see the fire burn away?
Beautiful minds – where are you now?

Can you see the viscera killing your soul?
I did. Let it end.

by Daniel Park, Ridgewood, NJ

restless lenses

a poet sleeps with
delirium in her eyes
contentment is for the rest
it's a curious life
sudden quick flooded
there is stormy color
there are sharp curves
there is no stillness
but every once in a while

a pause

i wonder if the crooked moon listens
to dreams about waking
traveling moving roaming flying
i will not accept borders
i want to go somewhere
no one else will ever go
(i don't want to go alone)

by Mallika Singh, Santa Fe, NM



Photo by Emma DeMuth, Charleston, CA

Your Garden

Outstretched arms
blooming with
the blue flowers
welcome me to
your garden.
And there I meet
the drummer –
there I find
my favorite daisies,
the shattered mirrors
I can glide past,
stones I learned
I loved to lie upon,
keys that rumble
in my belly.

Even thorns that
slice my snowball
skin, even crows
pecking at our flowers,
even paths that melt
into brick walls,
piles of the unnecessary
and pools of *I can't* –
the sky releases.

I flutter smoothly –
a dancing bird
who knows of rain
and sunshine.
A nirvana-reached
bumblebee with
weathered wings:
I would drown in
your garden.

by Stephanie Huss, Lakewood, WA

Con Flict

i can still hear your eyes snapping shut
because you couldn't let them go
in my line of sight. the moment is
frozen in time:

pulp splashes from your fist
a scream dribbles from my lower lip
the grass is dead and crumbly
a thorn stretches from dirt to toe

i can't put myself in your shoes
(it's against the rules)

by Lilia Taylor, Las Cruces, NM

Insomnia, Coffee, and Butterflies

The night's music keeps me awake.
There's melody in the drizzling rain
drip-drip-dripping along the window pane.
I hear it within the old, whirring fan blowing
futile air to absolutely nowhere,
And within the distant droning of a
television in the other room.
Together, they strike a chorus.

The poignant scent of French vanilla coffee
drifts throughout the house,
And I know you can't sleep either.
You evade dreams and escape reality
all at once,
One cup after the other.

There's a certain loneliness to lying awake,
Eyes large because of an anxiety I can't
quite name,
Mind fluttering with those butterfly-thoughts
too elusive to tame.
Catch one or catch hundreds more,
Disorienting and tantalizing,
Mystifying and petrifying.

And my eyes can't help but wander
around the room,
Imagining silhouettes by the doorway.
Your hand rests upon my bedframe.
You're happy to see me,
You're laughing.
You have no desire for infinite cups of coffee
that drown your thoughts in caffeine.
You catch your butterflies and give
them purpose.
You follow your dreams.

In my nocturnal imaginings, you're just
how you used to be.
You can call me an insomniac,
But I think the only reason I can't sleep
is that I still can't quite catch
My butterflies.

by Hannah Butcher, Lake Worth, FL

(uni)versal

when (you) look at her,
your eyes (are) brighter than the sun
and (her) eyes are black holes
that suck you into her little (world).
so (too) think I had a chance
was the funniest joke of all,
because while you were my whole world,
you saw a completely different star

by Sophie Consorti, Wilmington, MA

Confessions of a Hoarder

Memories of you clutter the insides
of my heart –
every corner is filled with your presence,
and the warmth between us that
had floated around and danced in
the sunlight
is now a wintry layer of dust,
the ashes of us settling on top
of every piece of nostalgia,
and I can't turn around
without feeling remnants
of you there.

Knock knock.
Hello?
Someone new comes in
and the mess around us
swallows up the floor,
almost dragging us with it –
it's so plain to see that
it's a disaster,
maybe even a lost cause,
and I just want to cover it all up
like a mistake in my story
scratched out line after line.

Yet
he's willing to help me
clean it all out –
so we start dusting away
all the times your eyes
met mine,
and we wipe down
the moments you and I
embraced and intertwined,
even dabbing at the tears that fall
as the dust of your love
mercilessly pricks my eyes.

