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APRIL 2015 | VOL. 26, No. 8

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Sexual Assault Awareness Month

"In nursery school and kindergarten, we are taught to be kind and respect one another. But as we grow older, these lessons stop. We forget to teach love, and it produces culture where violating another human is acceptable. The evidence is clear, but instead of taking action, we make a mockery of it or simply ignore it."

"Rape Culture," page 10

Cover photo by Rachel Man, Mechanicsburg, PA

16 and Definitely Not Pregnant

“16 and Definitely Not Pregnant” by Gabriela Rodriguez is a very powerful piece that, for me, struck close to home. There are so many stories out there about teenagers who go from failing mean girl to sweet straight-A student. And while those stories are lovely and eye-opening, “16 and Definitely Not Pregnant” tells a different tale. In her piece, Gabriela speaks of the competitive environment in which she was raised, and how she looked down on those who drank and partied and had “fun,” a rare luxury for her. But a tournament party and a typical teenage game later, she saw the world and those around her in a completely different way.

Gabriela describes Brenden, a boy who she judged immediately. He told the most ridiculous stories, had done all the things she’d never dreamed of doing. And yet he played four instruments and had an SAT score that Gabriela was jealous of. Watching him, she realized the importance of finding a balance and not judging those you don’t know, things that we all struggles with.

“16 and Definitely Not Pregnant” made me remember all the times I’ve labeled someone before really knowing anything about them. It’s wonderfully emotional, and Gabriela’s word choice really makes it come to life. I loved the fact that this story isn’t a jock judging a nerd, but rather the other way around. The ending, though, is by far my favorite part. Gabriela concludes, “Me, I’m still working on that balance between my drunken Vineyard Vines crush and the overly apprehensive 16-year-old girl watching him from a distance.”

Paulina Klubok, Brooklyn, NY

Is Teen Ink Healthy?

Dear Editor,

Let me start off by saying that *Teen Ink* is amazing for young writers like me who want to share our work with others, receive

critique, and be motivated to work harder in order to be published. Your site motivates us to keep pushing to create even greater works and inspires us through the talented community on *TeenInk.com*.

However, is there also a downside to *Teen Ink*? With the yearning to be published in print comes a bundle of stress and insecurity. I can admit to keeping *TeenInk.com* on my computer screen and refreshing the page every few minutes just to see if the work I submitted a few days ago had been accepted as an Editor’s Choice or if I received more views or comments on a piece. I’m not sure if many people deal with this, but I have seen people write about the pain and disappointment when they are certain they have written “the one” – the piece written by their heart and soul that will finally be printed in the magazine – but then they open their e-mail only to be faced with a “Your submission to *Teen Ink* has been posted ...” AARGH! ME SO MAD ME CAN’T WRITE WITH GRAMMER!

Okay. Angry phase over, I began to think about writing more to increase my chances of being chosen. I spewed out a few haikus that gave me no satisfaction. I came to a terrifying realization: Have I started writing just to put words on a document? Just to submit something to *Teen Ink*? Have I been killing the writer within me?

I don’t know if there is a cure for the drive to be published. If there are any successful antidotes, please tell me before ... me spell grammar with an “e” again.

Sincerely,

*Eileen Deng, Livingston, NJ
Victim of Teen Ink Fever*

Why I Hated “The Fault in Our Stars”

Emily Garber’s “Why I Hated ‘The Fault in Our Stars’” was about her disgust of the glorification of cancer by the movie based on John Green’s famed teen romance. I definitely support Emily’s reaction to the movie.

It glorified a deadly ailment, thus removing empathy for its sufferers. Why make a serious disease in need of attention some sort of cheesy cash cow for big media executives under the ploy of some existential revolution of ideals and feel-good one-liners people can quote when feeling masochistic on social media? It’s almost as if people are becoming desensitized to the horrors of cancer.

In Green’s book, he afflicted the characters with cancer to give the story an air of urgency, morbidity, and solemnity so it’s separated from other faux-deep teen romance novels. This lame ploy to make money from the tumultuous feelings of teen girls is like a very thin layer of smoke, and I’ve opened a window to clear it up.

*Shauna Stout,
Defiance, OH*

The Mistakes of My Father

I have never before read an article that made me think that someone was writing about my life. Not everything was the same, but there was so much to relate to in “The Mistakes of My Father” by “Amber” that I could completely overlook the differences. This writer told about having a racist, homophobic, and classist family – despite being a minority. She wrote of being beaten by her father just because she admired the black basketball player Carmelo Anthony. This only fueled her rage as she began to realize that her father was discriminating against people based on his past experiences. His bigotry repulsed her.

Being an Asian with a family that upholds nearly identical values to Amber’s, I know how it feels to be scolded for admiring or befriending someone of a different race or class. Like Amber’s father, sometimes people can’t contain themselves and they let their hands do the talking. It pains me to hear when racism results in abuse, but it brings relief that there are others who feel and share their thoughts about this too.

*Avis Ho,
Brooklyn, NY*

Life Is Not a Movie

“Life Is Not a Movie” by William Burk is very relatable. I completely agree that life isn’t a movie, but after seeing all the clichéd scenes – from the meeting to the heart-breaking good-bye scenes – we want that exact thing to happen to us. Newsflash: Turn off the TV, because those cutesy scenes are highly unlikely to happen.

I can totally relate because I too have gotten caught up in the fantasy of movies, thinking that I will see a gorgeous guy at a party and from the first moment we look at each other to the dates that we go on, everything will fall into place. William perfectly describes these Hollywood movie scenes that we long for. Let’s remember that you are the most perfect you there is and no movie should be telling you how to live.

*Meghan Engel,
Holgate, OH*

A Mountain of Lies

The poem “A Mountain of Lies” by Zoe Webb is poignant, thought-provoking, and clever. Zoe uses an extended metaphor to compare a growing pile of pebbles to the heaping mass of expectations and lies placed upon her shoulders as she matures. Starting from age seven, the pile grows and grows, finally collapsing at age 15.

Beautiful, descriptive language is used to convey Zoe’s message. The contrast is apparent as the years pass by. An example is, “When I was seven years old, I dropped a pebble on a polished floor So when I was fifteen, my mountain tumbled down. Years of intricate planning and design/cascaded into nothing/before my eyes.” Many teens feel peer pressure and expectations weigh down on them, as well as stereotypes and social norms. Zoe skillfully captures this issue. Well done!

*Sophia Atlas,
New York, NY*

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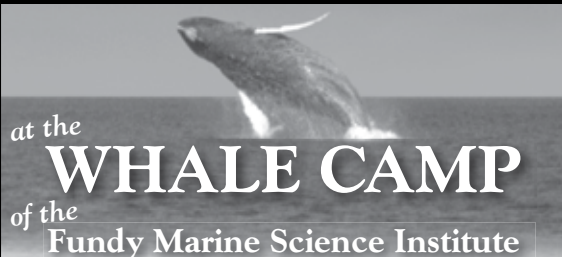
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-- E.M. Forster

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Where I Am Content

by Rebecca Fliegel, New City, NY

I love the sizzle of Parmesan-crust chicken hitting the frying pan. I love the ruckus of the blender whipping steamed spinach and crème fraîche into a dazzling green puree. I love the aroma of my fall-apart brisket, redolent of tomatoes and onion, that fills the house and summons me back to the oven. I love everything about the kitchen.

In the kitchen, I have complete control. And I like it that way.

When my parents announced their divorce, I found that I was not in control of a lot of things. At 15 I was forced to deal with changes without the help of my brothers, who had gone to college. It is frightening to feel alone at such a vulnerable age. I do not like change,

*In the kitchen,
I have complete
control*

big or small, and this was big.

But in the kitchen, I am in charge.

I decide how much lemon juice will give my lemon risotto with prosciutto and asparagus just the right amount of pucker. I decide how long to whisk my olive oil and balsamic vinegar until they emulsify to a tangy vinaigrette. It often takes a few tries to get my recipes the way I want them, but in the process, I have learned patience and how to have fun. Plus, I get to lick the spoon!

Food has always brought my family together. Dinnertime was important because it was the one time when we all came together. It seemed impossible for me to accept that food could not mend my broken family.

I tend to think analytically, so when my parents divorced without an obvious reason, it was hard to wrap my head around. I often puzzled about the cause of their divorce, and thinking about it took a toll on me. Despite a happy facade, I often cried myself to sleep.

Fortunately, I did both my best thinking and my best escaping in the kitchen. Uncomfortable times call for serious comfort foods, like my Brie mac 'n' cheese with figs and toasted breadcrumbs, and my beurre blanc sauce makes everything better.

Cooking is no longer just a hobby; it's my salvation.

As I've gotten older, I've started to feel pressure: to do well at school, to be popular, to be versatile, to be responsible, to avoid mistakes. In short, to be perfect. The kitchen gives me an outlet for all that stress. The pressure to be perfect is relieved, because I've learned to accept

that sometimes my culinary creations come out as planned and sometimes they don't, and that's life. There are no mistakes in the kitchen, just adjustments that need to be made. Cooking is my healthy way to process everything; I'd much rather make a mess in the kitchen than make a mess of my life.

Testing new recipes encourages me to take risks without any real fear of failure. I am not always sure what the finished dish will be, but as I determine what ingredients to add or what process to use, I enjoy my creative freedom and respite from forces that I cannot control.

Because of the kitchen, those nights of crying have become less frequent and my real smile is slowly returning. The therapeutic nature of the kitchen has helped me conquer some great difficulties in my life.

My mom always told me the best part of cooking is licking the spoon. She was right. ♦



Photo by Rosa Lopez, San Diego, CA

Junior Year

In Math this year we didn't discuss existentialist theories

in light of the Fibonacci number

Or the meaning of life according to Pythagoras; apparently, that would have been irrational.

Plus

we didn't debate heavenly sines from above or go off on philosophical tangents.

In Chemistry we didn't learn how to catalyze mutual bonds or about the products that they form.

And it was never really made clear how the chemical formula of oxytocin –

$C_{43}H_{66}N_{12}O_{12}S_2$ –

actually has any relevance when you're talking about a chemical reaction

between two hearts.

English did manage to say something about the mysteries of love

and the beauty in the struggle, but it was all about the saying.

“Clarify, define, expound, portray ...”

We never sat to ponder the indescribable or what silence looks like printed on paper or how the best writing speaks to readers the most when it stops itself short

before it finishes saying what it's trying to say.

In Spanish class the topic of study was not if citizens of *el mundo entero*, instead of a *ciudad* or *país*, really do exist today.

And we never considered that the language barrier might not be much of a barrier at all, or at least not as impenetrable as barriers *del corazon* – if, after all, *acciones* speak louder than *palabras*.

But we borrowed pencils and shared notes

and sat shoulder to shoulder pondering equations.

We discovered how valuable those are who teach and how to be teachable.

We reached for the guiding hands above us and turned back to reach for the hands below us.

We questioned everything then questioned the answers then questioned each other then questioned ourselves.

Some things are just bigger than a classroom.

by Jacqueline Zanders, Broken Arrow, OK

Lost Teeth

by Brooke Solich, Greenwood Village, CO

I was one of the last people in my second-grade class to lose my two front teeth. There was nothing I wanted more than to sport that gummy gap for a couple of weeks. Fortunately, my best friend from down the street, Julia, was also still in possession of her two front baby teeth, and I felt better when she was around. The school year was almost over, and neither of us had had any luck getting even a single tooth to feebly wiggle in its socket. All that changed when Julia reached into her mouth out of habit as we lay in the overgrown grass one day and found that one of hers was loose.

It was then and there that I felt a fiery competitive spirit swell within me, and by the time Julia went home for dinner, we had made a bet: whoever was the first to lose their front teeth would be in charge of our play dates for the rest of the summer. I was determined to win.

I lost my first one the following week as I bit forcefully into my corn on the cob at dinner. I was so excited that I even ate the rest of my blood-streaked ear of corn. As soon I had cleared my plate I ran down the street to Julia's house and jammed my thumb into the doorbell. When she opened the door we grinned at each other, both revealing a single gap. She had lost her first that

night too. We each had one tooth left and were more determined than ever.

Some days later, I was circling the driveway on my blue Razor scooter. It was almost dusk. My dad was finishing up mowing the lawn, his sweaty T-shirt hanging from the waistband of his shorts. As if in slow motion, the front wheel of my scooter wedged itself into the deep crack in

the concrete that I was always careful to avoid. My momentum launched me forward, and I landed face-first on the driveway with a sickening crunch.

My scream was loud enough to be heard over the grumbling mower, which my dad abandoned as he rushed to my aid. I lay crumpled next to my fallen scooter, my lip busted and the tears flowing.

My dad pulled me to a sitting position to assess the damage. As he examined my lip, he noticed that my gums were bleeding too. He looked around for a moment and picked a small white object off the ground: my tooth!

I smiled through my tears, finally showing off the coveted gap. My dad scooped me up and carried me inside, my blood and tears mixing with the sweat on his torso. In the end, that was what it took to win the bet – blood, sweat, and tears. ♦

*I felt a fiery
competitive
spirit swell
within me*

My Littles

by Catie LeMontangue, Clinton, CT

“Do you even like kids?” Sarah asked without raising her eyes from her phone. This question caught me off guard, especially coming from one of my best friends, whom I assumed knew me well. Truth was, I didn’t even know if I liked kids. I’d never given it much thought.

“Yeah! Of course I like kids!” I replied resolutely, despite my indecisiveness. I resolved to say anything to get her off my back, especially since it wasn’t my fault I had to babysit on movie night.

“You seriously can’t see ‘Catching Fire’ with us tonight? Whatever, I’ll Facetime you later, I guess.”

A few moments later the school bell sliced right through my eardrums. Talk about things you don’t want to hear a half hour after waking up, especially after realizing your dad’s social life is interfering with yours. I was supposed to babysit that night because my dad was going out with a woman named Krissie who had three kids. I was a little bit irritated, seeing as I didn’t have much choice in the matter, but I was getting paid, which was sort of a consolation for being forced to play with a five-, seven-, and 12-year old on a Friday night.

A few hours later my dad pulled into Krissie’s driveway with me riding shotgun. A thin stone path led up to the patio, and a folding table with a red vinyl tablecloth caught my eye as I walked in. Upon it sat six boxes of cornstarch and four rectangular aluminum pans. A little Italian woman slid open the door and stepped out with arms extended and a big smile.

She greeted me with a loud, “Hello, darling!” in a thick New York accent before wrapping her arms around me in a warm hug. “I’m Krissie. It’s so nice to meet you!”

I smiled and returned the greeting, introducing myself as well. I glanced at the doorway and spotted a brunette pre-teen dressed in a private school uniform. Krissie was quick to introduce her daughter, Olivia, who I greeted with a warm smile and a hello. She of-

fered me a small wave of acknowledgment but wore a sad expression. Olivia’s brothers, Franco (the younger) and Gianni (the elder), bounded out the door. They were the most hyper kids I’d ever met; they giggled and ran about the yard like a couple of dogs who had been locked in a cage all day.

Krissie and my dad departed before letting me know what the cornstarch was for. I was left at a loss for what to do to entertain these three.

“So do you have any idea what this stuff on the table is for?” I asked the boys when they ran in range of my voice. They came to a halt on either side of their sister, who was in an Adirondack chair on the patio.

“Ooblit!” Franco shouted with so much enthusiasm he could probably convince anyone it was the coolest thing in the world. Perplexed, I listened as Olivia explained that it was in fact called oobleck, and that their mom had left the instructions somewhere in the house. Gianni ran to retrieve them, and Franco followed, giggling.

When they returned with a two-page packet explaining the steps for making this foreign substance, I took a quick look and decided we would get started. So far the kids seemed pretty cute, even though I couldn’t figure Olivia out. I figured whatever was bothering her could be cured by a bit of oobleck ridiculousness.

A box of cornstarch combined with a cup of water made a gooey mixture that I couldn’t help but want to play with too.

“Isn’t this nasty?” I asked, trying to get some sort of reaction out of Olivia. She cracked a little grin, more to satisfy me than anything. Gianni grabbed a big handful of cornstarch and clapped his hands together, getting powder all over me. I scooped a handful from one of the boxes and chased him into the yard as he



Photo by Megan Brawner, Ledyard, CT

“Do you even like kids?”

laughed hysterically. When I was finally close enough, I got him; he ended up with a huge white spot on the back of his shirt. When I turned around, I was greeted with Franco’s grin and a flurry of white powder. By the time all six boxes were exhausted, the three of us looked like ghosts. Even Olivia was wearing a smile – a real one this time.

When my dad and Krissie got back, the four of us were curled up on the living room couch watching a movie on my laptop. Turns out I got my movie night after all. My dad and I said our good-byes and took our leave. The boys had fallen asleep, but I hugged Olivia before I left. She was my new favorite 12-year-old.

When I got home Sarah called me and went on for a good 20 minutes about all the drama that had gone down that night. After hearing about that trainwreck, I was happy I spent my evening with the littles.

I opened up my laptop to check Twitter and all my social media nonsense, and was greeted by a sticky note on my screen:

“Hi, Catie. You are so fun. From, Olivia.” ♦

I Am Camden

by Juan Morales, Camden, NJ

Everyone thinks that growing up in Camden is bad, but it really isn’t at all. Camden has an image, an image that will never change. Camden is also known as “CMD,” which means Camden’s Most Dangerous. It’s hard to get a good education in Camden and not get caught up in some BS.

I mean to get a good education. It can be difficult sometimes; you just have to maintain yourself and not fall under pressure because then there’s no turning back.

People think that living in Camden is hard, but it really isn’t; it’s just a regular ‘hood. When out-of-towners come in, they mainly come for drugs. That’s really the only time you see white people out here. I know some who are scared to even set foot in Camden because they think if they come out here, they’ll be killed. That’s what you have to deal with when you’re young and living in Camden.

These days it’s hard to get a job and be grown up in Camden. If you can’t get a job, the first thing on your mind is, *Nobody wants to hire me. I’m getting on the block.* That’s the bad mentality you get living here. All you see is drugs, money, and cars. When you see

drug dealers with all that money and nice cars, you’re like *Damn, I wish I had money like that.*

But if you fall into that life, there’s no return. Once you start going to jail, your record is ruined, then you drop out of school and your education is ruined too. Then what are you going to do? It’s like the Meek Mill song says: “The things we do/just to make it through/Nobody wanna fail/Nobody wanna die/We just tryna live our life out here.”

All in all, I’m just an average teen trying not to fall under pressure and sell drugs. I go to school and do what I have to do to graduate. When I get older and have a family, I don’t want my kids to have to worry about Dad being in and out of prison, where the next meal is coming from, or how we’re going to pay the bills.

I don’t want to worry about any of that. That’s why I’m going to do what I have to do now and defeat the negativity going on in the Camden streets. I will do what I have to do for my future. My future family will be in good hands and won’t have to worry about Dad not coming home or not having enough to eat, because I’m going to make something of myself. ♦

I’m just an average teen trying not to sell drugs

Protesters

The New York streets are flooded with protesters, the people some of my friends who strive for change in this black and white world painted like a burning photograph in my hands
I see them in packs of wolves as I look out the window of my East 57th Street apartment. black paint spells the letters P-E-A-C-E but the brown-haired man holds out a flower to a line of guns, doesn’t he know they’ve already won. fueling the flaming fire with gasoline a cloud of smoke rises from war. its ashes still burning on the sidewalk I walk upon.

by Megan Tyler, Winnipeg, MB, Canada

In Pursuit of Old Men in Wigs

by Howard Wu, Long Grove, IL

I grew up with an inherent fascination with money. Food. Clothing. Toys. All were gained with this strange green paper. How did little portraits of old men in wigs lead to my Legos? I wanted to understand this ethereal phenomenon – every last intricacy. When I was nine, I noticed an investment book called *Rich Dad Poor Dad* on my parents' bookshelf. Compelled by curiosity, I opened it, and it forever altered my view of the world.

When Robert Kiyosaki, the book's author, was nine himself, he was working in his town's general store stacking cans. One day, he saw the manager trashing the previous month's comics to make room for newer editions. Robert saw an opportunity. He asked for the old comics – still in excellent condition – and started a comic book library in his friend's basement. By charging for admission, he made money from trash.

Reading this set my mind on fire. You can make money without money! Inspired, I approached my parents and triumphantly proclaimed that I was going to start a business. Laughing gently, they asked how a nine-year-old could conjure up a business from thin air. I soon realized they were right. Nevertheless, I promised them – and myself – I would succeed.

Thus my inner entrepreneur was born. He wanted to solve the ultimate enigma: how to generate capital from nothing. My alter ego pondered this for months as I lived my ordinary third-grade life. Then, one day, he had a revelation. Candy!