The inside starts to clear up
just a little more,
but he doesn't know that
he hasn't even seen
the skeletons of us in my stuffed closet,
that what seems like progress
really isn't,
because at night when he leaves,
even when the room
appears clean,
I'll lie in my bed
constantly haunted by you
because no matter how much we wipe,
vacuum, and wash,
your presence is still stained,
engraved
in the walls around me,
and even when I wrap my arms
around myself tightly,
I still can't stop my heart
from falling apart
because I don't know
how to get rid of these cracks
or how to
erase you
so your ghost never returns.
I've thrown away
so much of you already,
so tell me,
why is it that after all that
I still hoard you
inside my heart?

by Yema Yang, San Ramon, CA

Longing

A pool of silver linings
Water lapped ocean rocks
The sun sank the wishful thoughts
Reality struck you like a clock
When you whispered "this is the end"
And never surfaced

Love made you stronger
But I wish I had you longer
Different lies
Of the same variety
Banished you to fields of gray
Trapped in the looking glass
Of memory
Where only pictures in my head
Brought me to your bed
Where cloudless nights
Brought forth blinding lights
And sleepless fright

by Justyna Maria Kedziera,
Stalowa Wola, Poland

Diamond Necklace

glittering mass of stars in a dark sky –
a sparkling river in the moonlight
silver buttons in a row.
gleaming rows of teeth
a row of icicles clinging to a roof –
shattered glass on the floor.
eyes twinkling in the candlelight;
dew drops in the morning light.
new love shining in another's eyes:
breathless speaking. a whisper.

by "Amy," Flower Mound, TX

This blood is not your home

Fishing gluttony, greed,
excessive indulgence,
the rupture bleeds an eternity
spilt flame red
on those white sheets, staining like
red wine.
The stench of six-pack beers
and spoiled milk
infects the refrigerator and the
scent of cigarette smoke
still rises from the carpet from
the owner before.
Old cigarette butts
still parade the garage floor.
The essence of the echo falls
heavy with a hurl. My sunflower
eyes have turned into
weeping dandelions,
a tremendous pressure
holds a grip tight on my eyelids,
aching limbs scramble for relief.
Your name floats around
in the old shoe box under my bed
I store in there the words you
spoke, the memories I
cannot make myself look back on,
the pain that makes me
shiver as you get too close.
This house, bought new,
can never be my home.

by Megan Tyler, Winnipeg, MB, Canada

Beauty

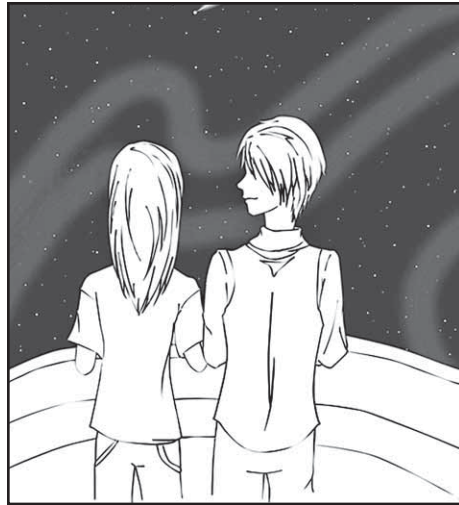
I've never heard silence,
I've never felt the brightness dim,
or my folded knees find its place
or my fingertips slide onto the right key.
I've never stopped time – though I wish
sometimes I could.
I've never felt a slow, unfamiliar,
beating heart of a stranger.
Though the thought of romance makes
me cringe,
they're the only words that fall along
most of my pages.
I've never felt my shoulders fall, not too low,
but low enough to still keep my head high.
No breath can finally release
the amount of fear that takes over my
corrupt mind.
I've never felt something that wasn't there,
or a hand that was big enough to carry
me home,
but not all the way,
so my strength can finish the walk.
I've never said something right the first time
or felt proud of my every poem.
I've run far from my unimpeachable,
childlike mind that once made me believe
that the world was an unending dream.
But one thing I have felt was an escape.
Beneath my pen,
an endless tune without lyrics seems to play
the right keys.
The night lasts a day
as the clock begins to freeze,
and a heartbeat – not mine –
seems to fill my ears and scream ...
"Beauty!"
Yes, this is beauty.
It's the only beauty I've ever heard.
It screams so loud it almost makes me deaf,
but beauty never felt so good.
The escape sleeps peacefully
where the unfeasible is possible,
and is woken by music and written words.
I'd wrap this world into my hands and
climb up the highest tree
or sail farther than life has ever reached
to keep this delicate gift comforted
in my palms
so it can be touched by only me.
It's the only beauty I've ever heard.
It screams so loud it almost makes me deaf,
but beauty never felt so good.

by Monica Janiver, Brooklyn, NY

Hang Fire

Memories
taken without consent
by the thief of time
lost to all
who wish for better
for the youth of childhood
for the simplicity of love
for relief
from the fog of
emptiness
but cannot change
left to
wither away, forgotten,
waiting for the pilot
to come.

by "Maggie," Littleton, CO



Art by Jolina Landicho, Taytay, Philippines

To Weep

I have always wanted to take apart a piano.
but there is no music in watching
something fall.

Somewhere there is a boy
Who has always wanted to make a friend.
but there is no love in being left
abandoned

where the only proof of your friendship
is the tears that stain your heart.
But surely
weeping is better than
nothing?

For the number of pianos. The number
of people. They were as the stars of
the sky in number.

But today there was only one.
Then it falls.
and then I weep.

And my tears make Noah's flood
like dew.

But
my tears water Eden.
And a flower grows.
And the flower is you.
And we laugh. With music.
Together.
And we watch the stars.

by Mason Meyer, Snohomish, WA

A Revolver ...

Compares itself to burdens of her lip
with dirty bullets shooting out of range.
They puncture hearts and wreck all souls
with change
of soon to be a past relationship.
Revolver spirits fit more like her soul,
as she, untouched, can cause a broken heart
for she's not scared of what might cause
her part;
she cares no more of living like a whole.
But to her words for sure I give no blame,
since it's her past, the one that caused
the break;
That broken heart of hers now hides
in shame.
She thinks that truth prevents another ache.
To her love lied, so now for truth she aims
with her revolver mouth, for mistakes' sake.

by Kelly Ramirez,
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Love Comes, Love Leaves

Love comes.
Love tells you you're beautiful.
Love kisses your nose and holds your hand.
Love makes you feel like flying, unstoppable
with every word or action.
Love is there to dry your tears and push out
the darkness.
Love is perfect and never-ending.
Love is faithful.
Love is happy.
Love makes you feel whole.
Love makes you feel empty.
Love is sad.
Love is fraudulent.
Love is broken and temporary.
Love makes you cry and laughs at your pain.
Love makes you fall with nothing there to
catch you, makes you feel small and alone.
Love takes back their things and
closes the door.
Love tells you you're hideous.
Love leaves.

by Hannah Amara Hartmann,
Mequon, WI

Tomatoes

The sun beat down on our
sunblock-bare faces,
A crisp breeze walked over our faces,
As we dug into our garden.
We planted dozens of seeds,
Embodying hopes of soon-to-be tomatoes.

Mom and Dad were still married,
And my brother hadn't left us yet.
I was twelve and wistful,
With wiry blonde hair and crooked teeth.

At twelve, I didn't understand most anything
I didn't get what it meant to be heartbroken,
What it meant to be disappointed or hurt.
Not until my tomatoes got destroyed.

The sky was dark blue,
Charcoal clouds stared at me.
I grasped my dark wooden basket tightly
As we walked out to our same garden.

We found every one of our tomatoes eaten
from the inside out,
I remember sifting through them, distraught,
And seeing my mom with her head
in her hands,
Sobbing and repeating *Damn it, it's over.*

The disappointment was overwhelming
My mother and I had put so much work
into that garden.
Digging for hours, nail beds caked with dirt.
Using every dollar to buy our vegetables.
Even after all that work, it was ruined.

That garden was my life,
Eaten from the inside out.
Believing everything is perfect,
Only to be blinded by rotten tomatoes.

The bank took our house that year,
Mom and Dad separated,
and my brother moved out of state.
We never planted a garden again.

by Carmen Smith, Benton Harbor, MI

Expanding

It's proven that the universe is expanding
Even as we speak
It's proven that the outskirts, those farther
from the center, are moving faster
They're moving away at an accelerated pace
I think that's what's happened to you and me
I'm so far from you
And you're trying to hold on
But I keep drifting
And every time you open your mouth
You send a few words
You deliver a smile my way
I want to run in the opposite direction

The scientists say they don't know what
energy is pushing it away
But maybe they've never thought that
things drift apart
Because circumstances change
Because you changed
And you didn't even give me the courtesy
of informing me
Of letting me choose if I liked this
new person

Well, this dark energy
The one I can't see but I feel as it thrusts
me back

Is you
Who knew you could ever be
Synonymous with darkness
Well, I hope we rip apart
I hope I can run faster and you'll realize
That the universe and I aren't so different
I don't like your core
So I'm leaving.

by Paola de Varona,
Miami, FL

Autumn of the Mind

You think you know it all because you say
That you know nothing, and so go your way
Assured that caution is enough to give –
That prudence safeguards how you mean
to live

You didn't think you'd fall in love like this
A thousand times, a thousand shards of bliss,
With word and feeling, nature and a book
You find a soul in all if you but look

Yet every time you fall in love you fall –
You do not choose, you merely hear the call
And when you follow far, you can't go back
They hit you hard, each time you find
they lack

In seeing light where none was to be seen
You held to hope, but also to a dream
And how could you have known that
dreams fall flat?
No cautious plans you made could tell
you that!