My teacher had a unique learning activity. Each day, she'd write a "Smarties" question on the board. Whoever answered it right would receive a roll of Smarties candy. As my "Smarties" victories increased, so did my tummy aches, causing my appetite for sweets to fade. But because my drive to answer the questions remained, a sugary army soon conquered my locker. I needed space; I needed a business. Trembling with excitement, I realized I could solve both dilemmas at once. I'd collect candy by answering "Smarties" questions in the morning, find customers in the halls, and sell to buyers in the afternoon bus lines.

Within a few months, my first business had accrued nearly \$50. (Sometimes customers would offer more than the 50 cents I was seeking; I didn't mind.) Then my parents found the money. Businesspeople themselves, they were mortified that their son was spearheading a black market candy conglomerate. In a passionate century-long lecture (or maybe it was 20 minutes), they explained the details of an invisible rule book titled "Ethics." Apparently I'd broken about five or six chapters' worth. Oops. I refunded my customers, embarrassed; they were more disappointed that I had no more candy for them. My "company," Smarties International Corporation, went bankrupt. But my passion for business only grew.

As I matured, so did my bookshelf.

In middle school, I studied Hogwarts' history as well as Google's policy on making money "without doing evil." I watched Derrick Rose's highlights in addition to Peter Lynch's portfolio. And while Donald Trump's hairdo haunted my nightmares, his bold real estate deals inspired my soul. By sophomore year of high school, I was day trading with a legal account under my mother's name using a method from *One Up on Wall Street*. As of today, my portfolio somehow has one stock that's up 45 percent since I bought it (yay), and another that's down 40 percent (ouch). By junior year, I was furiously searching for an internship: I wanted to learn how to run a business.

Fortunately, last March, my mom helped my search over the dinner table. She was recounting a conversation with a friend. I listened politely – until she mentioned that he owned an international recycling company. A business that made money helping the environment? That was something new! "Could I intern there?" I blurted out, pasta threatening to escape my mouth.

My mom pointed out that the company was "pretty far away" (Google Maps said 73.7 miles south, to be exact). I mentioned that I'd suddenly developed an incredible love of driving. My mom then stated that it'd be a big time commitment; I'd need to get up at 6 a.m. and wouldn't get home until 5 p.m. every weekday. I claimed

that I suddenly detested sleep. She mentioned I had no previous work experience. I pointed out that I could learn. Bemused, she eventually helped me set up an interview.

So, last summer, I worked with shipping records in the recycling company's warehouse. I learned about contract creation in the office. I worked with so many financial documents that I now see why even IRS workers hate themselves. And I loved every second of it.

I do realize the fortune I have experienced in life. It isn't just friends, family, a house, or possessions. It's purpose. Lots of people drift aimlessly, with few concrete goals beyond "make money for rent." However, I am lucky. I have a passion for learning about business. And I was able to discover it while young.

Today, my great dream is to start a business that can better society. I will achieve that dream. While money is complex, learning about it has taught me one ultimate lesson: Dreams, like money, are illusions. U.S. money is a fiat currency, which means that our coins and bills aren't intrinsically valuable. Their worth is created only through the belief of those who use them – otherwise, they are simply paper. A dream is the same. Without sustained belief, it is simply an illusion. So I'll turn my dream into ambition and my ambition into goals, and one day it'll be an accomplishment at last.

Then I'll move on to the next dream! ♦

I grew up with an inherent fascination with money

I'm one of those girls who have Big City Dreams

Just One

by Zulma Martinez, Santa Rosa, CA

"Don't wear your hair like that to school. You look ridiculous. They'll make fun of you."

Mother's voice is quiet (for once) but sharp. After three years of trying I had finally managed to coax my bangs into a barrel roll just like the pin-up girls in old movies wore. I have always admired the style of those women – their perfect hair, constantly on-point makeup, and daring tattoos. I like most things vintage, from medieval gowns to '80s rock.

My mother, on her usual perch at the opposite end of the spectrum, is a modern woman, a strong, respectable adult who takes pride in being reserved and conservative. Only the latest trends in fashion will do. In my family, drawing any sort of unnecessary attention to oneself is frowned upon.

"I like it," I murmur as I curl my eyelashes. It is far easier to have a conversation (if you can truly call it that) with Mother if I keep my hands busy.

"Does anyone at your school wear their hair like that? No, because that trend has passed." She looks in the mirror, touching up her own hair with the straightener.

"I've seen people in San Francisco wear their hair like this. I like it," I say, keeping my voice calm. I knew this was coming. But I find I can never fully brace myself for the inevitable.

"Oh, how you love to make yourself look ugly. You can wear it in the city." (What she really means is "You can wear it in places nobody knows us.") "But you can't wear it at school. They'll laugh at you," Mother warns.

"I don't care. As long as I think I'm pretty, that's what really matters," I say meekly.

"There you go with your ridiculous fantasies."

She gives an exasperated sigh, but I pay no mind. I'm too busy admiring my barrel roll – or at least half of me is. The other half is still clinging to the word "city." Oh yes, I'm one of those girls, the kind who have Big City Dreams, the ones who constantly have their head in the clouds believing, hoping, fantasizing about a far more exciting life, or at the very least freedom.

As a junior in high school I can feel my opportunity arriving. One more month and all that will be left is a year – just one more year of living with my mother, one more year of scrutiny, one more year of isolation, one more year of being treated like a dog. If I can just last one more year, then I will have the chance to be free. All I need is for one measly college to say yes. If one university is willing to accept me, if one academy will take me, I will be free. The thought itself is enough to make me quiver with anticipation. I just need one. ♦



Art by Ashley Jenkins, Argyle, TX

Teddy Roosevelt's Mustache

by Jamie Hight-Miller, Lafayette, CO

I do not plan on becoming the president of the United States. I doubt I'll win the Nobel Peace Prize. I'd love to write a book or two, but I don't expect to write 18 of them. On the other hand, Theodore Roosevelt Jr. intended to study science in college but later went on to become the youngest president. He negotiated peace in the Russo-Japanese war, and earned the first American-won Nobel Peace Prize. He governed over a country while raising six children, and still found time to write his books. For all these reasons, and many more, Teddy Roosevelt is my idol.

My infatuation began in third grade. My sister bragged about sharing a birthday with Abraham Lincoln. *He's been dead for, like, a billion years*, I thought. *It's not that exciting*. I was actually extremely jealous. I wanted someone super cool to share my birthday too.

A quick online search resulted in ... Kelly Osbourne. Who? Okay, look again. Captain James Hook. You mean I share a birthday with the silly pirate from *Peter Pan*? I thought for sure I wouldn't find someone better than Abraham Lincoln. But then I saw him. Big, round glasses and a big, bushy mustache. Ha! Abe only has a big hat! His name was Theodore Roosevelt Jr., and he was my ticket to one-upping my rotten sister.

After reading a bit more, a man I only planned on being my go-to fun fact quickly turned into a genuine hero. I mean, Teddy was shot, point blank, then gave an hour-and-a-half-long speech before seeking

medical attention. If that doesn't scream cool, then I don't know what does. From that point on, my love of Teddy only grew.

Teddy and I have more than our birthday in common. On February 14th, 1884, Teddy lost his mother; a few hours later, his wife also died. One hundred and twenty-four years later, I had a similarly tragic experience.

My grandmother was sick for a long time, and one day she finally let go. My mother was a wreck. I remember sitting on the living room floor watching her pace in the kitchen. Then the phone rang. I assumed it was some relatives offering their condolences. Then I watched as my mother's trembling hand covered her mouth in shock.

I didn't understand. What could possibly cause my mother even more pain? She hung up the phone, and in a voice broken by devastation, she said the words I never expected to hear.

In an instant, all emotion left me. I felt like a computer in forced shutdown. Nothing mattered; my world ended. I didn't know how I could continue living. At 11 years old, I hadn't planned on losing my father.

Teddy became my support system. Maybe it was the mustache both Teddy and my father sported; maybe it was the compassionate heart I saw in both of them. Whatever it was, Teddy always reminded me of my dad.

I can imagine them, watching "Jeopardy" together, screaming out their answers. They'd chuckle with

each other when one of them was wrong. I find comfort knowing my father and Teddy Roosevelt would have been the best of friends. In third grade, I didn't plan on my fun fact being the way I got through so much pain.

I do not plan on becoming the president, but things don't always go as planned. ♦

Teddy always reminded me of my dad

love lessons

When I become a mother
I will not tell my daughter how bad love hurts
I will not tell her that every time you inhale
your lungs fill with helium instead of
oxygen and you transcend so far off beyond
yourself the only pieces you have left are
the ones you've recollected on your way
back home
I will not tell her that every argument will feel
like a landmine and every space apart will
feel like a fire
licking all parts of her aching bones and skin
till every muscle is tense with reaching
I will not tell her that sometimes these land
mines are better than the machine-gun first
kisses and butterfly-winged silent jitters
she will have guns in her heart because love is
lethal at its summit
and she will learn that when she picks glass
from her knees and tendons from her teeth

by Kailee Meyer, Magnolia, NJ

I Overcame

by "Heather," Moro, IL

I am a warrior. Or, rather, my heart is. It has won battles and suffered losses: learning how to operate the mower, riding a horse, my family leaving my father, being abandoned by my mother. I've armed my heart, granting it more defenses with each trial I overcome. Gauntlets, breastplate, and helm all protect me as I move forward, making me stronger each day. In my mind I am able to relive battles in seconds: dank smells, tears, screaming, fear, hope. My heart, the warrior, pumps with adrenaline, recalling them. Many battles were fought and won, but I do not settle for past glories. I look ahead toward my next challenge, meeting it with a smile.

For six years of my life, I lived in the basements of anyone willing to house my broken family. Always damp and chilly, I thought of my sister, my mother, and myself as cave-dwellers. The unknown inhabitants of the upper world almost never stooped so low as to consort with basement people. I can't blame them; poor, hungry cave people in tattered clothes are hardly good company.

It seemed we would be forced to spend the rest of our days living in musty environments that flooded with each rain. The only thing keeping us company were the forgotten possessions of the upper-worlders and a growing mold creature that resided on the wall. I believed we committed no crime to deserve this. But I was wrong.

My favorite times were when Mom and I would take a drive away from our cave. She would meet up with a woman sometimes, and they would converse. I didn't listen; I was off pretending, trying to forget the gnawing in my stomach. Cave people do not have the means for food. My

mom would hand the lady money, and she'd get a plastic bag in return with red pills inside. Cave people do not have the means for food, but they do for pills. I'd ask my mom what the pills were for. She wouldn't answer.

That's how things went for the longest time. Drive. I'm hungry. Money. My stomach hurts. Pills. What are they for? No answer. I knew what they were, but I pretended I didn't.

Our underground chambers were never permanent. We were nomads, traveling from location to location. I always hoped our new quarters would be better than the last. Usually, though, each space seemed even more decrepit than the last.

And so it went, until one day, I ceased to dwell in the cobweb-infested cellars and came to live sun-side. A woman named Marsha took me into her home as if I was her own daughter. I know I could easily have been resigned to a life of misery, but she gave me a chance, an opportunity I will never forget or squander.

My mom left. I didn't allow it to bother me; I was prepared for her absence and I adjusted accordingly. I also had to reform my worldview. I had always been a basement person, but now I was able to think like a sun-dweller. I could think of hope, of possibilities, of life, and of my future.

Victory or defeat does not matter. It's what I learn from them that matters. I know how rare chances are, and I will take advantage of each one that I get because I know their worth. I know that one chance can change my life. I know I cannot dwell over the defeat and glorify the victory, they are both important. They will prepare me for the challenges that have yet to come. When they do come, I will be happy I have the chance to face them. ♦

We were nomads



Photo by Sameen Maali, San Diego, CA

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month

“No” Should Matter

by “Kira,” Montrose, CA

“No” – a simple two-letter word that we use on a daily basis. “No,” just like “yes,” is a clearly understood term. We are all too familiar with asking our parents for extensions on our curfew or money for useless things (that we did not see as useless at the time), and their expected response of “No.” We would argue back, believing they were wrong, but that no still meant no. I always understood, growing up, that when someone said no, that is exactly what it meant. My rapist did not seem to have the same thought process. Apparently “no” actually meant “okay.”

I said no. I made it very clear that I meant it. Yet it didn’t seem to matter. I’ll never forget it. I consistently repeated, “No, no, no. I don’t want to.” Nothing seemed to work. I remember wondering why this was happening, why “no” was not enough for him to stop. It had never failed me before, so why this time? Was it because we had both been drinking? Was it because I allowed him to come on to me? Was it what I was wearing? I said no and it didn’t matter.

Rape is an enormous problem in our culture. According to RAINN, the nation’s largest anti-sexual violence organization, someone is sexually assaulted every two minutes, and each year there are about 290,000 victims in the U.S. alone. Forty-four percent of those victims are under 18. I am a part of that 44 percent. I said no. The others said no, and it didn’t matter.

I remember the next day. Oh, the next day. The

humiliation and disgust I felt toward myself was appalling. My neck was covered in hickies. *Who should I tell? Do I tell anyone? How am I going to hide these marks from my mother and my friends? Disgusting. I am disgusting.*

I didn’t eat or talk to anyone for days. I didn’t want anyone to see me – this new, repulsive version

Why wasn’t “no” enough to make him to stop?



Art by Arushi Kuchhal, Noida, India

of me. I decided to keep it to myself. It wasn’t that important anyway, right? I asked for it. I was drunk. I was leading him on. We were friends, kind of. We had class together. I couldn’t do that to him. It was my mistake to live with. Yet I said no, and it didn’t matter.

This disgusting, shameful aberration began to tear me from the inside out. I had to tell someone. I turned to someone I knew I could trust: my best friend. *What will she think? Will she think I am disgusting too?* When I finished explaining, she said, “That is rape.” I argued, saying that it was my fault. Then she asked if I had said no. I had. I said no, and it didn’t matter.

I said no. My “no” wasn’t enough. Nor was it for the other victims – 290,000 a year. Of these 290,000, 60 percent didn’t report their assault. Two-thirds of rapists are known to their victims, and 38 percent of rapists are friends or acquaintances of their victims. We said no and it didn’t matter.

Why isn’t “no” enough to make someone stop? As women, we are exploited and judged by how we look, how we dress, how we act. We are blamed. We are told that we “asked for it.” We are taught that sexy is the ideal, but when we act on what we have been fooled into believing, we are asking for it. How does that make sense? It doesn’t.

It should only take one clear response. “No,” this simple two-letter word that we use on a daily basis, is not as well understood as we think. I said no. They said no. We said *no*, and it should matter. ♦

Rape Culture

by “Adam,” Roanoke Rapids, NC

During the past four years, I have ingested endless math, language, science, and arts curricula. But through it all, never once was I taught to be a human.

Currently around 50 percent of the world’s population is living in constant danger of being raped. However, this is not an emphasized topic in our schools. Calculus, visual arts, and psychology are great, but where are our lessons in humanity? In a world where rape culture runs rampant, we need to emphasize love, empathy, and understanding, not just how to balance chemical equations.

Sitting here alone in my room, I have frightened myself. I become fearful of the thought of raising a son or daughter in our society. Rape culture hits home for me, even as a male, because I, too, am a victim.

A question floats around in my mind. Why is it okay for a man to be demanding of a partner, but distasteful for a woman to demand respect for her boundaries? It is disgusting to me to think that gender roles have evolved and manifested into a horrific phenomena that devalues women – or anyone – in that regard.

In nursery school and kindergarten, we are taught to be kind, to share, and to respect one another. But as we grow older,

these lessons stop. Maturity becomes synonymous with a chip-on-the-shoulder, assertive approach to life and a cold dedication to responsibility. Consideration for others is not emphasized. It becomes “me, me, me” and not “us.” Camaraderie, mutual understanding, and mutual appreciation are not a priority. We forget to teach love, and it produces inhumane and monstrous crimes and a culture where violating another human is acceptable. The evidence is clear, but instead of taking action, we make a mockery of it or simply ignore it.

We need to emphasize love, empathy, and understanding

I was younger than 10 when I was made to perform sexual acts on my older male and female distant cousins. As a child, I didn’t comprehend what was happening or understand the gravity of the situation. Looking back now, I feel lucky that the course of my life was not horribly altered by this. Amazingly, I don’t feel victimized. Sometimes, due to the years that have passed since, it just feels like a dream, and I wonder now if that’s how rape victims feel after being violated.

Although I know my attempt at empathy isn’t enough to fully relate, I know that I can use my own experiences to fuel my fight for the eradication of rape culture and the establishment of a global appreciation for human life outside of the individual. ♦

Mattress

the weight of her mattress is heavy.
but so is her heart, and that’s heavier than any mattress.
every time she carries it,
there is somebody to help her,
because they too know how wrong this is.
until she gets justice
her mattress will be by her side.
the shattered bits of her soul
stain the mattress in the form of tears.
and even if all the pieces are found
they can’t be glued together because
he stole a piece that day
and until justice is served
he keeps that piece, stolen treasure.
a precious jewel that nobody deserves.
except the person she loves,
and not even he gets it without her permission.

by Sophie Consorti, Wilmington, MA

Dedicated to Columbia student Emma Sulkowicz, who carries a mattress everywhere on campus with her to protest the university’s failure to punish her rapist.

Sexual Assault Resources

National Sexual Assault Hotline: 800-656-HOPE

National Child Abuse Hotline: 800-4-A-CHILD



Art by Fajr Alam, Gujranwala, Pakistan



Photo by Morgan Nichols, Denver, CO



Photo by Stephanie Shen, Lake Hiawatha, NJ



Art by Rachel Sykes, West Salem, OH



Photo by Sameen Maali, San Diego, CA



Art by J.S. Wong, Victoria, BC, Canada



Photo by Katie Groves, Citrus Heights, CA



Photo by Ethan Lai, Belmont, MA



Art by Taylor Ries, Nacogdoches, TX



Teen Ink

College Connection



Photo by Stacey Hall, Fountain Valley, CA

INSIDE: COLLEGE DIRECTORY, ESSAYS, ARTICLES AND FACTS

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS TIMETABLE

GRADE 9

- Enroll in college prep courses. Math and English are essential.
- Begin to read about admissions and think about your college financing plan.

GRADE 10

FALL:

- Contact the guidance counselor to discuss plans regarding college.
- In October you may elect to take the PSAT or PLAN (pre-ACT test) for practice.

WINTER AND SPRING TERM:

- Consider taking SAT Subject Tests for courses you are completing this year.

GRADE 11

SUMMER BEFORE:

- Begin preparation for the PSAT/NMSQT and PLAN. If you feel you could use help, seek a reliable prep course.
- Begin exploring college interests and visit local campuses to get a feel for various settings.

FALL:

- Contact your high school counselor to initiate the college selection process.
- October – Register and take the PSAT/NMSQT or PLAN.

WINTER:

- Attend college fairs to gather information and speak with college representatives.
- Visit nearby colleges to help gain a better understanding of characteristics that are important to you, for example, location and size.

SPRING:

- Register and take the SAT or ACT. Consider a prep course if you need help.
- Take SAT Subject Tests, especially for subjects in which you are taking the last course.
- Over vacation visit some colleges to begin figuring out what suits your needs.

GRADE 12

SUMMER BEFORE:

- Contact colleges to make appointments for interviews and visits. It is usually better to visit a college when students are on campus to get the real flavor of campus life. Talking with students is helpful too.
- Research online about colleges.
- Begin to narrow your list of colleges.

FALL:

- Contact your guidance counselor.
- Develop a final college application list.
- If previous SAT/ACT scores are low, retake the tests.
- Begin applications, especially the essays. Have a teacher or a counselor review your essays.
- Apply for all possible scholarships.
- Many Early Action/Decision applications are due October 15, so be sure application materials are completed early.
- Be aware that some colleges have “rolling admissions” deadlines as well.

WINTER:

- Complete applications for regular admissions. Be sure to include one or two “Likelies” and one “Reach.”
- Request transcripts, send all recommendations (from teachers and counselors) and other supporting data to colleges.
- Complete and send appropriate financial aid applications.
- Be sure to keep a record of every document. It will save time, money, and aggravation if an application is lost.
- In January/February, check with the college registrar to see if your application is complete.

SPRING:

- March/April – Colleges send admission, rejection, and waiting list letters.
- Make your choice and, if necessary, visit colleges again to be sure.
- April/May – Send an acceptance letter and deposit to your college choice and write polite letters of refusal to the others.

U.S. Statistics • 2013-14

NUMBER OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Public 4-year	690
Public 2-year	945
Private 4-year, nonprofit	1,571
Private 2-year, nonprofit	98
Private 4-year, for-profit	784
Private 2-year, for-profit	669
Total	4,757

Graduation rates at 4-year institutions:

All	60%
Men	57%
Women	62%

STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Women	57%
Full-time.....	62%
Minority	36%
Foreign	4%

81% of freshmen who graduated from high school in the previous year attended college in their home state.