You say you'll never trust until you do –
You're sure they won't play false, but then
it's you –
Your villains tell the truth, your heroes lie –
You learn there's more to dying than to die

by Emma Tiner,
Richmondville, NY

Spinning

Feather duster grass
tickled our arms.
Yellow fire leapt to our hearts,
igniting our desire
for foolhardy fun.
Suffocating black tar sky
and salted stars
looked down on us,
and the man on the moon
shook his head
with glowing disapproval.

Littered cups and
scattered plates held the remnants
of soda and
birthday cake.

We sat next to the fire pit,
a tribal circle of ten,
giggling,
an empty bottle of Coke
in the center of our sphere.

The glow of the fire cast shadows
across the faded wood fence.
Suddenly everyone looked bigger
and my shadow seemed small.

Laughs became louder,
the only other sound the
swooshing of mosquitoes out
for their last bite.

The bottle spun faster,
a tornado of destruction,
whirring and whizzing
to find its next target

And it stopped
in front of you.

Liquid courage drained
from my veins and,
for a moment,
I did not breathe.

Your face, level
with mine.

Your hair, tinged red
by the fire's glow.

Your lips in front of me,
waiting, waiting
for my decision.

So I decided –
a feathery kiss
upon your cheek,
swift as the wind
and fleeting as
a fairytale. I wish
I had done more.
You exhaled with relief.

by Bianca D'Antonio, Natick, MA



Photo by Daria Raine, Owen, WI

Physical or Chemical Change?

I stared at you for weeks,
trying to place that glossy,
peculiar look
your eyes brim with

The knowledge of chemistry
offered to me on a spoon
was not nearly as appetizing
as watching you learn

It was not obvious;
you don't wear your emotions
like you wear striped scarves
and fingerless neon gloves

I had to ask the teacher for help
after the bell had rung
He worked through the problem
and we came through with a solution

We determined that you,
boy who sits in the back row,
are absolutely radioactive
with wonder

I want to be next to you
and hear you describe that wonder
with your soft voice
that causes chemical reactions

by Sarah Bridgeport,
Columbus, OH

-ish.

When I grew up
and washed the grass stains from my knees
I saw the world had changed, had divided
in two.

there were boys
and there were girls.
and there was no in-between,
nothing for the mess of human limbs
that were pieces of each,
so I told myself I was a girl
made of flesh and blood and dollar-store
lip gloss,
and I gave myself away to boys with
half-crooked smiles and
paint-streaked hair
and said this is love
and then, in the summer of Steinbeck
and Salinger, I met ish.
and ish was beautiful.

she had hands that could create the cosmos
and a mouth that was at once a cigarette
burn and a sign for nothing
but I loved her eyes most of all.
because when I looked into her eyes
I saw the sinless skies that reminded me
of a childhood spent staring at clouds
the dead, neon-soaked jellyfish that I saw
on the beach every morning walking
home from school
and the water that I had loved, even as
it filled my lungs.
and surrounded by a holy mess of indigo
ultramarine
cyan
and cobalt,
I no longer felt at a loss as to why I felt blue.

by Maya Nakauchi-Hawn,
Arvada, CO

... Yourself

Lately
I've been flaking off –
(paint chips.)
each piece a person
who was in my life, but
left me.

Whether death or choice,
each left and took a piece of me
with them. Now

I find
it's hard to move
on with all these
holes and parts falling
out –

it's hard
to limp through life
with no crutch, no love,
and the same broken-leg
hurt.