Students averaged **20.9** on the ACT and **1010** on the SAT.

SOURCES: *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, U.S. Dept. of Education, The College Board

COLLEGE FACTS

NEW YORK IS MY CAMPUS • FORDHAM IS MY SCHOOL



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FORDHAM UNIVERSITY

THE JESUIT UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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The Wait Is Over. Now What?

by Rachael Morton, Oxford, OH

It's that time of year. The long wait for college decision letters has almost wound to a close, and high school seniors everywhere are piecing together their setting for the next four years. Some are joyful, with the certainty that their fantasy school will be their reality next fall. Some are filled with despair, watching the elation of others and wondering why it can't be theirs too. And many others are like me, split between acceptances, rejections, and waitlists, hoping to find in the piles of officially

stamped envelopes and e-mails some sign of what to do next.

When I started applying to colleges last fall, I researched each institution, read student reviews, and visualized what it would be like going there. I imagined myself as an odd collection of completely different people, with various personalities, career paths, and hobbies. At this small East Coast college, I might become a daring inventor. At this rigorous Midwestern university, I might be glued to my textbooks, planning a quiet life of research and teaching. At this West Coast tech school, I might become a savvy entrepreneur and start my own company. But in truth, these are fantasies about strangers who aren't really me.

I'm still grappling with how profoundly this one decision, this one tiny checkmark on a letter of intent, will impact my future. But will it, really? Going to a particular school is definitely formative, but enrolling somewhere doesn't overwrite the definition of who you are. The most prestigious university in the world can't guarantee me a life of easy success, and the most modest community college won't hold me back from achieving my goals. In this digital, technology-driven age, opportunities are everywhere in education, knowl-

edge, and creation. No matter where I end up next fall, as long as I am driven, open to opportunities, and supported by wonderful friends and family, the world is wide open.

To all you seniors who made it into your dream schools, congratulations! I wish you the best of luck and hope that college will be everything you wanted. And to those of you who are struggling with rejection or indecision, this isn't the end. This is just the beginning of the next chapter. This was a tough year, with many colleges having a record number of applicants. But when it's over, and it's time to take a deep breath and piece together your future, your choice will not define who you are or what you can do, unless you let it.

Seniors, it's time to take a breather. We're finally finishing! Now we'll have free time (what an alien concept) to investigate new hobbies – woodworking, animal taming, reggae music, or whatever catches your eye. (Personally, now that the nerve-racking wait is just about over, I plan to devote myself to learning how to juggle and looking at cute pictures of rabbits on the Internet.) And wherever you end up next fall – be it a university, a gap year, a job, or someplace else – good luck finding your niche and figuring out who you want to be. ♦

Enrolling at a certain school doesn't overwrite who you are



Photo by Rachel Kravitz, Benicia, CA

Sisyphus

by Jimmy Kasic, Boulder, CO

They started us out small. Looking back, it seems like a waste of time. I think it was only to get us to think we liked it. And we did. It wasn't until later that we started lugging rocks to the tops of hills. They tricked us. Years of promises made us feel like we were on our way to moving mountains. They didn't let us see it when they trucked the rocks back down so we had more to carry.

By now we have recognized what they are doing. The boulders we move roll back down before our eyes, and we go along with it. We all have different plans to play their game the best; there is more to it than getting the biggest boulder the farthest up the steepest hill before it comes down. Some say it doesn't matter how big of a boulder you move; all they look for is how far you go. Others say that just working on the steepest hill will get their attention.

They still tell us that if we spend our time moving rocks, some day we will be able to move mountains, and maybe they are right. But the mountains will roll back down too. I guess that's good; if they stayed put, we would have nothing left to do. Moving mountains is all we know how to do, all we have ever learned. We will never climb the mountains. We don't know we can. ♦

Author's note: "I don't normally like writing to be explained, but I think it's important to mention that I wrote this while students at my school were protesting a new statewide standardized test."

Teach, Don't Test

by Kyleigh Leddy, Bryn Mawr, PA

As the car flies by mile marker 216.7, I watch the white numbers blur into the green sign until they eventually disappear altogether, taking my future with them. For me, 216.7 is not a distance on a highway. I do not see the decimal point that separates the number. I do not imagine the miles that stretch before me. At first glance, all I see is my SAT score: 2167, the number that will determine whether I get accepted or denied by my top colleges.

This one number encompasses my academic potential in the eyes of society. It is an inescapable part of my identity. I am considered "smart" because it is above 2100. I am considered "not smart enough" because it is below 2200. Schools will either consider or disregard me because of this score. It defines me.

Hours of staring at SAT books and acceptance rates statistics, hours of listening to friends discuss their scores, hours of crying over my own score have all led to a societal brain-wash. Now, whenever I come across a four-digit number that begins with a 2, all I see is an SAT score. The context doesn't matter. The sentence could read "The year is 2012" and I will still process the number as a score first and a date second.

Our generation is defined by numbers: SAT scores, class rankings, GPAs, college rankings. Years from now, when I have forgotten the names of some of my peers, I am certain that these numbers will still be etched into my memory as distinctly as my birth date.

Before high school, I liked learning. I complained about waking up early, and I became frustrated when I didn't understand a concept, but I didn't dread school the way I do now. While I still find moments in class when I am interested and engaged, and while I am fortunate enough to have great teachers, finding the motivation to go to school every morning is a challenge.

I didn't dread school the way I do now

There is no time in my classes to discuss or question. There are only facts, due dates, and tests. Peers don't feel comfortable working together because they see each other as competition. Teachers design their courses to match a test.

We cram, we stress, we cry, and eventually we forget. Since classes, especially Advanced Placement classes, are so specialized, students often forget most of what they were taught the previous year.

Introducing students to these advanced concepts, then never mentioning the subject again, does not help us learn. Providing study aids and administering tests does not qualify as teaching.

Focusing on numbers does not encourage us to develop as individuals. Of course tests are necessary in order to measure students' ability and effort, but they shouldn't compose the entire educational system. As is evident from increasing rates of cheating and mental health issues, when education becomes more about testing and less about teaching, the effects are grave. ♦

Factors That Seniors Said Substantially Influenced Their Choice of Major

Academic interest or passion for topic.....	89%
Fit for my talents and strengths.....	89%
Career mobility or advancement.....	59%
Ability to find a job.....	55%
Potential salary or earnings.....	52%
Preparation for graduate or professional school.....	48%
Reputation of the major at the institution.....	44%
Having influence over people or managing others.....	41%
Encouragement from a faculty member or advisor.....	33%
Parental or family influence.....	29%

SOURCE: National Survey of Student Engagement, Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research

Moving to the Desert

by Allison Bramanti, Bloomington, MN

I originate from the land of 10,000 lakes, and I'll admit I had a spoiled childhood: after a long bike ride or a salty snack, I would drink a glass of water directly from the faucet. When I announced to my friends that I would be moving to Arizona for college, they told me to watch out for scorpions, tarantulas, and any unusually large, scary bugs. They didn't tell me to watch out for the tap water.

Arizona's climate in the summer is dry and hot. You don't have to wonder whether you can fry an egg on the sidewalk: the answer is obviously yes. There is no humidity, so the above-110-degree temperatures are (semi-)tolerable. The terrain is sparsely inhabited, rocky desert straight out of an old Western movie, right down to the occasional cactus or dead-looking tree. Anything green must be a palm tree imported from California or turf pretending to be grass. "Just wait until winter – the weather is perfect then!" the locals say.

My dad agreed to help me settle into my dorm at Arizona State University in the middle of heat-stroke weather (a.k.a. July through September). By the time I had buckled my seat belt in our rental car, instead of eyeing my new home with wonder and anticipation, I was asking myself if I had made a terrible mistake. Beads of sweat sprinkled my brow and crept down the backs of my legs. The interior of the car scalded my skin, while my dad desperately tried to drive without getting third-degree burns from the scalding hot steering wheel. We were

silent, avoiding any mention of the possibility of a fatal flaw in my college decision-making.

I grew up believing that water was water. I assumed that when I turned on the sink of any public establishment, I would get water. If I was thirsty, I would drink straight from the tap. But while the water coming out of the sinks in Arizona looks exactly like the water I knew and loved, I assure you, it tastes nothing like it.

Imagine stepping out of your car after hours of driving, soaked in sweat. You carry your life in boxes and bags nearly a mile from your car to your new dorm room. Your muscles shake from exhaustion, your head pounds with food and water deprivation, and your sweat has dried into a hot mess. You turn on the faucet in your new home and a sour, rotten smell confronts your nostrils. In desperation, you lean down to scoop some of it into your mouth.

Instead of cool refreshment, you get a mouthful of homesickness and tears. A metallic aftertaste coats your tongue, leaving a deeper thirst in place of your dehydration. You spit what you can back into the sink, looking around for something to wash away the taste of disappointment.

When I registered for college, I unknowingly signed myself up to live without access to water. I wish that this had been noted in the acceptance letter. Perhaps I wouldn't have so readily said goodbye to the beautiful Minnesotan weather, five-star water consumption, and my health.

My dad left me with a case of water bottles and

hopped on the next flight back to true civilization. Meanwhile, I measured out my life in the 24-pack of H₂O and imagined my untimely death from dehydration. Luckily, I escaped being left for dead, because my roommates began arriving from their own waterlands. I welcomed them to the drought. Over the next few days, we watched our pre-packaged water supply dry up, and eventually we had to face the problem. "We need to buy monthly water service," I declared.

"That's exactly what we were thinking!" my roommates responded. Three hundred dollars later, we were promised 15 gallons of water a month. Problem solved.

Yet here I sit, a quarter of the way through October, staring longingly at the empty gallons from September's delivery. An early morning heat wave, and the water's not there. A mid-afternoon meal – still feeling parched. Wiping away my last dried-out tears – a new kind of paradise! It's not like water is vital to human life or anything. (Fifteen phone calls later, our water arrives, just in time for Halloween.)

All dorm rooms at Arizona State University should come equipped with drinkable water. Students shouldn't have to use a meal swipe in order to get vital hydration, or pay hundreds for an unreliable water service. More than two-thirds of the human body is water, and doctors' rule of thumb is to drink eight glasses a day. College students shouldn't be viewing water as a treat for special occasions – it's a necessity!

So as I reflect on my first year in college, I can't help but feel choked up. Not because I'm going to cry, though – my throat is just dry. ♦

You carry your life in boxes and bags to your new dorm room

When I Grow Up ...

by Emily Sun, San Diego, CA

When I was four years old, I helped my mother bake chocolate chip cookies for the first time. After that, I was convinced I'd grow up to become a baker. I held fast to that dream until I was six, furiously beating eggs and scooping flour into measuring cups. But after I was selected to perform at my ballet school's recital with the principal dancers, I decided instead to become a ballerina. I practiced grand jetés in the living room and clenched my teeth as I struggled into a split on the kitchen tiles.

My plans changed again when I was 10, after an astronomy book inspired me to become an astronaut. My dream of orbiting masses of swirling gas shifted to a job in genetics – or perhaps neurology – after a summer of poring over my parents' medical journals. When I was 15, I firmly set my foot down under the instruction of an inspiring English teacher. I was sure I'd become a professor of English literature – for a few months, at least – until I joined my school newspaper *The Falconer*, absolutely certain this time to become a journalist. I'm 17 now, and no closer to choosing a career.

I still love to bake. I still love to dance (though usually alone in my room). I still pause by the window and gaze at the

gleaming pinpricks in the night sky, wondering what marvels lie enveloped in that velvet vastness. I conduct DNA research at a lab and pester my parents to keep up with their research. I guiltily indulge in reading by flashlight under the covers until my arm aches and eyelids droop, and I'm as involved as ever as a proud "Falconerd."

I think my indecisiveness stems from the fact that I still have so much to explore. After all, I have over a year before graduation, and in that year I'll examine every corner, devour every experience, until I'm mature and knowledgeable enough to formulate my ambitions. Friends of mine already have their dream medical schools picked out or are taking courses in preparation to become software engineers, but I want to be absolutely certain of the road I'll take. I want to experience everything.

And I can be sure none of it'll go to waste. Upon entering high school, I tried my hand at every extracurricular I could. I joined *The Falconer*, edited for the school science journal, and competed in volleyball, academic team, quiz bowl, and two types of debate. By the beginning of junior

year, when more focus was imperative, I was forced to narrow my scope. Still, debate cultivated my confidence in public speaking, trained me to improvise and think faster on my feet, and helped me become a more articulate person. This all boosted my ability as a student journalist to write concise articles and interview complete strangers. I miss the sting in my fingers after serving an ace, the exhilaration after landing from a kill,

and the squeaking of sneakers on the volleyball court, but the sport taught me how to better interact with fellow writers and academic team members. The exhaustion of long hours in the gym was a taste of the dedication required for late-night layouts in the lab.

John Steinbeck spent five years at college, taking only the courses that interested him before dropping out. I'm comforted by knowing that his success was defined not by a college degree but by his ability to integrate into his writing the cumulative knowledge he gained from not only school but also the odd jobs he took as an itinerant worker or the Sea of Cortez voyage he took with Ed Ricketts. Although seemingly connected by no pattern, these

experiences molded Steinbeck's work and outlook on life.

I suppose I do know my true goal, encompassing all those previous and all those following it: I want to learn. Perhaps it's fitting that I'm an avid journalist and quiz bowl player; I want to inhale and greedily gulp every experience, every factoid I encounter. In what form my goal will ultimately manifest is still hazy. But soon, I hope, I will have the proper tools to decide.

Even then, I'll continue to examine and savor every facet of life. I'm reminded of a remark Kurt Vonnegut Jr. once made about his wife's insistence that he buy an envelope online.

"I pretend not to hear her," he said, "and go out to get an envelope because I'm going to have a hell of a good time in the process of buying one envelope. I meet a lot of people ... and a fire engine goes by. And I give them the thumbs up. And ask a woman what kind of dog that is. And I don't know ... We're dancing animals ... we love to move around. And we're not supposed to dance at all anymore."

Mr. Vonnegut, I'll show your wife a plié or two. ♦

I want to be absolutely certain of the road I'll take

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Information security analysts	37%	\$86,170
Industrial-organizational psychologists	53%	\$83,580
Health specialties teachers, postsecondary	36%	\$81,140
Physical therapists	36%	\$79,860
Diagnostic medical sonographers	46%	\$65,860
Genetic counselors	41%	\$56,800
Occupational therapy assistants	43%	\$53,240
Physical therapy assistants	41%	\$52,160
Interpreters and translators	46%	\$45,430
Insulation workers, mechanical	47%	\$39,170
Segmental pavers	38%	\$33,720
Medical secretaries	36%	\$31,350
Skincare specialists	40%	\$28,640
Helpers – brickmasons, blockmasons, stonemasons, and tile and marble setters	43%	\$28,220
Helpers – electricians	37%	\$27,670
Occupational therapy aides	36%	\$26,850
Physical therapy aides	40%	\$23,880
Home health aides	48%	\$20,820
Personal care aides	49%	\$19,910

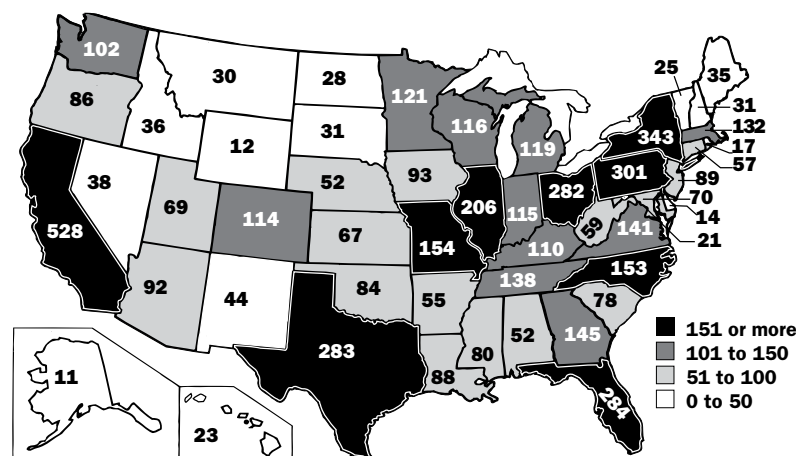
SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012

Colleges' Top Selection Criteria

	Public 4-year	Private 4-year
Some admissions requirements	82%	87%
High school record	79%	79%
Test scores	74%	65%
Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)	71%	70%
High school grades	68%	69%
College preparatory program	45%	25%
High school class rank	25%	18%
Recommendations	8%	53%
Formal demonstration of competencies	5%	9%
Open admissions	24%	13%

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Number of Colleges and Universities



SOURCE: U.S. Education Department, 2013

COLLEGE FACTS

Our House

by Alya Davis, Hudson, NY

Every day, when I clamber off the school bus and walk the five minutes to my newly painted yellow house, I have approximately one hour of quiet to begin my homework. An hour later, while I am wrestling with a math equation, I hear the familiar sound of voices and country music rising from downstairs. Each song plays for just a few seconds before it is skipped. As I enter our kitchen I hear Ben attempting to open the front door, pushing extra hard due to a stray shoe wedged in the gap between door and floor.

"Ezra, come put your shoe away," I call in the direction of the room where fiddle music is blaring unashamedly. Once the shoe has been taken care of, Ben proudly tells me how much milk each cow produced today: "Stella 15 pounds, Talia 10, and Artemis just five." He milks them himself by hand on our small farm.

He runs off, remembering something. I start setting the table when, in a flash, Ben returns, clutching a letter addressed to me. "Alya, you have mail. Who's it from? Do you think they will send me a postcard too?"

My four siblings, my parents, and I share our home with seven others. Sometimes it is hard to distinguish between them and my family.

I was born in Germany. When I was

two my parents moved to England to join a community of people who live and work with young adults with disabilities. Three years ago we moved to a similar place called Triform Camphill Community near Hudson, New York.

Ben and Ezra are in their early twenties and have learning disabilities. Slowly, the house begins to fill. Alex, Peter, and Laurie join us, and when our two volunteers from Chile and Germany come, it gets quite rowdy.

I grew up alongside people perceived as different, but to me they are totally normal. No one can make me laugh as hard as Ezra, no one can describe

as eloquently and precisely what is bothering him as Alex, no one gives me comforting advice like Laurie, and no one can rock a costume at Halloween like Peter. On average I am asked more than a hundred questions every day by my extended family, many of which I do not know the answers to. I am peppered from morning to night, but mostly I enjoy the time with my extended siblings.

Before every college visit Ezra asks me, "Alya, do you think I should come along college visiting with you? I know the dean, and I swear he'll accept you!" The questions can get repetitive, the constant noise and activity exhausting, but there is no place I'd rather be.

I grew up alongside people perceived as different

I actively fight against discrimination

Every year Triform's bell choir drives down to New York City to perform at a fundraising event. This past year I went to help. The ride was just like driving in my school bus, with the same arguments and occasional yelps. We arrived and set up, nervous but patiently waiting in concert dress, the bell ringers wearing white gloves. Soon it was our turn and all became quiet in the hall. The curtain rose. Bells ringing and singing voices filled the room. I looked at the faces in the audience and almost everyone was dabbing at their eyes or smiling from ear to ear.

Alya is planning to attend either SUNY Purchase or Wesleyan University next year. She'll pursue studies in journalism.

We were all overcoming our limitations, creating something beautiful together in that moment. I felt so lucky. The feeling that I saw on the audience's faces – I get to experience that feeling in our house every day. ♦

COLLEGE FACTS

A Profile of Freshmen at 4-Year Colleges

Probable field of study/major	Highest degree planned
Business15%	Master's degree42%
Biological science15%	Bachelor's degree.....21%
Health professions.....13%	PhD or EdD.....20%
Arts and humanities11%	MD, DO, DDS (dental), DVM (veterinary).....11%
Social science.....11%	JD (law).....4%
Engineering10%	Other1%
Education5%	None0.5%
Math and computer science4%	Associate0.4%
Physical science2%	BD or M.Div. (divinity)0.2%
Other5%	Vocational certificate.....0.1%
Undecided10%	

SOURCE: UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, 2013

Profile of a Terrorist

by Amy Maniola, Hoffman Estates, IL

I stared blankly at my teacher, wondering if I had heard her right. As she repeated the homework assignment, I realized I had. My gaze shifted from my teacher to my classmates to see if any of them had the same reaction I did, but everyone else seemed perfectly fine with the assignment. We had been told to describe what a terrorist looks like, and to bring in a picture of someone we thought fit the physical description of a terrorist.