Torn memories wave in the mind
like torn white waving flags.
Give up ...
as now, all you have
is ...

by April Jones,
New Castle, IN

The Jealous, the Empty, and the Frustrated

My grandma's jealousy
is seeping into my bloodstream
and I'm starting to understand
my grandfather's frustration –
his temper.
Lately, I've got his sharp tongue
and tendency to blame the world
for my own imperfections.
I'm so sorry I blamed you
for the hollowness inside me,
and I apologize for hitting Decline
when you call –
I just don't know how to verbalize
what I need to say,
how to show you how I'm feeling.
When I sit to write out a draft
of my speech,
I leave the page blank;
I could not describe it any better.

by Camelia Alikashani,
No. Vancouver, BC, Canada

to the unaware

i am light blue and the sky is gray
today. you are the car that idles in
the morning, soft sounds, turn
signal clicking quietly. you're overgrown
just a little, face darkened in sleeping
splendor. meanwhile, i – a little bean,
afraid, an exclamation and a hesitation,
watch, but i wish to speak

by Sydney Shavaliar,
Byron Center, MI

Strangers

I wonder if she smells like ripe apples
hanging on the hands of a tree branch. I
wonder if the tips of her fingers are
as soft as her face seems. Now I am left
with the thought of wishing to know how
her lips function. If they jive into the
right direction?

And I wonder if she is mechanically built
with a motor. Electrically ubiquitous?
Consuming just the right amount of
kilowatts? Maybe I am not certain. What if
she, if not careful, reaches combustion? Will
I be able to fix her disintegrated engine?
Slowly remove the skin and, at the same
time, tear into the core of her apple
as the gasoline is dripping crimson red,
slowly mixing with air, only craving a
spark? I can slowly turn you into nothing.
Into a speck of dust, a faded memory or
a bad dream.

But I would find any excuse to hesitate.

For now, let me help the
ignition as it pumps with the vessels
supporting your body and blood.
Reproducing and sending a letter like
high voltage, circling among your
entire being. And here another spark is
lit and ignites the blood like fuel,
and now let me sew it all back together
and into a perfectly running heart.

I wonder if she is chemically balanced,
if she is equal on both sides of the
equation. Look at the mysterious glare in
her eyes. Your smile can be so deceiving,
yet no mark is worn. You seem so innocent
but corrupted. You make me feel inhuman
when I come across your thought. I am
swallowed by my own words and yet I
know nothing of you. Nothing but your
beauty, your unconscious ambition con-
centrated on me. You're all-powerful but
humble. I am hopelessly in love with your
reflection. Your absolute integrity, your
complete vanity and humanity. And I am
in love with a complete stranger.
A beautiful and perfect stranger.

by Scarleth Kong, Belleville, NJ

Velvet Dreams

I sealed moonstone kisses to your
silky throat,
Your Adam's apple shifting as you
swallowed my stars.
They shone through your mahogany eyes,
And we made constellations
When wood met water.
I was the moon,
Milky and glowing,
You were the sky,
Velvet and mystery.
I used to seek out the fallen stars,
Short-lived blazing trails of light.
But I found I couldn't resist the pull
of the night
Baby, you make me shine twice as bright.
It's what keeps me coming back
For your addictive lips.
All the inky kisses you bleed
Into my paper soul
Will never be enough to keep me away.

by Kyra Anaruk, Littleton, CO

A Not-Trinity for a Not-Couple

My book hasn't got any threes.
I haven't got a Trinity to compare you to,
nothing holy to rub in around you,
no myrrh or gold or incense.

Rather, we are the three peaks on
Whitney's east face,
and one of us is skipilot and another
granite and one a Phoebus Apollo.

We're Walt's America, and Djuna's drinks,
and all Andrea's rasps,
and the three of us together are a happy
patron at a dive cafe.

We come from a famine, a death camp,
and a war.
The broken bracken below the family tree
that for us means survival.

We're not a twin bed, we're a
two-person tent
and three sleeping bags, four stuff sacks,
no pillows.

We're two books, a Kindle, 1,491 pages
and 40 percent,
A dogear, a cat bookmark, and a dim screen.

We're holy Trinities in our own way,
something escaped from books with pages
and scrolls with columns and running
in hiking clothes
into a lake, water in our hair and love bites
on our shoulders.

by Beatrice Waterhouse,
Santa Rosa, CA

Redistancing

California, this is my stop.
July nineteenth, two-thousand fourteen,
four forty-two ante meridiem.
One hundred and ninety four
dollars left over on my debit card.
Two hours of sleep,
a six-hour good-bye,
a six-hour flight home.
Leaving hurts.
I hear church bells.
Everything feels like
a funeral.
Engines whir in the distance.
I feel ill:
something terminal.

I remember Broadway and Clifton,
sallow sidewalks and uneven asphalt
beneath cobblestone tones of sunset
below a jungle canopy in Suburbia.
We stood on the curb forever.
It felt like the center of all existence,
and as we watched it revolve around us,
I felt important.