The idea of stereotyping a group of people for homework left me feeling uncomfortable and conflicted, to say the least. On one hand, I respected the teacher and knew she had good intentions with the assignment; but, on the other hand, I disagreed with the way she presented the project. I actively fight against discrimination through many of my extracurricular activities, so completing this assignment would be inconsistent with who I am as an individual. Yet not completing it would be inconsistent with who I am as a student, so

I knew I had to find the middle ground.

At the time, I was a quiet student and did not actively participate in class because I felt insecure about my lip. I avoided public speaking, so the idea of having an atypical point of view was quite daunting. After careful consideration, I decided to use an ambiguous outline of a person with a question mark where the face would be. While I did not do what my teacher had asked, I still completed the assignment.

As we rearranged our desks to form a circle for discussion, I second-guessed myself. Everyone else had a picture of Osama bin Laden or someone with a similar physical description. When my teacher asked about my picture, I nervously told her that I thought a terrorist could be anyone, so it was impossible to come up with a profile. I breathed a sigh of relief when she smiled in approval.

While this experience may seem trivial, it has had a permanent effect on my attitude toward class discussions. Instead of delib-

Amy now attends the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she is studying sociology.

erately avoiding eye contact with teachers during class and being hesitant to share my views if I disagree with the majority, I am now more comfortable expressing my opinions. The positive response I received after taking a unique perspective gave me the confidence I needed to come out of my shell and take risks, which led to me becoming more engaged and involved in discussions.

Obviously a homework assignment worth ten points is not a life-threatening risk to take, but I am proud that I pushed myself beyond my comfort zone. This experience helped me realize that taking risks is a necessity for success, which will make me more inclined to speak out and stand my ground when faced with ethical dilemmas. ♦



Art by Kian McKeown, New York, NY

A Need to Create

by Casey Wang, McDonough, GA

I was horrified when my teacher placed a bust on the table. It had elaborate hair on its head and intricate wrinkles on its aged face. I picked up the pencil reluctantly. I had not sketched in a long time, and my last attempt had been a simple vase. At first, this task seemed impossible, but after wracking my brain to remember the concepts of sketching – the border between light and darkness, the highlights, the direction of light, etc. – I finally concocted a plan. I reviewed what I had learned and rediscovered how to exaggerate space between objects and parts of an object. As it forced me to sketch with a more perceptive eye, this assignment not only drastically improved me as an

artist but also reminded me of how I discovered my love for art. When I was a little girl, I spent most of my time in a small room in the back of my mother's alterations shop. Enclosed by four dull walls decorated with nothing but a print of "Young Mother Sewing" by Mary Cassatt (which remains one of my favorite paintings), I entertained myself by climbing on racks of clothing and imagining myself as an adventurer. When I grew tired of these antics, I would sit under Cassatt's painting and draw and color for hours. When I ran out of crayons, I would snag my mother's lipstick or her fabric marking chalk. When I ran out of paper, I would run to the nearby supermarket and collect a stack of the coloring books it offered for free. I've filled in the pages of at least 50 copies of those books.

Sometimes I would dig through my mother's box of fabric scraps (which I viewed as a treasure chest) and make clothes for my dolls. I would choose from myriad fabrics of different materials and colors. Then I would match different threads with ribbons which I proudly arranged in color spectrum order. I drew up designs for doll clothes and learned to sew in the process.

When I turned seven, my mom let me take free art lessons at my church. After a few months, the instructor suggested that I take private lessons to

advance my skills. My mother brought me to an art studio where I met my first real art teacher. Walking down the hall of paintings, I looked at his works with awe and immense admiration. From that day, the art studio became my second home. My instructor taught me how to sketch still life objects and use colored pencils for cartooning. After I'd developed fundamental skills, he taught me to use watercolor paints. My love for art grew stronger every day, but when I turned 11, after adding the last few touches to my first oil painting, I ended my carefree days at the art studio. My parents could no longer afford the classes, and I was forced to turn my attention to my studies.

Nevertheless, I borrowed every book relating to art in the school library and drew as much as I could. I painted pictures of the farm where we lived and created works inspired by my cultural background as an Asian and American. My love for art was never quite extinguished, even though I had less time for my work when I entered middle school.

In high school, I joined clubs and tried many activities, but nothing could satisfy my thirst for something I truly loved. I remember when an interviewer, to my horror, asked me to tell her about myself. Although this was a simple question, I did not know how to answer. I could have told her about my hobbies, what I wanted to do,

The art studio became my second home

Casey's dream is to study business, film, and journalism in New York or England.

what subjects I liked in school, but the plain, simple truth was that I did not know the answers to these questions. What did I like to do? What were my dreams? What *did* I love?

Then, one day, when I was looking for old shoeboxes in the attic, I stumbled upon Cassatt's "Young Mother Sewing." Next to it was a framed image of a richly colored crayon rooster. In the corner of the work was a Sharpie kiss of its creator in sloppy, childish writing – my name.

Distracted from my original search, I dug through the old boxes from my childhood. As I looked through the designs, drawings, brushes, and palettes, a wave of nostalgia washed over me. At that moment, I exhumed my past love for art. At that moment, I realized what I wanted. At that moment, I knew exactly how to answer that formidable interview question. I called my former art teacher, and by the end of the week, I had picked up the paintbrush again and started a new chapter of my life. Ever since, I have spent hours every weekend in the art studio doing what I love.

Art is far more than a hobby for me. It is a passionate need to create and illustrate, and it satisfies me like nothing else. ♦



"Heroic Visage" by Casey Wang

Monster of a Headache

by Fiona Chace-Donahue, Freeport, ME

I have a loud-mouthed green monster inside my head. He has been my ever-present companion for five years, and I have, as is human nature, grown accustomed to him. We fight nearly every day; he is greedy for my energy and clear thinking, and he uses every drop of power he has to drain them out of me. But he, my monster of a headache – the searing, arrow-sharp, deafening pain-bringer – is not all that I am. Not anymore.

His creation was not unlike that of the universe: he came into being with a bang, a concussion. He was just a baby then, but as time passed and I had seven more concussions, he became full-grown.

In his prime, he had the power to dictate my every move – or lack thereof. He had my academics and social life firmly in his grip, and he slowly tore them to pieces; I struggled to grasp the pieces of my life and put them back together. My headache was my captor, my abuser, and worst of all, part of me.

I spent too many days in darkness, in bed, watching the blending forms, geometric patterns, and bold flashes of color that were my monster's boot prints behind my eyelids. The headaches crippled me physically and emotionally. I had no sense of balance, or even muscle memory to walk; my thoughts were catastrophic and my feelings hopeless. I almost let my life slip away to

an eternity in bed.

However, one day I remembered that I have dreams, dreams that consist of more than darkness and a duvet. Thoughts of flower shops and freshly baked bread were oxygen for a small flame inside me, and they ignited a fire that cannot be extinguished by any amount of pounding, squeezing, or crushing. I will never forget the feeling in my stomach – of nervousness, strength, and extreme pride – when I decided to conquer my monster. I knew that for my life to have direction or purpose, I had to stand up, literally, and take back what my monster had so viciously usurped.

The idea of a battle for power was daunting, and I felt wildly unsure that I would come out on top. I started the fight regardless, slowly and deliberately. Doctors and countless appointments helped me to forge weapons to use in my battle against my monster. Each day I practiced focusing on my breathing and relaxing my muscles, and with the slow, measured beating of my heart and a full sense of peace in myself, I pushed my monster to the edges of my skull. I found the will to fight day after day,

It had the power to dictate my every move

brandishing my headache-shrinking mind power and breathing techniques. The fire in me burned brighter each day, and I found that having faith in myself was one of my most powerful weapons.

I don't regret that a monster moved into my head. I have learned priceless lessons from my struggle, lessons that have shaped me and will guide me for the rest of my life. I learned to have nearly infinite patience for myself and others, and that problems can't be solved by being ignored. Most importantly, I learned through battling a headache every day that I am the only one who can take charge of my life. I am responsible for creating my own success. Though the monster is still a tenant in my head, he doesn't define or rule me anymore. ♦

COLLEGE FACTS

Average Annual College Costs

4-year private colleges, on-campus	4-year public colleges, on-campus	2-year public colleges, commuter
\$43,289	Out-of-state: \$35,312 In-state: \$22,261	\$15,584

SOURCE: The College Board, 2012-13

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My Literary Paradise

by Danielle Green,
Westbury, NY

Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you? (Common Application topic)

Within a ten-minute walk from my home is a sanctuary – a place of solitude, abundance, bliss, wonder, and repose. It is brown-and-white brick and “read” all over. Housing thousands of books, that spot is my local library, my literary safe haven.

Almost since the day I was born, I have cherished the written word. I found joy in my mother reading aloud to me – everything from *Heidi* to *Junie B. Jones*. With the turn of a page, I have voyaged *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, stayed *In Touch* with the latest celebrity gossip, and savored the haute cuisine of *Eataly*.

At the library I swim in a sea full of literature from 5,000 B.C. to the 25th century. The library isn’t only a figurative escape from my everyday life; the books it contains are timeless, powerful tools of change. They have been my outlets for adventure. They have been instruments of transformation for my personal beliefs. Thanks to its sheer diversity, the library has allowed me to discover worlds unstudied and unknown, and exposed me to the harshest realities that

I now seek to change.

I’ll never forget the day I stumbled into the section on food and drink. I scanned the shelves, picking *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, *Fast Food Nation*, and *Eat This, Not That*. Little did I realize that this seemingly random selection would impact the way I eat, shop, think, and reflect.

I quickly unearthed a horrifying reality. I traced the journey of a fast food meal from farm to plate.

I uncovered the plight of agricultural laborers, the inhumane treatment of livestock, and so much more. I discovered the hidden underbelly of the American food industry, a reality that I wished to change. I began to shop and eat with a conscience, implementing the knowledge I’d gained on trips to

the farmers’ market and grocery store.

Not only have books changed the way I eat, they’ve also aided in my connection with relatives and friends. Nicola Kraus’s *The Nanny Diaries* is one hilarious favorite. My cousin saw me reading it and ended up devouring the book herself. And then there’s *Bringing Up Bébé* by Pamela Druckerman, a novel about French parenting. I shared it with my beloved French *professeur* Madame Zulich, and we often bring up the title to enliven our class discussions about French culture. I bond with others over

**At the library,
I’ve journeyed
to all the nations**

What Are You?

by Denise DeFelice, Flourtown, PA

“**W**hat are you?” I’m bombarded with this somewhat intrusive question wherever I go. In response I love to toy with askers’ minds. Typically I say I’m black and white, but if I’m feeling adventurous, I’ll say, “I’m half Dominican” or “I’m from the Philippines.” I rarely say, “I don’t know.” I hate to admit that I have no idea what I am. But every once in a while, I share the story of my origin with wide-eyed inquisitors.

The plan was for me to be half my

mother and half my father. No one planned for the event that created me. No one thought that a virtually-unheard-of mix-up in an artificial insemination procedure would cause a white couple to conceive triplets who clearly were not white.

When I say this, I’m immediately and inconveniently bombarded with a litany of questions:

“How did your parents not know?” “Who’s your real dad then?” “What does that make you?”

When my sisters and I were born, we

looked like every other new baby: red and wrinkly. Our tired mother and terrified father were too relieved that their precious baby girls had arrived safely to wonder whether we were biologically theirs. As we grew and our gurgles turned into half-formed words, our father’s Italian heritage became a more and more dubious explanation for our explosion of curly hair and increasingly dark skin. A few years after our birth, my parents received a call from the hospital and were faced with a shocking reality: their three girls were biologically half from a stranger.

When I look in the mirror, my mother’s bright blue eyes stare back at me, but no trace of my father is there – no features of that surly yet clever man with unruly hair reminiscent of an Italian Einstein. Instead I see brown skin, kinky hair, and African features – characteristics from my biological father. But who is my real father?

My dad is. He is the one who raised me. My dad taught me how to ride a bike, assembled bookshelves when I filled up my first few, and let me vent to him when life was tough. Though we are not genetically related, my dad will always be more of a parent to me than my mysterious biological father.

Who am I? Do I call myself Italian? I was raised in a rambunctious family in which everyone speaks at once. When

Danielle’s top choices for college are Columbia, the University of Pennsylvania, and Brown. She would like to double major in French and creative writing.

books, and the many works I’ve discovered at my literary paradise have served as sources of friendship, inquiry, laughter, and joy.

Above all, my favorite part of my literary hideaway is the travel section. So far, at the library, I have journeyed to almost all 200 nations on the planet. Through my beloved travel guides, from *Lonely Planet* to *Berlitz*, I’ve voyaged from Greenland to Antarctica, India, the Cook Islands, and beyond. I have discovered my favorite New York City restaurants thanks to a dogeared copy of *Zagat*. And issues of *Time Out New York* have driven me to visit the city’s dazzling array of art galleries and museums. I love to globe-trot and explore, and the library, with its infinite range of books and periodicals, piques my constant curiosity and rouses my desire to sightsee and travel.

The books in my literary hideout are outlets for my adventurous soul. No matter what the season or where I go, the written word is my mainstay, my second home. ♦

Denise will attend the University of Pennsylvania. She plans to major in the Biological Basis of Behavior program and minor in Spanish.

the front door flies open, my dad’s yell of “*Chiudere la porta!*” (“Close the door!”) immediately follows. “*Andiamo!*” (“Let’s go!”) rushes us out the door and into the minivan when we’re running late.

Or do I call myself something else that better fits the way I look and act? I blend in with black and Latina cultures more seamlessly than I do with my own family. When I’m nestled in those circles, no one looks at me sideways for being different.

I may never know where I come from. But because I cannot define myself racially, I bridge the gap between races. I realize that I am more than the color of my skin, where I come from, and the story that explains why I am half a mystery.

I am a friend and an avid reader. I hate the color pink and love the word “plethora.” I am crazy about soccer and find peace on long runs at the crack of dawn. These things are what make me Denise – more than my ethnicity ever will. ♦

**I hate to admit
that I have no
idea what I am**

COLLEGE FACTS

Time Seniors Spent on Course Work

Field of study	Preparing for class (hours/week)	Preparation time spent reading (hours/week)	Assigned writing (pages/school year)	Agreement that courses are highly challenging
Arts and humanities	16	8	80	60%
Biological sciences, agriculture, natural resources	16	7	66	60%
Business	14	7	81	60%
Communications, media, and public relations	12	6	81	53%
Education	15	6	80	65%
Engineering	19	5	86	61%
Health professions	16	7	75	70%
Physical sciences, math, computer science	17	6	58	57%
Social sciences	14	8	92	58%
Social-service professions	13	7	92	64%

SOURCE: National Survey of Student Engagement, 2013

Breaking the Glass Box

by Megan DeJarnett, San Jose, CA

“Why, hello there, Megan!” the music advisor greeted me, stealing a quick glance at the folder in her hand. “I hope you’re enjoying your time here. Let’s get down to business, shall we?” I nodded and smiled, hoping to get this over with. The college selection process had been tedious enough; now I just wanted to be done with the countless interviews.

We sat, and the smiling lady opened her folder. “Let’s see ... music composition major ... my, we’re breaking *all* the stereotypes, aren’t we?”

I looked at her blankly. “Excuse me?” I’m not sure what I felt more strongly at the time – annoyance at her use of the royal “we” or utter confusion about what stereotypes she thought I was defying.

“You’re a trumpet player and a composer,” she said matter-of-factly. “Girls don’t usually do those things. It’s strange.”

How can you say that like it’s okay? I wanted to scream. *Like it’s not a problem that many girls are pressured away from activities like these?*

It had been a while since I’d thought about the fact that I was a young woman in a man’s world. Sure, trumpet players are more often male, and most people would be hard-pressed to name one female composer (Clara Schumann, anyone?), but I hadn’t encountered such blatant bias until now. Not only was I singled out for being a girl in my field, but the college music advisor made me feel like I didn’t – shouldn’t – belong in it at all. The reality hit me like a falling piano. I’d grown up being told I could do anything I wanted, but once I started following my dreams, people saw my choices as strange.

During childhood, my interests varied drastically on almost a daily basis. I’m sure I went through the princess phase like most girls, but I also went through a knight-in-shining-armor phase and a detective/forensic scientist phase. My parents encouraged me to do whatever I liked. Girls don’t always want to do “girly” things, and they accepted that.

Eventually, composition became important to me, and I dove into the world of music wanting to learn. It didn’t take long to realize that there were far more men than women in the field. As a girl of 12 who

wanted a career in music, I saw that if I wanted to become everything I’d dreamed about, I might have to do it without the one-on-one guidance of a female composer.

I had gotten my first glimpse of what’s usually called the “glass ceiling,” which I didn’t realize is more like a glass box, at least in the world of music composition. Musical women aren’t just prevented from rising in their chosen field; they are strongly encouraged, sometimes even forced, to go into fields that are more “appropriate.” It’s perfectly okay to play flute, clarinet, violin, or piano, or to teach or sing – but if you’re a girl like me, who loves the power of French horns and trumpets and the freedom of writing what I want to play myself, you’ll start running into opposition.

Those gifted, hardworking women who make names for themselves are applauded across the country for breaking the glass ceiling in their fields. In many cases, once one woman has achieved something significant in a particular field, it becomes easier for those following her. Take women in school band directing, for instance. A generation ago, there were barely enough of them to merit official recognition at conferences. Now they’re more numerous, but these women still face bias from some of their counterparts. How do I know? I was lucky enough to have a fantastic female band director in high school, and I learned from her experience.

As more young women pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), the barriers between “male” and “female” disciplines are weakening faster than ever, but those barriers still exist in the minds and hearts of many. STEM programs and other gender-inclusive organizations will never completely solve the problem; this gender bias extends past big business and lab work. STEM programs are great for their respective fields, but you’re still not going to find a Girls Should Play Trumpet group anywhere soon.

Like the woman who sat me down and told me I was breaking stereotypes, plenty of people – women included – still discourage girls from pursuing fields that are deemed male-dominated. The more I hear “Good luck – you’ll need it,” the more I

think they might be right – that talent alone, or even effort, might not be enough to succeed. Although I’ve seen that some can escape the glass box after devoting enough time, strength, and determination, that does not always mean that the path is clear for other women to follow. Glass shards strewn across the floor can do some serious damage to those who step on them.

The turning point for me came when I was talking to a friend late one night. As a fellow musician, I confided how scared I was of what might – or might not – happen if I continued with my music. “Look at the odds,” I said. “Ninety percent of people don’t make it in our field.” The next four words he said completely changed my outlook:

“But ten percent do.”

Women breaking into male-dominated fields like music composition are bound to lead stressful lives. We’re often stuck between what society tells us is right or proper and where our hearts and talents lead us. We are discouraged from believing we are capable of walking a different path, and we are hindered by those pesky stereotypes. Still, many of us continue to bang on the walls of that glass box in the hope that one day the glass will shatter and women will feel free to pursue any career they want. We continue fighting for the daughters we hope to have one day. We will break out of this glass box, and once we do, it’ll be time to face the music. ♦

I was singled out for being a girl in my field



Photo by Rosanne Bjorkman, Johannesburg, South Africa

Just Like You

by Lorena Hoggard, Paragould, AR

Yes, we can hear you. You make fun of me and my brother every day – just because he’s different and I’m doing all I know to protect him. You can’t tell, but I go home at least once a week crying because I feel like losing hope in the world of people I’ve grown up in. I tell you constantly, “Stop making fun of him; can’t you see he’s just like you?” Or at least I try to. You don’t ever listen to me, though. All you do is cut me off and laugh. You always laugh, threaten, and point.

That was an excerpt from my journal on the day that my brother and I had to stop riding the bus. Let me explain something to you: my brother has autism. He has difficulty communicating and forming relationships with other

people. For some reason, this is often seen as a valid reason to bully him. Over the years he has been hit, called names, and generally tormented – and no one has done anything about it. The boy who shoved him against the window of the bus was never in trouble. The kids who laugh at the way he talks never get in trouble. No one has gotten in trouble yet. Not here.

People with autism are often judged by others who know nothing about the condition. Even charities that exist to provide services and advice to families affected by autism inadvertently help build a bad image of people like my

brother. In order to appeal to donors, they often focus on the negative aspects of the disorder. Autism Speaks, one of the largest and most well-endorsed “autism advocacy” organizations in the world, designates just 4 percent of its budget to services for families dealing with autism. In addition, the organization has no autistic members on its board. How can it fairly represent

autistic people without the input of autistic people? The negative image of autism that people popularize through stereotypes is unfortunate. Now, sometimes our lives are unlike others’. Most autistic

children have sensory issues that can cause outbursts in public. Some cannot speak. Sometimes a marriage fails from the stress of having an autistic child. Sometimes therapies or medicine are too expensive for families. It can be gut-wrenching, and it will be difficult. But we will never call it a burden.