I remember Her expression
the first time
She saw me.
She exploded out of the backseat.
She was a lake of gasoline,
I was a matchbook, and our
combustion was the conception of some
gorgeous, mismatched universe.
The fifteen months

I'd spent waiting
suddenly felt as warm
as Her embrace.
I was emotional.
She was immaculate.

I fell asleep as
the train stuttered by
Mount Diablo,
a monument to
my arrival.
She lay with me in
Her bed.
I fell asleep again, and
could have died
happily.

My last will and testament:
California, thank you.
You gave me Texas and Florida,
you gave me Iowa and Virginia,
you gave me New Jersey and Nevada,
you gave me Maine and Minnesota,
you gave me California and New York.
You gave me states like a box of crayons.
Our rooms were draped
in colors
every night.

I stayed in Room 18,
the floor littered with
poem drafts and undeveloped film,
with New Jersey,
and shared a suite
with Texas, and
California
would entangle
Herself
in my bed sheets
whenever
She visited.

I was sick with
Her colors.
I hoped the butterflies
She planted in my belly
would flutter out in the
involuntary, forceful
expulsion of colors
that followed
Her kiss.
Once I counted the miles
between Us on
Her skin
with my fingertips.

We left love notes
in the air of the
Embarcadero.
We cluttered the sea
with stunted breaths
We took between
kisses, counting down
to my estimated time of
departure.

Departure means certain death.
I'm lost in thoughts of two nights ago.
We stood on Broadway and Clifton,
tears pouring like raindrops,
tears melting through my cheeks
like acid, and God, did I,
do I
hurt.

Her tears decorated the sidewalk,
She lit cement fissures with
Her colors
like fireworks that

We did not go out to see
on the Fourth of July. As
She sobbed into my chest,
I felt as though
Our gorgeous, mismatched universe
collapsed.

I gave Her my blanket,
stitched together
pale blues,
from which We could
breathe each other in.
Her colors
spilled from
Her eyes
and sank
into the threads.
I kissed Her
good-bye,
and She departed
with Our blanket.
She was hysterical.
I cried colors for hours.

I think Room 18 is
empty now.
Poems revised one hundred times,
finished;
photographs developed,
hung to display.
I'm thinking
about anything
but boarding my flight.
I want to remember
the good things
and forget my
boarding pass.
I can still feel
Her lips
against mine.

I write to
California.
You made a month feel like a year,
and a year feel like it was
not enough
time.
You made me feel at home
in a crayon box.
You made me feel
important.
You let me feel Her love
in person.
California,
I love you.
California,
I hate you.
California,
this is my stop.
California,
leaving hurts.
California,
I felt important.

California,
She was immaculate.
California,
She didn't want to leave.
California,
She was hysterical.
California,
I held Her.
California,
You feel like home.
But I live somewhere else.

by Joshua Peet, Brooklyn, NY

Whence We Came

I felt it the moment you took my hand,
felt the crushing weight of what
the universe did to itself to put us
together. I felt continents shifting in my
lungs, a meteorite lodged in my throat.
I felt the 40-day flood, the plagues of
locusts, seas that parted down the middle.

Years later, my chest would still tighten
when you looked at me, a reminder of how
the universe held her breath until
we met. We burned bright, we burned
slow. We were the universe's grand
triumph. Achilles and Patroclus couldn't
hold a candle to us. We did not go to
our graves empty-handed; we took each
other's hearts for our headstones and, six
feet under, the universe cradled us in her
palms, said "Thank you for your light."

We could not have done this better. She
bore us into the stars and one day she
will cast us back to the earth, let us try
again away. (And when I find you, we will
look to the sky and find the constellation
we left behind. We'll be so homesick our
hands tremble.)

by Timmi Sturgis, Eugene, OR



Photo by Toni Castro, Torrance, CA

Call Me Crazy (I'm Calling)

Tracing the pavement and
waiting for some bones to heal, you
watch crows count the dust
of another missing meal
and the sand, twenty minutes past
your curfew.
The timer doesn't ring
when no one is there to answer
but the dripping clocks and slipping numbers
aren't on your homework anymore.
There is a new coat of wallpaper
done by boys from the laundry shop
and nothing looks the same from the corner
of your eye.

by Sabrina Koss, New City, NY

GET INVOLVED:
VISIT

Teen Ink

.com

SUBMIT
YOUR NOVEL ONLINE!!


CHECK OUT COOL
Summer Programs!

VOTE
FOR
YOUR
FAVORITES!



INTERACT ON THE
FORUMS!!!

CONNECT:

SHARE YOUR PUBLISHED
ARTICLES AND ARTWORK!!