That screaming kid in Walmart who you think is having a temper tantrum? He may just be in sensory overload because, for him, the environment is too loud. Those kids who are in the special ed classes? They deserve respect. The next time you see someone bullying one of those kids with disabilities, step up and end it. Never forget, families with autism are just like you. ♦

We will never call autism a burden

pride & prejudice

Author Teresa Toten

Interviewed by Kate West, Newton, MA

Teresa Toten began writing when her daughters were born and is now the author of nine books. Her first, *The Onlyhouse*, is about life as an immigrant in a white Anglo-Saxon neighborhood in Toronto, as Toten herself moved from Croatia to Canada when she was just 13 days old. Her latest novel, *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B*, follows a unique romance that unfolds between two members of a support group for kids with OCD.

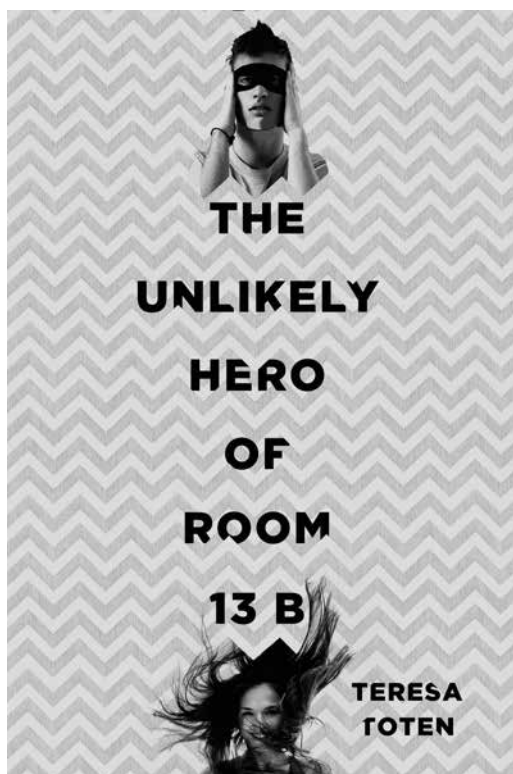
You have a BA and MA in political economy. Why did you decide to pursue writing after you left college?

It was on a whim after my daughters were born. I took a workshop called Writing for Children that was held in the basement of a children's bookstore. I never went back to civilian work again. My head exploded with want and a sense of belonging. This was what I had to do.

Describe your writing process. What do you do first? Which part of the process do you find most challenging?

I write down "floaters." Snatches of ideas, a phrase, a piece of a character, an observation – things that intrigue me. This is before I know what

"I'm making friends with my fear of writing"



the book is about. It's a very idiosyncratic process, and it goes on for quite a long time while the book is steeping in my head. For example, one of my first floaters for *Unlikely Hero* was that a boy falls desperately in love with a girl as she walks into a room.

Where do you find inspiration for your books?

It begins with those little gems or floating ideas – a boy in a room falling in love with a girl by the time she shuts the door. Then I have to figure out what kind of room is he in, and why? Who is in there with him, and why? Who is the girl? Who really is the boy, and why is he there? It's a weird and laborious process, but it's the only one I know how to work with.

Which of your books is your favorite?

It would have to be *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B*. Adam was my first boy protagonist, and I confess to falling in love with him.

Are your characters inspired by people you know?

For sure! Absolutely no one in my family or circle of friends and acquaintances is safe. And that includes the young people I meet at signings and presentations.

Adam came straight out of my heart and onto the page. I mention in the Q&A at the back of the book that I had the bone-jarring experience of meeting a young man at an OCD conference who blew me away with his intelligence and gentleness, with his beauty and pain. I'd already written a draft of the novel and exhaled for the first time; Adam was indeed possible. There are many of him out there.

Robyn was also crafted out of thin air, and she became real to me the moment she fell in love with Adam. Sweetie, however, is totally based on my godson, who at three and four and five would come up with the most profound and heart-hurting questions and observations.

Where did you find inspiration for this book?

Close to home. I've watched the best friends of my children and the children of my best friends suffer mightily with all manner of anxiety disorders, and with OCD in particular. Without exception these are extraordinarily talented and beautiful young adults who have been laboring under this invisible burden for years. Each one of them inspired my words.

Several of the characters have very realistic traits and tendencies relating to their disorder. How much research did you have to do when writing this book?

The research took a little over a year. Of course there was a lot of material to wade through and make notes on, but I was very fortunate to get advice and direction from an internationally renowned OCD expert. I also attended that OCD conference and met many therapists and clients, including young adults. It was a journey I felt extremely privileged to be a part of.

Did you write as a young person?

Not so you'd notice, although teachers and professors kept insisting I could and should be a writer. I come from an immigrant background, and I honestly didn't know what they were talking about.

***The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* is the ninth book you've written. How has your writing process changed over time?**

I've learned so many things from writing all those novels. The big one, however, is that I write with fear, and I have finally come to accept it. Over the years, I've fought the fear, tried to trick it, talk myself out of it, and deny it. Now I know it will be a constant companion throughout the entire writing and editorial process, and that's finally kind of okay. I'm making friends with my fear of writing!

How do you deal with criticism of your books?

I try to learn. I try to do it better. I try harder ...

after I've picked myself up off the floor.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from an editor or fellow author?

That you should write toward the pain. If there's a part of your story that makes you wince or cringe – a part you want to gloss over because it's deeply uncomfortable – that's exactly where you should go. In other words, rip off that protective scab and write about it.

Do you have any words of wisdom to offer aspiring writers?

Read a lot, and read way out of your comfort zone. Sure, read what you like, too, but push yourself to read classics even if you find them dry. If you're so not a poet, read poetry and lots of it. Not interested in sci-fi? Read the best there is. Hate mysteries? Read the most elegant and beautifully crafted mysteries. There is so much to learn from reading out of your comfort zone.

What was the biggest obstacle you had to overcome when writing *The Unlikely Hero*?

I really, really wanted to get the "boy voice" right. I made a lot of young men uncomfortable by asking pointed questions about, uh, things. They were extremely generous and patient with me. I learned so much about them, and I loved that.

Where did you get the idea of having the characters assume superhero personas?

I used to be a rabid comic hero fan. I know that some psychiatrists use role-play and character appropriation as part of group therapy. I was delighted to marry the two ideas.

If you could impress upon your readers one thing about mental illness, what would it be?

It's just an illness. Period! Like diabetes or heart disease or any number of physical illnesses. Some are chronic but manageable, and some are curable. Virtually all are treatable with the right combination of therapies, but you have to have the courage and support to reach out for the proper help. I truly believe that this will be the last generation that treats mental illness as a thing that should be shrouded in secrecy or shame.

Where can readers get help if they relate to any of these issues?

There are a few websites listed in the book, with more on my website. Check them out. Reach out. You are so not alone!

Are you currently writing a book?

I've just finished a book called *Shattered Glass*, which is part of a series with six other authors all revolving out of a common plot point. It's called the Secrets Series, and it will be out in the fall. I'm now knee-deep in a very dark and twisty thriller and loving every minute of writing it!

What is your favorite thing about being a writer?

I can't believe that I get to do what I get to do! I love living with people in my head and then foisting them on the world. And even more than that, I so love meeting and hearing from my readers. If someone picks up one of my books and a piece of a character or a paragraph makes them feel somehow less alone, well, can you top that? Really, that's unbeatable! ♦

"There's so much to learn from reading out of your comfort zone"

An Answer

by Lilliana Bollinger, El Cajon, CA

Robert Frost writes in his poem “A Question,” published in 1942:

*A voice said, Look me in the stars
And tell me truly, men of earth,
If all the soul-and-body scars
Were not too much to pay for birth.*

Frost was an American poet who died in the 1960s. His life was plagued by loss; his father and mother died young, as well as his sister, wife, and several of his children. Depression ran in both his and his wife’s family. Out of their six children, only two outlived their father.

Though short and simple, this poem has always spoken to me. It contemplates pain, it contemplates life, it contemplates death, and most of all, it contemplates the stars. He is saying, “You, person of earth: look at the stars, look at their beauty and vastness. Tell me if this really isn’t enough to pay for the pain you will endure – that this bright universe and being able to be alive and thriving in it isn’t a generous trade for enduring the hard parts of life. Tell me truly.”

I thought long and hard about the poem when I first read it, and tried to find the honest answer to Frost’s

question. But as someone who’d never really seen the stars the way they should be seen, I didn’t have the answer.

Then I talked to an astronomer who claimed that light pollution affected human behavior. When he first said this, I didn’t understand.

He’d grinned enthusiastically. “The cosmos changes you! Starlight makes you happier!” he’d insisted.

“Wait,” I said, my right eyebrow raised. “You’re telling me that being surrounded by light in the dark affects how we think?” I

frowned and pursed my lips. There is so much pollution on this earth, but as a day person, I’d never considered light to be a part of it.

But then I went camping with my class on the top of some godforsaken mountain – in the cold, but more importantly, in the dark. And as I gazed up at the blue-black night splattered in twinkling little lights, smeared with stardust as the Milky Way sprawled across the sky, I understood. I understood how I’d let myself feel so big, let my problems and emotions

swallow me whole, let what was going on inside of me outshine what was happening all around me. In the city, when I look up to the stars and see maybe just a bright planet here or there and only one or two constellations, I can shrug and go back inside and stew about myself; I don’t feel like I’m missing much outside.

However, in the mountains, away from what the astronomer called

“light pollution,” I couldn’t tear my eyes away. The night sky is a type of beauty one simply can’t tire of.

I also believe that it says something that you have to lie on your back, at your lowest point, at your humblest, in order to properly look up at a sky so big and so vast and so amazing. Sometimes all you’ve got to do is quit staring at your feet as you trudge through life – stop, and look up at the sky instead. You remember how small you really are, and yet somehow, on your back, looking up, you are your own little spot in the universe.

In a sky full of stars, you your-

*Each tiny star
is a part of the
endless universe*

The Valley of Kings

by Nohili Thompson, Kamuela, HI

Every rock and ditch we ride over makes me nauseous. Will this drive ever end? My cell phone has no reception, and I feel disconnected from the technology-driven society I am familiar with. As I arrive at my destination, relief replaces my unease. Gray clouds drift out to sea, and unexpectedly, they take my dependency on technology along with them. I am now in the Valley of Kings: Waipi’o Valley on the Big Island of Hawaii.

As I go further into the valley, there is less and less civilization. Just an arm’s length away, wild horses graze in the dew-topped grass. The aromas of sea-salty air and fresh rain fill my nose and lungs and tickle my skin. I hop out of the truck to find my bare toes hugging the fine black sand like friends who haven’t seen each other in years.

Near the river, I close my eyes, listening to the water rushing to meet the ocean. I hear every rustling leaf of the *ni’oi* trees and the crash of waves rushing over the sand. Salt dries on my skin as the trade winds blow. All the natural elements of the valley collaborate to create this wonderful symphony. I meditate on its beauty; this tranquil environment provides an escape from a world of chaos and materialism. The serenity I feel at Waipi’o cannot be found on the little screen of my cell phone or my laptop.

The peaceful views of cliffs and waterfalls in the distance – and the feel of goosebump-cold, brackish water on my

body – allow me to reboot. I am so fortunate to live in such a beautiful place. I wonder how anyone would want to cause any harm to nature. Cities and towns cannot compare to the peaceful environment the earth provides.

*Wild horses
graze in the
dew-topped grass*

In the Valley of Kings, the tall cliffs are the skyscrapers I am accustomed to seeing daily. The indigenous birds that fly overhead are like the huge planes I hear and see all the time. The fresh air here replaces the burdensome smog I experience in the city.

After my visit, I take this experience and sense of place with me wherever I go. It has helped me to realize how precious and beautiful nature is. Waipi’o Valley does not live off of a battery; it lives off of love and its natural resources. ♦

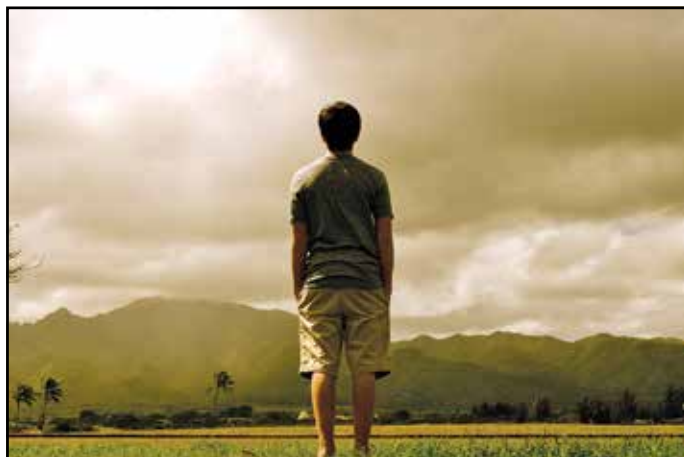


Photo by Devan Lawrence, White Plains, NY

self can be a tiny twinkling light in a sea of twinkling lights. Sure, if one star disappeared, millions more would still light up the sky, but each one is important in your eyes. And you’d never know if the star that disappeared just happened to be someone’s favorite, the star that made them feel like they could wish for anything, the star that made them feel endless. Each tiny star is a special part of the whole endless universe.

And so, to answer Robert Frost’s “A Question,” when the “soul-and-body scars” start to wear you down, and your feet begin to feel heavy during the endless climb uphill, it’s important to pause and look up. The stars tell you the trade you are making by carrying on: you are enduring darkness so that you too can light up the sky. ♦

Trees

There are many different types of trees,
And they all have names:

Spruce

Pine

Birch

So on and so forth.

But isn’t it more fun to

Ignore the names

And describe the trees as they are?

With broad leaves, their spindly veins

Supporting a thin, fragile sheet of life,

Or with narrow leaves curved gently inward

Like the shell of a beetle?

With thick bark, sporting definite chunks

That you can wrench off and throw like a stone

Or with thin bark that crumbles when you scratch it

With a fingernail?

Tall and broad, against which

You press your body,

Minuscule in comparison,

Looking up through the mesh of branches

Into the pearly sky?

Or small and windy, perfect for climbing

And yet too fragile

To welcome any climber?

What about the trees

With small, evanescent leaves

That speckle the sky, creating

A delicate canopy

To turn the sunlight green?

And surely you’ve seen those,

Locked in tightly woven forests,

That blot out the sun so completely

That you’re left in near darkness

In the only cool place

On a sweltering afternoon,

Breathing in the subtle aroma

Of moist soil?

But I suppose this is inefficient.

Referring to trees by their names

Is much more practical.

by Jesse McMillin, Felton, CA

John Melidosian by Grace Duncan, Wilmington, DE

I walked into the small office for the first time and read the sign with teary eyes: “9th Grade Guidance Counselor.” The sign told me I was in the right place, but it didn’t hint at the boundless support and comfort I would receive from the man inside the office.

He looked young, with brown hair and a humorous gaze that I would later get to know. He always looked as if he never got quite enough sleep; I knew the feeling. It was very easy to get along with him, and I found myself in his office regularly. I didn’t realize then that we were forming a friendship through our counseling sessions as we snacked on chips and salsa, or took countless walks through the hallways, talking about life or nonsense. However, I don’t think I would be here now, two years later, if it weren’t for Mr. Melidosian.

Meeting Mr. Mel in ninth grade allowed me to develop a trusting relationship since he was also my tenth grade counselor. I always went to Mr. Mel with my problems – both school and personal – or just when I needed to de-stress and talk. He became more than a counselor and teacher; he became a friend. He was always supportive, especially with what I went through last year.

During the fall of my tenth grade year, my mother, who’d struggled with multiple sclerosis for 23 years, had a stroke that severely damaged her brain. She suddenly became unresponsive and had to stay in the hospital, eventually leading to hospice and the end of her life. Throughout those days of emotional

turmoil, I sought comfort and desperately wanted to escape my responsibilities at school. Mr. Mel understood that and did everything he could to make sure I was okay, even if it meant just spending lunch with me. Mr. Mel knew my mother and had helped me through problems with her even before her stroke. He never pretended to know how I felt or told me it would get better; he just stood by me. That was really all I needed.

On the day of my mother’s funeral, I was in the procession going to the cemetery. I got out of the car and began walking to the plot. After I looked around at the familiar faces of my family, I saw two that surprised me. Mr. Mel and our assistant principal, Mr. Kohan, approached my sister and me. Their sincere smiles made me feel that I was not alone. Mr. Mel handed each of us a card signed with condolences from all of our teachers.

I’m extremely grateful for what Mr. Mel has done for me, especially because he never had to do any of it. He has an extremely difficult job, not only guiding students but also taking care of all our schedules and classroom-related problems, as well as coordinating anything you can think of. For him to take so much time to help me means more than he will probably ever know.

Now, as a junior, I am beginning to research colleges and decide what I want to do in life. I am inspired to teach, because I want to reflect the many great qualities my teachers have shown me. I want

Nobody should feel alone

She is so proud of us

English and Art • Cache High School

Katie Enright by Anonymous, UT

I am writing this from a desktop in the living room of a residential treatment center, more commonly known as a group home. I do not go to school, but a teacher comes to the house every weekday to teach us two subjects, which change every six weeks. Currently they are English literature and art. I like school here. We read and write poetry and have recently read the books *Z for Zachariah* and *Catching Spirit Bear*. School has always been a challenge for me, and I am trying to catch up on credits. I am in tenth grade, originally from Baltimore, Maryland, and now live in a small town in Utah. The point of this submission is not to have a pity party thrown in my name, but to honor and show my gratitude to my teacher.

At my old high school in Baltimore, there were 1,500 students, so I didn’t really have the luxury of knowing my teachers or having the special education plan I needed. But my current teacher customizes each of our classes so that we are challenged but not overwhelmed.

She doesn’t give us shortcuts in order to get us good grades. She doesn’t let the circuits in our brains sit still and gather dust; she keeps them spinning and stirring, always challenging us with a new problem or a new way of doing something.

Her teaching method is to tell us what the end goal of an assignment is and then allow us to make our own decisions on how to get there. She is

always there throughout, not giving us the answers but encouraging us to find our own.

Recently, we had a group meeting because there had been some chaos in the house the previous night. The meeting was during our school time, so our teacher was there. One of the therapists brought up the system of checks and balances used in our government and asked if anybody knew about it. Another resident raised his hand and explained the judicial, executive, and legislative branches and how they worked. We had learned this two months before in class, and he remembered it perfectly. Our teacher was sitting a few feet behind him (I don’t think he knew), smiling and nodding her head.

She was so proud of him. She is so proud of him. She is so proud of us. She doesn’t care if we don’t draw perfect lines with amazing shadowing; she cares if we take our time and put all our effort into drawing.

If we are caught up with our classwork, we get to go on a field trip every Friday. Just today, we went to a nursing home to read our poetry. I read a slam poem I had written. I’m not sure if the older residents understood it, but their smiles told me they appreciated the effort.

I’m not planning on winning this essay contest, and even if I do, I won’t know, because e-mail to our group home is often blocked. I just wanted people to know about my teacher. ♦



Photo by Rhianna Cundy, Oshkosh, WI

to be someone to a student, that same someone that Mr. Mel has been to me. I believe that nobody should feel alone or as if their life doesn’t matter, especially during their vulnerable teenage years.

In the past year, I’ve become more confident and mature. I still give Mr. Mel high fives in the hallway, and occasionally stop by his office to bother him. Although I don’t have much time to talk anymore, I want him to know that he has made a difference in my life. He has taught me that many of our troubles won’t last forever, but even the ones that do – like grief – won’t always burden you in the same way. I’ll never forget my mother, but I know now that despite my struggles, I can accomplish anything. And there’s nothing wrong with getting a little help along the way. ♦

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

When Worlds Collide

by Palmer Brigham, Augusta, GA

I had never been asked *if* I was going to college. Instead, the question was always *where* was I going. I never understood the significance of this until the summer of 2013, when I learned that a 10-minute car ride is all it takes to enter a different world in my hometown.

On the first day of my internship with an inner city nonprofit, I walked into a stuffy gym brimming with children running, yelling, and jumping rope. The stifling summer humidity did not stop their antics as they begged me to join them, their eyes longing for attention. As I scanned the room and noticed that I was the only white girl in a sea of black faces, I had a taste of what it felt like to be a minority, out of place only a few miles from home. Each day, as I discovered how I fit into inner city Augusta, I became immersed in a foreign culture with a surprisingly different set of expectations.

When my boss showed me around the government housing projects,

the complexities of her job seemed daunting. Yet I began to love the work as I met the families of the kids I had gotten to know from tutoring and mentoring over the past few years. A child's aunt would open her door suspiciously as we invited her child to camp or a cookout, and I would see her hard glance soften as her child excitedly called my name and ran into my arms.

When I was told that I would be helping with a dance workshop one week, I flashed back to earlier in the summer when a group of girls tried to teach me to dance. Realizing their efforts were useless, Cameron, an eight-year-old, exclaimed, "Girl, you're giving me gray hairs!" Creating relationships wasn't about me being their savior or a perfect dancer; it only involved loving them as they were, letting them braid my hair until my scalp

ached, or laughing together at my attempts to dance.

Every afternoon I returned to a comfortable home where nothing had changed except me. As I was trying to relate to the people I encountered downtown, I was also trying to explain this experience to my friends. I would return to a world where people's responses varied from "Why would you do that if you're barely getting paid?" to "What a good thing to do!"

Honestly, both reactions frustrated me because neither group could grasp my motives. I wasn't spending my summer in the inner city just to do a good deed, and it definitely wasn't for the meager pay; I wanted to invest in lives. When my friends bragged about their cushy jobs working for their dad making \$40 an hour filing papers while watching Netflix, I knew that they were making more money but

achieving less.

The inner city students I interacted with knew, even at 16, that the odds were stacked against them. Nikeria and Mokila have aspirations to be lawyers, but their school has a 30 percent graduation rate. The school I attend has 100 percent college matriculation. These girls I befriended are working hard for their future despite their disadvantages.

Gathered around a dinner table joking and laughing with new downtown friends, I was asked *if* I was going to college. I was taken aback: of course I was. Wasn't everyone? Then I realized not everyone went to college; not everyone even finished high school. As I saw life through their eyes, our two worlds collided in such a way that I could no longer compartmentalize them. Without this experience, I would have remained caught up in my own world, comfortable and unchallenged. Instead, I was able to step out of my comfort zone and see a new perspective. ♦

Not everyone goes to college

The Miracle League

by Teresa Chevarie, Stratford, ON, Canada

I hear his name over the loudspeaker as the announcer calls for each player to run up to the white line. I trot alongside Mitch as he joins the rest of his team. The field is longing for the game to begin. We face the American flag as the national anthem starts to play. As the last word sounds, the energy of the players and the crowd fills the air. The sun is peeking through the clouds. It's a perfect day for baseball.

All the players in this game have a disability of some kind. My assignment for the day is to pair up with one of the players, helping in any way needed during the game. Across the field, one of my co-volunteers is giving a high five; another is encouraging a buddy to run for each ball that comes near; another is holding the hand of a girl in a wheelchair, telling her she is beautiful and making her smile. My 9-year-old buddy, Mitch, is sitting beside me waiting for a turn at bat. Although Mitch's disability prevents his body from moving properly, he is just like any other little boy, eager to get out on the field.

Suddenly, I hear it. "Mitch, one of our hardest hitters, you're up!" Mitch jumps from his seat, runs to home base, picks up the bat, and takes his stance before I even get there. I stand behind him to help if he needs it, but Mitch swings the bat and hits the ball perfectly, sending it far into outfield. We run to first base together. I give him a big high five and we set into our stance, eyes on second base. "Go!" I yell as the next batter sends the ball screaming over the fence. Home run! We set off toward home, jumping up and down as we reach our goal, adding another run to the scoreboard.

When it is our turn in the outfield, Mitch and I trot over to guard first base. Every once in a while, the announcer calls out "Buddy protect!" which means

there is a hard hitter at bat. I am ready to move in front of Mitch in case any dangerously fast balls come our way, but I try to let him have enough space so he doesn't feel like he constantly needs my help. Every time a good hit comes our way, Mitch grabs the ball and throws it back to the pitcher. He has a strong arm and is very proud of the plays he makes.

Before we know it, the game is over. Although our team won, in reality, everyone won. Everyone had a chance to play and have fun. I will never forget the time I spent with these kids; they couldn't stop smiling!

At the next game for the day, a guy named John asks me to be his buddy. John, a 19-year-old, is always smiling and wanting to give all he can. He uses a walker, but with it he is able to move quickly, and he turns out to be a very fast runner!

Our team, the Michigan Dodgers, are first on the field. John knows exactly where to stand: in between second and third base. The first batter is a girl in a wheelchair. One of the volunteers hands

her the bat and wraps her own hands around it to help. After a few tries, they hit a good shot, sending it right to where John and I are standing. Immediately John starts moving toward the ball; he fields it and sends it right back to the pitcher. I look to the dugout and notice that one of my co-workers, Joyce, is using sign language to communicate with a little girl. I feel amazed.

When it is John's turn to bat, the coach tells me what I have to do to help. I kneel with my right hand on one of the bars of John's walker, ready to push it into place when it's time for him to run. John takes his stance at home plate, feet planted, hands tightly holding the bat, knees bent, a few drops of sweat on his forehead, ready to take on the world.

The pitch is released. John swings the bat with all

his force. The crowd goes wild. I push his walker toward him; he grabs it and starts to run to first base. We run all the way home. The crowd is roaring with excitement, jumping up and down! John has the biggest smile on his face as he heads back to the bench and will not stop asking for high fives. When this game is over, we congratulate all the players on how well they did.

It felt really good to help put smiles on these kids' faces. I enjoyed encouraging them to do the best they could and learning to see them for what they can do, rather than what they can't.

Thank you Mitch, John, and the Miracle League for showing me authenticity, joy, and true happiness. I will never forget this experience, especially those smiles. ♦

He is eager to get on the field



Photo by Alyson Welling, Nova, OH

Rules of Flight

by Angela Fu, Birmingham, AL

Whenever I travel amid strangers, cramped aisles, and stale air, I find a home 30,000 feet up in a metal tube rocketing off to who-knows-where. No matter the airline, the setting remains the same: drab blue seats with crumb-filled seat pockets and worn carpeting. The flight attendants are bubbly; the pilot cracks the same tired jokes. When pinballing between cities – or even continents – the interior of an airplane becomes a welcome constant.

The laws of luggage storage and in-flight entertainment replace the rules of time and geography. I may never know what the sun is doing when the pilot claims it's nighttime or where we are exactly, but I do know that the overhead compartments will be full and one of them will burst open midflight. Someone will have filled in the magazine crossword puzzle stuck haphazardly in my seat pocket. That's just the way it always is.



Photo by Niccole D'Arco, Auburn, PA

On each flight, I gain a new family within my row of seatmates. While actual family members occupied the seats next to me when I was younger, these days, strangers fill them. On one flight, my cousin is a fast-talking, stooped man from Harlem, and on the next it is a woman with an airy voice who speaks almost no English. Not knowing who will show up to claim the title of long-lost aunt or crazy uncle makes adapting to this new family an interesting challenge.

The conversations start slowly, with a polite acknowledgment and perhaps a question or two as to why the other is flying to London, not Laredo, Abuja, or Auckland. Sometimes the exchange ends there, each of us turning to our respective forms of entertainment to whittle away the hours. But most times the conditions will be right for a confession or two. The hazy dimness and forced closeness tease our stories out.

"I think this might be the last time I see my mother."

"I'm going to my stepsister's wedding. I don't know if she wants me there."

"I think things might actually work out this time."

We redden and glance away, wondering if perhaps we've revealed too much, but the power of anonymity intoxicates us. We can be whomever we want when our names are "26A" or "17D." We can be secret millionaires headed for a perfect vacation from our perfect lives. Instead we choose to be honest, to spill our secrets because we know that we will never see 26B again. Soon we're discussing our personal lives. Privacy is abandoned when someone's elbow juts into my side or my knee encroaches on his sacred space. Even I, someone who is loath to talk about my life, find myself spinning my autobiography for a person I've just met. In return, I'm granted access to life stories that history will never record. Suppressed hopes and dreams tumble out as we give life to ideas that existed only in our heads, trying them out on people we will never see again. Strangers replace best friends and confidants.

However, not all relationships require words.

I gain a new family within my row of seatmates

On one particular eight-hour flight, I found myself seated in the middle of the center section, far from a window and cut off from the aisle. The person to my right, a wild-eyed, frazzled woman, suffered the same predicament, and we exchanged sympathetic looks as we sat down. She took care to preserve my bubble of personal space, and I returned the favor. The cheerful man who sat to my left offered me his pillow, and I shook my head. Instead, all three of us passed our miniature pink pillows to the woman at the end of the row whose joints creaked. Wordlessly, the four of us organized a complex system of life aboard the plane, one in which we timed bathroom breaks to give each other adequate space and not disrupt the sleeping aisle-seaters. We swapped meal items like schoolchildren at lunchtime, and procured

pens for the woman who had an affinity for Sudoku. When the flight attendant stalked down the aisle demanding our nationalities so as to give us the correct form needed to enter the country, we froze. It was only after we'd scribbled in answers and shoved the forms out of sight that we settled back into our harmony again. There is no place for

pointless geographical divisions when you're 30,000 feet above the Earth.

No matter what happens during the flight, the routine after landing is always the same. The plane finally lands and the seatbelt sign pings off; we yawn and stretch and tell each other that it's been a pleasure. No one ever offers to keep in touch. (The one time an overeager, lonely woman broke this rule, I took her phone number reluctantly, knowing we would never speak again.) The suddenly harsh cabin lights dispel any desire for additional confessions, leaving vague embarrassment in its place. We take our bags and head in separate directions. If we see each other outside of the intimate shelter of the airplane, we catch each other's eye before sheepishly looking away. If it happens again, we stride by without acknowledging the other person. Even the best confidants can be replaced.

It's easier that way. ♦

Noonchi

by Monica Lee, Albertson, NY

"Monica, you have zero *noonchi*." "Noonchi? What's *noonchi*?"

"You know, *noonchi*. That thing. That thing people with *noonchi* have."

With no thanks to my mother's explanation and just a little hunch from the context, I made a guess. "Is '*noonchi*' Korean for 'common sense'?" I asked.

My mother's eyes brightened. "Sort of."

I gave her a look. "Sort of? What do you mean, 'sort of'?"

"I ... I'm not really sure how to explain it," my mother sighed. It was only a couple of years later that I understood the subtleties of that word's definition. The term *noonchi* refers to one's ability to gauge the nuances of another's feelings and act accordingly.

One day, my family and I were crowded around a table at a Korean barbecue restaurant with delicious *galbi* sizzling on the grill. My aunt was talking about one of my cousins, who was pregnant with her second son, when I decided to ask when her other daughter was planning on having a child. A swift kick in the shin coupled with an intense eyebrow raise from my brother was all it took for me to realize that maybe that hadn't been the most appropriate question. It was only after we got home that my brother shook his head and told me, "Monica, you have zero *noonchi*."

It took me several more tries before I eventually pieced together the defi-

inition. Before long, I started hearing the word everywhere – at my local Korean market, at my church, and even in my favorite Korean dramas. I even found myself using the term, then trying to explain it to my friends.

Before long, I started hearing the word everywhere

As a Korean-American, I have always found myself teetering in the middle of two vastly different cultures. On one hand, I am American-born and enjoy biting into a hamburger at a Fourth of July barbecue. On the other hand, I am Korean-raised and savor every moment of being able to twirl around in my *hanbok*, a colorful Korean dress worn on *Chuseok*, the annual harvest festival.

My struggle to grasp the meaning

of *noonchi* was a testament not only to my inability to identify with one culture over the other, but also the difficulty of truly comprehending the Korean language's idiosyncrasies.

Every language is born from a medley of culture and tradition. If every word from every language could be translated simply and mechanically, it would strip away and disengage the customs from their words. It would demean the thousands of years of history carved into the carefully chosen sounds and locutions.

So even if it did take me a frustratingly long time to fully understand the meaning of *noonchi*, it is one of the many, many examples that make the Korean language and culture unique, and I would not want it any other way. ♦

Under the Montana Sky

by Stevie Hunter, Manchester Center, VT

Before Crazy Horse rode into battle, he would paint a lightning bolt on his forehead, paint hail on his chest, and place a pebble behind his ear. Most warriors dressed in their best headdresses and clothing, but Crazy Horse had had a vision that he would never be hurt in battle as long as he was humble about being a warrior. In a culture that cherished strong, brave warriors, he refused to be perceived as a hero. I learned this from a retired history teacher at the Battle of the Little Bighorn site in Montana.

It was 102 degrees with not a cloud in the big blue Western sky when my family crossed the border from South Dakota into Montana. A ranger emerged from the museum at the battle site and announced that there would be a talk on the back patio in three minutes. My mother and I joined the packed crowd.

It was easy to get swept up in the ranger's story as we overlooked the site where the actual battle between the Native American tribes and the American soldiers occurred. Sitting Bull, the Lakota chief, had told his people not to go to the reservations. He knew that their time on their land was almost up and he wanted his people to live freely. The Native Americans created a village for themselves, knowing they would fight to protect it.

When the American soldiers finally arrived, young Natives made a dust cloud around the camp by tying bushes to their horses' tails. As they galloped around the camp, the dust rose. Guns started firing and General Custer was killed. Soldiers' bodies were mutilated and the Little Bighorn River ran red with blood.

Crazy Horse rode his horse over a blind hill and straight for the soldiers with guns. He had no fear because he had had a vision: he was not going to die in battle that day. White Bull followed Crazy Horse over the hill, and all the other warriors followed.

The Native Americans won the battle and moved the village south as the sun went down. Two Moons was asked how long the battle lasted. He responded, "As long as it takes a hungry man to eat his dinner." A total of 263 soldiers and 160 warriors were killed.

During the talk, the ranger used an arrow to point to where Crazy Horse ran over the hill, to where the river ran red with blood, and to where the American soldiers killed their horses so they could take shelter behind the dead animals. I was taken back to a time when cultures clashed. It seems

that this clashing of cultures exists no matter what time or nation you're in; people often assume their ways are better than another's.

After the talk, the ranger asked the crowd if war is worth it. Yes, he added, some wars have been necessary, he wouldn't deny that. But is war always necessary to get nations to cooperate? He didn't blame the Native Americans or the American soldiers for the battle.

He ended with this same thought: Is war worth it?

The previous time I had gone to the Battle of the Little Bighorn site I was 10 years old. I didn't know the history of the site then, but I have a picture

of my sister, cousin, and me underneath a Black Elk quote that reads, "Know the power that is peace." As a 10-year-old, I didn't think about what the words meant. After hearing the ranger's story recently, I see the sign differently. My mother took another photo of my father and me beneath it. I am on his shoulders holding my arms out wide beneath the words, a 16-year-old with new knowledge of their meaning.

My adventure out West was one I will not forget. Walking up the hill at

It's not every day we learn about what our country did wrong



Photo by Eowyn Laurel, Polson, MT

the Battle of the Little Bighorn made me realize how much history exists that I don't know about. It's not every day we learn about what our country did wrong, but every country has made mistakes; to move forward, we need to learn from them. I want to learn all I can about America's past.

I would tell everyone to go to Montana and to enjoy the hot weather and big sky as they drive to the Battle of the Little Bighorn site. I would tell them to stop at the trading post across the street and eat a bison burger.

Then I would tell them to listen to the ranger talk – really listen. The walk up the hill, no matter how hot it is, is worth it. To stand on the hill where a historic battle took place and to have Black Elk's words echoing in your mind is worth the effort. ♦

Paris: A Traveler's Reflection

by Annie Lu, Camas, WA

Ah, Paris. It's a name synonymous with high fashion and luxury. Hearing it might conjure up fantasies of quaint cafés overlooking painters along the River Seine, magnificently gilded palaces, or the bright lights of the latest runway shows. This is the side of Paris portrayed in paintings and poems. It's the side shown in movies and magazines. But it's not the side I encountered when I took a vacation there a few years ago, and I've learned a lot because of that trip.

It had been a rocky journey of turbulence, airport security, and Google Translate, but we finally arrived at the doorstep of our "authentic Parisian apartment." The general aura of "too hot, too tired" had settled in. We found ourselves in a tiny apartment with scarcely room to move

amidst our sea of luggage. My brother, always looking on the bright side, pointed out that it was possible to make breakfast without getting out of bed. I was not amused. I visited the bathroom, only to find that it was as wide as my shoulders. My first day in Paris did nothing to satisfy my appetite for French grandeur. I chalked the day up to jet lag and went to sleep, certain that the following day would be as breathtaking as my most extravagant Parisian dreams.

The next morning, my family and I packed maps and cameras and descended into the Parisian underground, otherwise known as the stuffy, cramped, and sticky subway tunnels thousands of commuters pass through each day. I wasn't perturbed, because I emerged from the underground and saw views of the Paris I'd seen in countless pictures and on television: giant stone buildings covered in columns and statues surrounded me, each one more impressive than the next.

We spent the morning wandering around the Louvre before hopping a bus to the Arc De Triomphe. Yet I sulked on the ride; nothing had lived up to my expectations. For every chandelier hanging in a long mirrored hallway, I saw 10 walls covered in graffiti. For every Parisian lady dressed from head to toe in feathers, fur, and gold lamé, I saw 10 homeless beggars. I saw litter strewn under the Eiffel Tower and an old woman begging for change at the doorstep of the Louvre. My shoes were covered in cigarette ash from the roads, and my body was grimy from

rubbing shoulders with passengers on the stuffed subways.

To my dismay, I found myself counting down the days to my departure, and I was secretly relieved when our plane took off from Charles De Gaulle Airport. From my window seat I cast a last glance of *au revoir* before leaving my Parisian adventures behind.

A few weeks later I scrolled through my copious vacation pictures, analyzing different angles of the Notre Dame and Musée d'Orsay. As I browsed, I noticed things I had looked at but never really seen. I recalled a woman on the metro, returning from a hard day's work. I saw two little boys with no shoes, laughing and kicking a soccer ball down a graffiti-covered alley. I saw a young businessman straightening his tie before walking into an imposing office building.

At that moment, I saw Paris neither as the pinnacle of luxury I had imagined, nor the grubby urban wasteland I had experienced. Paris isn't just a city; it's a home and a destination for millions of people. It's full of hopelessness, tears, and toil. It's a place for dreams that float just out of reach, for triumph and exhilaration. It's a place of glitz and glamour, sickening poverty, defining history, and classic culture.

From a trip I'd left disgusted, I learned to cast away my lingering naivety and realize that some things aren't what they seem. I chide myself for turning my eyes away, for not appreciating what lay in front of me while I had the chance. Now, when I think of Paris, I see something a thousand times more lovely than berets and baguettes. ♦

Nothing had lived up to my expectations



Photo by Giselle Chan, Hong Kong

The Rise of the Dragon

by Callie Hoon, Deerfield, MA

On the old TV hit show “Ally McBeal,” Lucy Liu bares her slender shoulders in a provocative lace halter top, eases her ruby red nails into Greg Germann’s dirty blond locks, then whiplashes him with her serpentine tongue. As the camera pans upward, Liu’s obsidian eyes meet our gaze in a mixture of lust and connivance, danger and mystery; she is the dragon lady of the East, an Asian vixen who is sweet maiden one moment and lethal siren the next. Liu’s role as Ling Woo, the Chinese-American attorney on Fox’s most popular legal drama series, perpetuated the two Asian-American female archetypes in Hollywood: the submissive lotus blossom and the predatory dragon lady.

Asian-American males have tolerated an even worse fate. Castrated and relegated to the category of the bespectacled, wimpy nerd, they have suffered a social stigma that has cast a pall over their masculinity, so much so that some Asian women won’t date them. How have these stereotypes been perpetuated, and why should we care about how this group is represented?

For six centuries, beginning with the Portuguese, Western European countries colonized Asia, seeking to plunder its riches, exploit its strategic trading ports, and “civilize” its people. During the Anglo-Chinese Opium Wars of the nineteenth century, Britain drugged an entire nation and barred its citizens from living anywhere but the slums, where dejected octogenarians puffed opium pipes in rusty

shacks. This ingrained attitude of colonization naturally led to viewing Asian people as possessions, from which emerged the image of the delicate, self-sacrificing Chinese girl – the lotus blossom stereotype. In fact, the first Chinese-American movie star, Anna Mae Wong, played a character named Lotus Flower, after which she became so tired of playing prostitutes and blossoms that she fled to Europe in the 1920s just so she could play a human being. “I think I left Hollywood because I died so often,” Wong lamented, reflecting on her 40-year career.

Even today, the stereotype of the self-sacrificing Asian girl has not died. In the Broadway musical “Miss Saigon,” a young Vietnamese prostitute kills herself for her white American soldier husband so that their son may lead a better life. Caught between the stereotypes of the chaste,

hapless virgin and the devious, assertive whore, the Asian-American woman has no middle path.

In America, Asian women are so constantly and condescendingly dehumanized and objectified that they’re even likened to food. In the popular 1961 musical film “Flower Drum Song,” a lighthearted story about immigrant life in Los Angeles, the waif-like Nancy Kwan prances along lantern-lit Chinatown streets, cheerfully chirping that “the girl who serves you all your food/is another tasty dish!” Several years later, the 1967 James Bond movie “You Only Live Twice” opens with Bond in bed with yet another sexy companion, the blunt-banged

Chinese siren Kissy Suzuki.

“Why is it that Chinese girls taste different from all other girls?” Bond asks.

“You think Chinese girls bet-tuh, huh?” Kissy replies in her broken English.

“Not better, just different . . . the way Peking duck is different from Russian caviar, but I love them both,” Bond says.

“Dah-ling, I give you very best duck.”

Then Kissy deftly leaps out of bed as her two suit-clad, machine-gun-toting cohorts burst into the bedroom to mow Bond down. Clearly, Asian women have been portrayed in the media as very dangerous dishes.

Perhaps, however, it is better to be represented poorly than not at all. Because of historical anti-miscegenation laws that outlawed interracial intimacy and marriage, for years U.S. directors did not cast Asian actors in films, even those starring Asian characters. For example, directors of the 1937 film adaptation of Pearl S. Buck’s *The Good Earth*, a romantic novel about Chinese farm family life, defied Buck’s request to cast Chinese-American actors. Instead, the movie featured white actors Paul Muni and Luise Rainer, complete with squinty-eye tape and yellowface makeup. Although these divisive laws were finally repealed in 1967, Asian-Americans, long conditioned into being invisible in the media, still only played 3 percent of characters and appeared in just 1 percent of opening credits as recently as 2002.

Asian-American invisibility in the media can be attributed to several factors. Hollywood fears a predominantly white audience will not relate to an Asian cast. This is a chicken-and-egg problem; it is hard to relate to that which you do not see. Hollywood needs intricate, engaging, genuine Asian characters, but who will write these characters? Asian parents should encourage their children to become artists and screenwriters, directors and producers so that the people behind the camera can write for those in front of it. For example, many animators for Pixar’s “Up” were Asian, and this behind-the-scenes influence led to the crafting of a half-Asian lead character.

With China’s new openness to the West, Hollywood has been desperately courting the 1.4 billion-person movie audience that China offers. China is now the second biggest box office market in the world at \$2.75 billion in 2012, and by 2020 will be the largest. Hollywood now wants to cast more Asians in movies and tell Asian stories, as evidenced by the bidding war over who would get to turn Asian-American author Kevin Kwan’s novel *Crazy Rich Asians* into a film. Clearly, capitalism and corporate greed are ironically eradicating Asian racism in America.

Since Asian-Americans make up only 4.4 percent of the U.S. population, why should we care? Because it is always a wise idea to see other races as human beings, not stereotypes. Seeing those who are different from us as our equals allows us to learn from them and grow because of it. Just as black Americans shrugged off their blackface stereotypes in film by showing us their talents, Asian-Americans should flaunt their skills too. China invented everything from paper to football, from gunpowder to the compass, and now they are giving us an opportunity to tell their stories. Perhaps we should let them. ♦

Corporate greed is ironically eradicating Asian racism in America

#Savingtheworld?

by Zoe Davis, Chicago, IL

Think of any viral video, meme, or trend on social media. Where does it come from?

As your friends tweet, comment, and post, you are expected to join in – and why wouldn’t you? It’s viral. Every day it seems like a new trend arises on social media, causing everyone to share, retweet, like, and favorite, and then forget as time goes on. The trends garner attention on shows like “Good Morning America” and then disappear, leaving everyone to wonder what happened to them. This seems to be a pattern.

#activism employs the same techniques as any Internet meme. Social media is used to raise awareness for a cause or issue in the same way that Grumpy Cat videos are shared. Awareness is good. It helps people think outside of their mundane rut of self-pity and their own #firstworldproblems. However, am I really helping someone with cancer if I simply tweet #cancersucks and then go on with my life?

This was the major criticism of the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, the viral movement to raise money for ALS, a degenerative nerve disease that often ends in death. Although people filmed themselves dumping ice on their heads and awareness was raised, what good does posting a video do?

Spreading awareness is not enough

The Ice Bucket Challenge raised more than \$110 million for ALS research, but getting showered with ice water and posting the video did not raise the money. Donating did. The videos helped to teach people about ALS. This is what prompted donations and got many celebrities on board with the cause.

There comes a point when spreading awareness is not enough. As well as tweeting about a problem, we should do our part to solve it.

During the Arab Spring of 2011, for example, social media was used to organize protests. In the week of President Hosni Mubarak’s resignation, the number of tweets in Egypt increased from 2,000 a day to more than 200,000. Protesters posted videos featuring political commentary to YouTube, and the top 23 videos received more than 5 million views. Protests were not confined to social media but led to an entire regional movement.

Whether it is through donating money or time, we must create solutions to the issues we feel passionate about. Spreading awareness is the first step, but it can’t be the only one. Social media and #activism make it easy to become aware and make others aware of problems in the world. Now we must take this awareness and use it to make a real difference. ♦

Table for One

by Madeleine Bertch, Tempe, AZ

I have had the same conversation roughly 79 billion times, and it still unsettles me. Interestingly, only once has it been with a male. It usually goes something like this:

“Don’t you just hate going to the dining hall alone?”

“Not really.”

“How is that possible?”

“Well, I sometimes prefer to talk to no one. I did it all the time at community college. It wasn’t like high school, where everybody made it a huge deal.”

“I can’t do it. If I don’t know that I’ll see someone I know in the dining hall, then I don’t eat.”

“What do you mean, you don’t eat?”

“I just live off of the [granola bars/celery/Chex Mix] in my dorm room. I, like, can’t eat alone in the dining hall.”

This phenomenon might be a side effect of being a first-year female college student, but I think its origin is the high school cafeteria. I remember the looks people gave me if I ever sat by myself in the lunchroom: *Does that chick have any friends?* It is my firm belief that college provides people far better things to do than judge the lone she-wolf and her Dixie cup of gelato. If someone does give you the Judy Face, they’re probably getting a degree in underwater basket-weaving and they really don’t have anything

better to do.

Unfortunately, society is abundant with judgmental types who get off on making you feel inferior for completely normal and healthy behavior. (Here’s looking at you, Internet.) Recently, 4Chan, a popular image board site, birthed a meme that further ruined the idea of dining solo: the infamous “Forever Alone” guy, with a boulder-like chin and a lonely tear on his cheek, smiles through a gritty complexion. His image is used for self-deprecation and serves as a tool for online public scrutiny. For instance, if someone were to post a Facebook status about ordering for one at a restaurant, it wouldn’t be long before someone plastered the Forever Alone guy in a sneering comment.

Restaurants, too, have perpetuated our fear of eating alone. You often see the single-seaters along the periphery and in the back of the establishment. If you don’t have an eating accomplice, don’t even think about sitting at that well-lit table near the host. Loners, even gregarious people who eat alone for the sake of efficiency, are becoming second-class.

Sure, society is ruining the experience of solitude, but now that we’re adults, we have to let it go. Is mere conversation the sole legitimate reason to eat in public? Can someone really

tell how worthy we are as humans based on the number of obligatory mid-chew head nods?

If you want to get by in life, drop the I’m-So-Popular-I-Never-Have-Time-To-Pee facade. Those of us who are in college can see through it now. If I’m hungry, I don’t care about waiting for a group of friends to join me, though I might have been conditioned to.

Honestly, why would you rob yourself of the joy of actually tasting your food and observing the scenery uninterrupted? I don’t need to hear about how horrible your sociology professor is, or how “turnt” you got on Crossfade Wednesday, while I’m trying to enjoy my salad. The image of you puking your guts out is not appetizing. I would much rather stare at the clouds.

In the spirit of emotional well-being and overall humanism, it is my wish that people will embrace and celebrate the act of eating – and being – alone. Life will be full of lonely moments unless you learn to like your own company. If you can take a shower, read a book, or practice the aria from “Carmen” *tout seul*, you sure as heck can tuck into a sandwich. At least it’s more socially acceptable than conducting a

Lone eaters are becoming second-class

dead boys’ mothers

there is a mother, somewhere.

her belly is swollen with promise of button nose and child’s laughter.

soon after, there are boys lying dead on concrete left to rot in the road. they are not given burial. see, it is rumored that not even god wants these children.

their mothers stand stiff-backed and tight-lipped, a legion. they say they wish for peace, each time. they cry, they mourn, they don’t ever go silent.

by Rebecca Zaritsky, Fair Lawn, NJ

one-woman opera in the dining hall.

If you ever feel hungry – whether during zombie hour or at midday – then eat the granola bar. But do it because you’re a lazy teenager, not because you’re afraid of eating alone in public. To all of you budding independents, let me heartily say: happy Lone Wolfing your food. ♦

Spoiled Riches

by Adesuwa Agbonile, Kirkland, WA

When I was eight, my parents gave me a monthly allowance of \$15. Back then, this was an extravagant amount of money. The first of every month I would go to my parents, collect my cash, and hold it with all the reverence in the world.

After about a year of almost foolhardy frugality, I had finally managed to save up \$100. I can so clearly remember going to the bank, handing my crumpled ones, fives, and tens to the teller, and receiving a crisp \$100 bill. I remember looking at the face on the money and thinking with awe, *So Benjamin Franklin is the guy on the hundred-dollar bill!*

It was a fortune! I was rich! I went to the store later that week and proudly handed my money to the cashier in exchange for a blue Nintendo DS Lite. I can honestly say that was one of the happiest moments of my life, holding that precious box – carefully, so carefully – in my hands and knowing that it was mine. I was the one who bought it. No one could take it from me, because I had earned it.

One hundred dollars was a huge, almost incomprehensible amount of money to eight-year-old me. Yet, as I grew older, I realized that it’s not.

That right there is the definition of growing up. Realizing that a hundred bucks is chicken change. Realizing that a thousand dollars isn’t really that much money. When big

numbers become small, when getting good grades stops being enough, when coming second stops being a reason to celebrate. When you look at college prices and start to think, really think, about the absurd amount of money you have to pay per year. \$40,000? That’s 400 Nintendo DSes. Four hundred Benjamin Franklins, four hundred piles of crumpled tens spread out on your twin bed.

It’s absurdly disheartening to grow up and lose that wide-eyed youthful wonder. To have the delight of crisp bills and new toys forgotten, replaced with strenuous all-nighters and lifeless 2,000-word reports. It makes you wonder, where, exactly, you went wrong. When did I become so cynical and formless? When did I forget the joy of simplicity – that childlike euphoria of spreading out bills on my bed, tasting the delicious rapture that came simply from knowing I’d accomplished the marvelous feat of having a hundred dollars?

And it makes you ache. You think, despairingly, about how to recapture that magical feeling. How do you hold a concept in your hand or taste a dream on your lips? My life has become so incredibly centered around bigger, better, stronger, faster things, powering toward the future instead of living in the now, and I’m exhausted. It is exhausting going to school and telling yourself that you have to be better than everyone else. But I’ve been taught that this is the only way to get into a good college, which is the

“Success” only exists in the highest tax bracket



Photo by Millen Dang, Jacksonville, FL

only way to get a good job, which is the only way to make enough money to live a good life. Society encourages us to believe that we can only be content if we are above everybody else, that “success” only exists in the highest tax bracket.

I want to go back to my younger self, in all of her naivety and wonder. I miss the simple joy of a \$15 allowance, holding Benjamin Franklin between my chubby fingers, clutching my shiny new Nintendo DS to my chest and never longing for more. I miss feeling content.

Do you? ♦

FAMILY

Big Hero 6

“Big Hero 6,” Disney’s latest animated venture, is an action-packed adventure. Filled with tragic beginnings, loyal best friends, simple but witty humor, and a heroic and determined young lead, “Big Hero 6” perfectly fits the equation for a successful Disney superhero epic.

Six super-genius kids use their intelligence to design technologies to enhance their abilities. They are led by Hiro, the youngest, who becomes friends with Baymax – a robot his brother, Tadashi, made to act as a personal healthcare assistant – and beefs him up to help fight the villain who killed Tadashi.



Witty humor and heartfelt story

Baymax and Hiro’s relationship creates moments of humor and heart throughout the film. Hiro teaching Baymax how to fist bump, and Baymax, adding sound effects to the gesture, brings a roar of laughter in the theater. As the movie progresses, the puffy and lovable Baymax teaches Hiro a thing or two about humanity.

The soundtrack serves its purpose well in making the audience not only sympathize with the characters but also feel the characters’ emotions.

The ending and the song that is played with the credits send the audience out of the theater euphorically pumped up with restored faith in humanity. The end brings twists and turns that may be anticipated by adults but will leave the target audience, children, utterly stunned.

“Big Hero 6” was loosely inspired by a Marvel comic book series of the same name. This movie presents the origin story of these superheroes and their strong ties to each other. It would be especially appealing to fans of Iron Man, as these six heroes’ powers are only possible through the technology their minds design. The audience is left with the same excited, anything-is-possible feeling that comes from any good superhero epic.

This movie is a must-see for adults and children alike. The witty humor and heartfelt story work hand-in-hand to create a thoroughly entertaining experience. No audience will leave disappointed. ♦

by Anubhuti Kumar, Strongsville, OH

TEEN

Heathers

“What is your damage, Heather?” With this quote, spoken early on in Michael Lehmann’s satirical high school film, “Heathers” set itself apart from typical teen movies. Released in 1988, the story follows whip-smart Veronica Sawyer (Winona Ryder), as she rebels against her friend group of cruel popular girls who – you guessed it – are all named Heather.

With the help of mysterious outsider J.D. (Christian Slater), Veronica’s plan to put an end to the Heather dynasty quickly escalates. Veronica, along with the audience, falls under the spell of J.D.’s utter coolness (earring! leather jacket!), sharp tongue, and flippant attitude toward violence, and soon the pair are quipping their way through murder with such ease that the lines of right and wrong blur beyond repair.

“Heathers” is a far cry from the earnest John Hughes teen comedies that were so popular at the time, but it also lacked an adult parallel, leaving it to change both dark comedies and teen films forever. Without “Heathers” there would be no “Mean Girls” or “Easy A,” and ’90s teens might have grown up without “Clueless.”

Betraying the dark subject matter, “Heathers” is shot in light pastels and adorned with classically awful ’80s hair and clothes. The script is an intricate gift that keeps on giving, providing not only a suspenseful turn of events but also quotable lines and dizzying wordplay.



Changed dark comedies and teen films forever

“Heathers” works as a deft, dark satire by knowingly including archetypal characters like Ram, a dumb joke, and a forlorn overweight girl dubbed Martha Dumptruck.

The soundtrack, mostly made up of spooky synths, is topped off with the song “Teenage Suicide (Don’t Do It)” by the fictitious band Big Fun, heightening the satire.

“Heathers” failed at the box office but has enjoyed decades of success as a cult hit. What may have once been regarded as shocking fits in nicely with today’s jaded culture toward violence and dark humor. Luckily for us, “Heathers” is as sharp as ever, and revenge has never been so good. ♦

by Kate McCarthy, San Francisco, CA

This film is rated R.

DOCUMENTARY

Spellbound

You want to be sure your bladder is empty before sitting down to watch “Spellbound,” because this nail-biting documentary doesn’t contain any dull moments to allow you to escape to the restroom. Directed by Jeffery Blitz, “Spellbound” is a documentary about the 1999 Scripps-Howard National Spelling Bee.

“Spellbound” begins by introducing eight contestants. From wealthy Emily to hardworking Neil, from Ted the farm boy to Angela with her Spanish-speaking father, each is unique. They all share one goal – to win. However, out of 249 contestants, only one can become the champion speller. Viewers will cheer for every child, but your heart goes out to the contestants from impoverished or immigrant families. You know how much it will mean to them and their parents if they win.

This thrilling documentary will not only touch your heart but will cause it

to race. The editing by Yana Gorskaya highlights the drama that grips you as you watch contestants attempt to spell difficult words. You wait with bated breath as they deliberate, often while unconsciously pulling hilarious faces. If they are wrong, you feel your heart shatter as their disappointed faces fill

the screen. But if they are right, you cheer and smile, overjoyed.

The score, arranged by Daniel Hulsizer, enhances the tension. Short and staccato notes play as contestants spell difficult words causing your blood pressure to skyrocket. Also, the lack of music as the

children think creates overwhelming drama as you beg, “Please get the word right!”

This documentary is chock-full of heartwarming victories, tear-inducing failures, and endless tension. “Spellbound” is i-n-t-e-n-s-e. ♦

by Alicia Marzolf, Cupertino, CA



i-n-t-e-n-s-e

TV

Eureka

While this review may be a few years late, considering “Eureka” ended in 2012, this review (and expression of love for the show) needs to happen. “Eureka” is about Jack Carter (Colin Ferguson), who gets stranded in the small town of Eureka, Oregon, with his daughter, Zoe (Jordan Hinson), only to become the sheriff and protector of the world’s greatest minds. Jack and the townspeople work together through unstable wormholes, rips in the space-time continuum, and “body-swapping” – yet come out of every disaster happier than ever.



An offbeat masterpiece from Syfy

The characters are well written, and the acting is even better, whether we’re watching the everyman Jack in a town of super-geniuses, Jo Lupo (Erica Cerra) and her gun-toting personality that hides her girlish side, or Henry Deacon (Joe Morton), a thoughtful and respected physicist.

The visual effects for the series are surprisingly high-end, especially for the Syfy channel, which in the end was its downfall (it was canceled due to its high budget).

The musical score from Bear McCreary drives the emotion and action with flair and finesse, with the help of Mark Mothersbaugh’s upbeat theme. The direction is superb, always finding balance between the quirks and the seriousness of the situation.

There isn’t a single bad thing I can say about “Eureka,” other than that it should have gone on for another season. It’s not that it felt rushed (the ending was spectacular), but it was simply too soon to see the crew go.

If you have yet to visit “Eureka,” I suggest you find it on Netflix, rent it, or buy the entire series like I did. (This especially goes out to fans of the canceled series “Firefly”; “Eureka” has a similar feel.) No movie or TV collection is complete without this captivating, offbeat masterpiece from Syfy. ♦

by Jared Kuntz, Kuna, ID

Cheek to Cheek • Tony Bennett and Lady Gaga

You probably didn't think that Lady Gaga and Tony Bennett would ever release a collaborative album. To many, these two artists could not be more different. She's the eccentric, controversial diva who has lit pianos on fire, worn raw meat as clothes, and shot sparks from a pyrotechnic bra; he's the beloved, classy crooner whose legendary jazz records could probably be found in your grandparents' house. But if you scoff at the idea of a collaboration between these two, I'd advise you to think again, because their new jazz album, "Cheek to Cheek," is nothing short of a masterpiece.

The pair team up to cover nine jazz standards, including the title track "Cheek to Cheek" from the 1935 film "Top Hat," Dorothy Fields' "I Can't Give You Anything But Love," and Cole Porter's "Anything Goes." This

song is catchy and upbeat enough on its own, but hearing Lady Gaga sing it adds a whole new kind of fun. When she delivers the first line, "In olden days a glimpse of stocking was looked on as something shocking/Now heaven knows anything goes," there's a hint of acknowledgment in her voice about the irony of the situation. Lady Gaga practically embodies the outrageous, post-censorship modern entertainment industry, and yet she delivers these elegant classics as if she were a singer from 90 years ago. Her clear, powerful voice is complemented beautifully by Bennett's velvety, swing-

ing tones.

As enchanting as these duets are, each artist also gets a chance at a solo.



Nothing short of a masterpiece

Lady Gaga flawlessly executes a heartfelt rendition of Billy Strayhorn's melancholy "Lush Life." Gaga has explained that she has been singing this song since she was 13, but after a recent bout with misfortune, she is able to truly relate to the bittersweet lyrics, and it shows. Many artists have attempted to cover this song, but Gaga is

among the few to sing it beautifully. Her voice glides effortlessly through its wide range and conveys all the woe and sorrow of a lonely, unlucky alcoholic.

Next, Bennett confirms what we already know: at 88, he has not lost his talent, and probably never will. His solo is a charming cover of Duke Ellington's classic "Sophisticated Lady," a perfect song to follow "Lush Life." It's almost as if he's trying to cheer up its forlorn narrator, assuring her that all is not lost. What's truly great about the dynamic between these two songs is that it reflects the friendship that Bennett and Gaga share, adding a heartwarming new dimension to the album.

"Cheek to Cheek" is a brilliant collaboration that is the result of a brilliant friendship. With two singles reaching number one on the Billboard Jazz Digital Songs Chart, it's sure to please jazz fans and Lady Gaga fans alike. ♦

by Arden Orth, New York, NY

FOUR • One Direction

"So here it is, for all you people who have been turning us off for the last four years, this next album is about to blow your minds!" Liam Payne of One Direction, the world-famous boy band from the UK, tweeted last May. And as of November 17, 2014, the release date of the band's fourth album, nothing has been truer. Titled "FOUR," their newest album makes One Direction the only group in history to debut at number one with each of their first four albums. Featuring rock-inspired tracks while still incorporating a modern touch of pop, "FOUR" is no doubt one of the boys' best albums yet.

Since the band's formation in 2010, they have continuously striven to create a more mature sound, and "FOUR" accomplishes just that. Tracks like "Where Do Broken Hearts Go" and "Stockholm Syndrome" bring to mind Rick Springfield and Bruce Springsteen; after all, the band has cited the '80s as a major inspiration. The album's second single, "Night Changes," full of soft tones and storytelling lyrics, fills listeners' minds with images of driving down an empty street on a starry night. And Liam Payne's falsetto note during the bridge of the song is sure to make you bow your head in respect.



Maturing lyrics and a more distinct style

Songs like "Clouds" and "Spaces" seem to be written specifically for the band's live performances. They consist of vocals that could be perfectly echoed throughout some of the biggest stadiums in the world, sure to be visited by One Direction on their 2015 tour. Their "On the Road Again Tour" will make

stops in Australia, Japan, and South Africa, to name just a few. The good news is that the boys will also be performing in North America.

Although "FOUR" includes a lot of dance-ready songs that loyal fans and casual listeners alike can find themselves jamming out to, there are also more relaxed songs here. "18" (written by Ed Sheeran) and "Fool's Gold" show off a simpler sound, while the captivating yet laid-back "Fireproof" will be stuck in your head for days.

The boys of 1D have made it clear that this album is the one they take the most pride in, and fans will agree. Whether it's because of the maturing lyrics or the more distinct style, vocalists Niall Horan, Zayn Malik, Liam Payne, Harry Styles, and Louis Tomlinson have finally reached the sound the band has been working toward since its formation. Unlike many boy bands of the past, it seems One Direction will be sticking around for a while. ♦

by Kelsey Johnson, Oxford, NJ

Vinyl • PEAR

Pear, a husband and wife duo hailing from Canada, has just released their sophomore album. In 2012, they released their debut, "Sweet n' Gritty," to great success. The 13-track album was a standout. At the time, I honestly thought, *Who goes into the studio and makes a debut album this good?* There seemed to be no way they could top themselves.

After multiple listens to their newest record, released in March and simply titled "Vinyl," I believe the duo has indeed topped themselves. They are calling the new record a departure from their previous work. However, in my opinion, that is not the case. The term "departure" seems a bit extreme. While they surely did not make the same record twice, instead of departing entirely, Pear has expanded with their newest body of work. They do not pull back or hesitate from showing growth. In fact, it seems as if growth was the goal for the album, and I hope to see more of it in the future.

"Vinyl" starts out with an instrumental "Prelude" and seamlessly breaks into the title track. The arrangement blows up in your face – it's loud and rocking. If you don't get hooked on an album that begins with the lines "33 RPMs dropping needle, stick it in the grooves out pop the Beatles," there is something wrong with you. The song pays homage to the days of having all good music on vinyl records.

The rest of the album follows suit

in that each song tells a story through poppy, rootsy music. "Vinyl" includes two instrumental tracks that are the true defining points of this record. "Jochanan and the Giraffe" and "Dance of the Chicken Snails" showcase the truly incredible musicians that Denis and Lynae Dufresne are. On the instrumental tracks, they allow their fans to see their craft blend together masterfully.

Vocally, Pear is on par as well. Lynae's voice is more refreshing than ever. On "In Love With You," she shines. The song is simple and sweet. Denis also contributes more vocally to this album, even singing lead on "Goodbye Sweet Lorraine."

"Vinyl" is electrifying and brilliant, all in just under 45 minutes. I cannot stop raving about it. Pear takes you for a ride from start to end. (A word of advice: hold on tight.)

If this album does not put Pear on top of the music world in Canada, there is a huge problem. I know many other critics who have had the chance to review the album and said similar things; it is all true. They evolve to another level while staying true to who they are. The new elements on this record are subtle and should not scare anyone away. Change can be scary, but if it is done right, what is there to worry about? ♦

by Cody Jendro, Temecula, CA



Electrifying and brilliant all in under 45 minutes

The Scorch Trials • by James Dashner

It turns out that the maze of James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* was only the beginning. In *The Scorch Trials*, the second book in the trilogy, Thomas and his companions, the Gladers, now have to travel across a desert with the scorching sun burning their backs. The conditions are dangerous, with lightning striking down on the group and wind blinding them. They finally reach a city, but the constant threat of being killed is a burden as they try to make it to the safe haven in time.

Thomas and the Gladers are in Phase Two of an experiment created by WICKED (World In Catastrophe: Killzone Experiment Department). WICKED is a government agency formed by surviving nations to defeat the Flare, a deadly disease that turns people insane. The Gladers, who are infected, have two weeks to cross the Scorch to reach the safe haven, where they will receive a cure. Along the way are the Variables, which were carefully manipulated by WICKED. These obstacles provide shocking and entertaining twists that kept me guessing. Many questions from the previous novel were answered, but new questions arose as well, leaving me even more intrigued. The plot makes a smooth transition between *The Maze Runner* and the final book, *The Death Cure*.



Another amazing sci-fi story

Dashner's unique writing style adds to the quality of this science fiction novel. The vivid descriptions helped me visualize every scene, from the desert to the hot room filled with Cranks, the victims of the Flare. With descriptions like Dashner's, it felt as though a movie was playing in my head.

The Scorch Trials has excellent characterization as well. From the dialogue alone, I was able to see Thomas's emotional side, Minho's sarcasm, and Newt's determination to get things done. This was true for new characters too, including Brenda, the tough girl, and merciless Jorge. I felt strongly about these characters, loving the admirable ones and hating the evil ones. It is important to be able to emotionally connect with the characters because it shows their depth. I also thought that the characters felt very realistic;

I never doubted any of their actions.

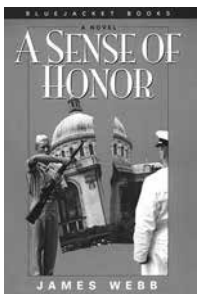
This number-one *New York Times* and *USA Today* best-selling author has done it again. James Dashner's unique plot and writing style combine to create another amazing sci-fi story that stands out among other dystopian novels. After finishing *The Maze Runner*, you will find yourself hiking through the desert just to pick up a copy of the *The Scorch Trials*. It is definitely worth it. ♦

by Raisa Khuda, Brooklyn, NY

FICTION

A Sense of Honor • by James Webb

A Sense of Honor by James Webb is a thrilling novel that attempts to capture the experiences of cadets at the United States Naval Academy. Though fictional, this story has its roots in Webb's own experience at the Naval Academy and his enlistment into the United States Marine Corps. I found it very enjoyable.



Informative & entertaining

The book takes place over the course of just a few days. Readers follow a "plebe" (freshman), a captain, and a few midshipmen first class as they attempt to make their way through the trials of the Naval Academy during a time of war. Their stories, though vastly different, are inevitably intertwined. Each character chases his definition of success and works hard to reach accomplishments.

As someone truly fascinated with the service academies, I found myself engulfed in *A Sense of Honor*, unable to put it down. I even ended up rereading it a few times, and the story entertained me each time. Anyone who is thinking about going to the Naval Academy should read this book. I would rate it a perfect 10/10. It features amazing writing, an interesting story line, and a multilayered plot that Webb manages to pull together to allow the stories to come full circle.

Webb is a fantastic author who allows his audience to not only read the story but truly sit down and think about it. *A Sense of Honor* is informative and entertaining for readers as they become an omnipotent overseer of the midshipman experience. ♦

by Bobby Bendik, State College, PA

HOT NEW RELEASE

I'm Glad I Did • by Cynthia Weil

During the summer of 1963, JJ Green decides to take her destiny into her own hands. Encouraged by her parents to find a summer job, preferably at the family lawyer's firm, she defies them by going against their wishes. As she follows her dreams, she finds an intern position in the Brill



Captures her audience quickly

Building, which she hopes will help her songwriting career. JJ doesn't listen to her parents' warnings about the evils of the music industry until she finds herself part of a murder mystery. This is the story that unfolds in the recently released *I'm Glad I Did* by Cynthia Weil.

Knowing Weil wrote this book made me nervous to read it for fear her vernacular would be over my head. Fortunately, she realizes most readers' lack of music knowledge. If you do not know her, Cynthia Weil is the songwriter behind many famous songs, including my favorite, "On Broadway."

In her debut novel, Weil captures her audience quickly. As you turn the pages, you are enraptured by JJ Green and wish for her to succeed, but each step she takes comes with a price. I think that this book shows a great historical view of the music industry, including the tension between races during the civil rights movement as rock 'n' roll came to life.

I rate the book 4/5 stars and recommend you look for this novel. As the novel says, I'm Glad I Did (read the book). ♦

by Aly Paparella, Hamburg, NJ

HORROR

Pet Sematary • by Stephen King

Pet Sematary by Stephen King is a novel that is certain to remain in your memory forever. King has a way of surprising readers, and with an ominously entertaining plot like this, he will definitely have you biting your nails and turning the pages.

The book revolves around the Creed family, who live near a mystical Native American burial site – now a pet cemetery – that brings the family's pet cat back to life as a demonic being.

King has a very relatable tone in his writing, and the characters are believable. I often found myself having an I-was-thinking-the-same-thing moment. The characters deal with situations differently from the average family, but you can still relate to them.

Even though it has a terribly frightening plot, *Pet Sematary* contains many realistic situations. The cemetery isn't the center of attention. It isn't the only thing that drives the family to insanity; more accurately, it adds to their loss of brain cells.

Loss is a huge contributing factor to the family losing their minds. The father buries a loved one in the

pet cemetery, knowing its power to resurrect; however, he also knows that the buried come back demonic. Knowing that and still burying a person in the cemetery is hard to imagine.

Sadness followed by madness is a great way to explain the plot, and King's way of going from one to the other is phenomenal. This best-seller is intense, scary, and completely vile in the best ways possible. Also, it lacks a resolution, which I find incredibly frightening.

I would recommend *Pet Sematary* to anyone seeking a good scare. An age consideration for this book is unnecessary, since it has great vocabulary and structure for older readers but still holds the focus of a younger reader.

King's *Pet Sematary* is one to add to your favorites. A plot with a family moving near a magical pet cemetery is greatly suspenseful. Sometimes, dead is better; this slogan is used in the novel and is intensely proved by King. Read the novel, and perhaps you will decide for yourself whether that's true. ♦

by Timmy Walker, Alum Creek, WV



Terribly frightening plot

Stuck in the Past

by Isaac Wilde, Arlington, MA

Tom sniffed, his nose red from pollen. It was the Spring Fair, and all the lovely pink dogwood trees in the town park were flowering. Tom resented them for it. More flowers, more pollen. He took a greasy rag from his greasy slacks and wiped the sweat off his face.

Next to Tom was his pride and joy: the world's first time machine. It had taken him months of scrounging for parts at the auto mechanics shop where he worked, but he finally had a working engine. At least, he hoped it worked. The fair would be its maiden voyage.

The first people began to trickle into the park, walking along the pleasant little dirt path and dodging the most outgoing of the vendors. Cries of "Oranges! Fresh oranges!" and "Sweetest corn cakes you can buy!" started to fill the air, along with the smell of dough hitting the deep fryer.

One of Tom's friends from school sauntered up. He was a cook at the town's only restaurant, and he still had on the stained apron. "Hey, uh, hey, man. Whatcha, uh, whatcha whatcha got here?" His voice was shifty, and he kept checking over his shoulder nervously. It was a habit of his, compounded by a small criminal record.

"It's a time machine," Tom said proudly, sticking his hands in his pocket and standing straighter. Tom didn't like to elaborate on things. Excessive English usage was for school.

Zack laughed. "Sure, uh, sure it is, man. Are you, uh, going to, to use it?"

"Yes," Tom said.

Zack waved his arms, trying to eke some more information from his friend.

"I will give a demonstration in five minutes," Tom said, gesturing toward a dial on the engine that was, indeed, counting down.

Zack raised his eyebrows. "Are you sure that's, that's a time machine? Looks like, uh, like a car engine." Zack didn't like standing still, and began shifting his weight from foot to foot.

"There are parts of a car engine in it," Tom said, nodding. Sweat trickled down his bare chest and under his suspender straps.

"Great, uh, great, man."

"Could you tell others to come for the demonstration?" Tom asked. No one else had come to see his time machine.

"Sure, man," Zack said, and wandered off into the now large crowd. Tom watched a couple enter the park – a woman in a frilly pink dress and a sun umbrella, and a man in a suit. Their arms were linked.

"Hello there, young man," a voice said from behind Tom. Tom didn't jump or start but slowly turned around and looked at the pastor from North Elmwood United Methodist. Standing next to him was the pastor from South Elmwood United Methodist. They were both wearing suits and bowler hats and looked like twins, which was fitting, since they were.

"Hello, pastors," Tom said, politely. Tom went to East Elmwood Catholic but tried not to get on the bad side of the United Methodist ministers. They both had quite intimidating girths.

"What do you have here?" one asked. Tom didn't know their names.

"A time machine."

"Really?" the other said, disbelieving.

"Yes," Tom said.

"I think no manly device could have a power that

is God's alone." They started to walk away.

"Stay for the demonstration, please. It's in two minutes."

One checked his watch. "Okay, young Tom. We shall see this play out." They stood together, waiting.

Zack walked up to Tom again. Behind him was a collection of kids from the high school. Some were laughing and pointing at the time machine. Others had arched eyebrows and skeptical looks. "Here's, uh, here's your audience, Tom," Zack said.

"Thanks," Tom said. "The pastors will watch too." "Great, man."

One of the kids, a tall strong boy from the rugby team, spoke up. "Yo, man! You saying this stupid lookin' car engine o' yours is gonna take me back in time?"

"All of us back in time," Tom corrected.

"Yeah? I don't believe you. When's it gonna happen?"

Tom looked at the dial on the engine. "In twenty seconds it will have enough energy to take us back in time ten seconds."

A kid laughed; more joined in. Zack looked nervous, glancing at Tom. "You, uh, you sure, man?"

"Yes. In seven seconds it will take us back ten seconds." Tom sniffed and rubbed his nose. Stupid allergies. "Ready?" He looked at the small crowd that had gathered. The couple he had seen walking had

come to watch. They all looked at him expectantly. "3 ... 2 ... 1 ... G–"

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"Are you sure that's a time machine?"



Photo by Mariah Deschler, Spring Grove, MN

The (Laser) Quest for Love

by Keilani Snyder, Corona Del Mar, CA

It was a Friday night, and despite the cool atmosphere, my heart burned for him. He had these blue eyes like pools of water that reflected the red and white LEDs from the sign above us. His pale skin softly glowed in the light. We stood next to each other, ready to dive into battle. And then, together, as one being of pure strength, we stepped through the doors of Laser Quest. We strode toward the front desk, and after exchanging words with the ecstatic cashier, Cuzco, we received our cards. We then discussed our code names and battle plans. My name was Doris; he was Boris. We were one team. We were meant to be.

The next room we stepped into was dark, like a cavern. Glowing paintings glared at us from the walls, and small children dotted the room, screaming like bloodthirsty, laser-wielding chimpanzees. In any other circumstance, I would have been afraid. In any other circumstance, I would have felt adrenaline coursing through my veins, for my fear would overwhelm me. But here, next to my love, I felt like I had just become prom queen. The adrenaline came from my admiration of him. He was the armor to my knight. He was the shell to my snail. But he was not mine. If only he had known.

The doors opened; we were in chaos. Looming towers surrounded us, and the skies above were black and endless. The neon wall designs attacked my eyes, tearing at my sanity. I grabbed my laser

gun and attempted to calm myself. Little did I know he was there behind me, slaying children with his glorious red beams of light, protecting me. And his love hit me again, much like how his lasers hit the children. It cut through me, red-hot, and pierced my heart, making me vulnerable and self-conscious.

Seconds later, we were running. We bolted from a horde of laser-wielding children like deer fleeing a wolf pack. Lasers were flying by us, and my love was hit. Startled by the saddening *beep beep beep* of his laser pack, he shouldered a wall. Everything was in slow motion. Everything was dark. He fell, his feather-like hair fluttering. I screamed, "Marshal! Marshal! Marshal!" But it was too late. There he lay, a heap on the floor. Unmoving. The pride drained from him.

Hours later, I lay in my room. Awaiting news of my concussion-stricken crush, I thought *It's over*. For it was. After the embarrassing and tragic incident, my partner "Boris" would likely be too pained to return to Laser Quest. Our relationship would likely never be the same, and I had to accept that. Eventually I would find another partner, another love. Yet still I was stricken with grief. That is why rule number six of the Laser Quest soldiers is, "I will not run, jump, or climb." For if you run, if you jump, then you will fall. You will fall like my love, or you will fall in love like me. ♦

His love cut through me, red-hot

Going South

by Jarrek Holmes, Littleton, CO

New York didn't like Eddie MacMurragh, and neither did Massachusetts, New Jersey, or Pennsylvania. This wasn't the fifties anymore; the blues were just a color, and nobody wanted another black saxophone player. He'd played the streets, mostly, pounding out emotions into music and watching people walk right on by. An uptown restaurant had offered him a gig for a few months, and that had been all right. He'd gotten to play every night, and people didn't really listen, but at least they heard. Sometimes, on slow nights when the Jets weren't playing and the song was a real doozy, they'd even applaud. He liked that.

The only problem was that he wasn't allowed to play any blues, just jazz. The showy kind. It wasn't his style; it lacked the blues' soul, the part that touched you. He quit after a few months.

He went looking for a place where people still appreciated the blues and still loved to hear that soul. A place where people would really hear him play. It wasn't long before he put all his worldly belongings into a couple of packs and started to make his way back home. Back to the South. Back to a place where music is as much a part of life as breathing. Which led him here.

Here, walking along some highway, his back curved with the weight of what he carried, sweat dripping from his nose and dust clogging his spit.

He was not old, but by no means was Eddie young, and the sun beat on him like a hammer on its anvil. He'd been doing all right, really. He'd been making good time, playing when he couldn't pay, sleeping under the stars when there wasn't anywhere else. That was up until he'd been abandoned. Some farmer had left him at a

fork in the road three miles from the closest town with nothing but an apology and an old baseball cap. It was a Yankee cap, but it was too hot to complain. It seemed like Eddie had been walking for years, but it could have been just an hour, he wasn't sure.

He thought about his mamma while he walked, and oh, lordy, was she a sweet one. He remembered her telling him things to help him get through, the kind of things every mother tells

her children when they're little and getting bullied or think they're nothing.

"Now, honey, you got dreams? 'Cause, honey, let me tell you, you gonna get 'em. All of 'em. If you want something, you smart enough, you fast enough,

and you good enough to go get 'em. That's right, and I know it."

Then she'd hand him a cookie and brush his cheek with the back of her hand, her skin slick with sweat from working in the kitchen. At those moments he'd feel good, right down to his bones, like he really could do whatever he dreamed up.

He stumbled, and his feet took him back to the place he was. He glanced up. The sun's heat poured back into him, banishing the last tendrils of memory. A man was standing in the road, which was strange on an unused road such as this – longer and flatter, it seemed, than it had been a moment before. Dustier, too.

All Eddie wanted right then was for a car to come along, pick him up, and take him away from this place. But none came, and the man didn't move. So Eddie adjusted the pack on his shoulders, bent his head to the dust, and kept walking.

The man was a strange one, that was to be sure. Stranger than the man himself, though, was his suit: Italian, silk, freshly ironed and pressed, immaculate. The man looked like he was born to wear it.

"Do you have dreams, boy?" the man asked, his voice a whisper even across the space between them. The words were Eddie's mamma's, but the voice was surely not.

"Excuse me?"

"I asked if you could play, boy. Can you?" The distance between them seemed to close with increasing speed. Eddie stepped forward and the ground wrinkled until they were standing just a pace apart.

"Well, boy, is that case on your back rattling or not?" the man asked, half a smile curving his face, just the hint of a chuckle in his voice. Dark black wraparound sunglasses covered

his eyes, and he relaxed languidly on the side of the road as though he was in an upscale hotel or at a cocktail party. The suit was pinstriped and seemed to repel the dust; his loafers gleamed with polish.

"Excuse me, sir?" Eddie asked again. His throat was parched, and his voice cracked on the second syllable. Eyes darting, feet shifting, Eddie kept his head down but couldn't help looking toward the sun as it set.

"Well, I'm something of a musician myself. I... well, you could say I... dabble in the performing arts. I recognize a fellow musician when I see one. And you are one, aren't you, boy?"

"Yessir. I play the sax."

"Well, isn't that just wonderful," the man said, all but clapping his hands with excitement. "Can I see it?"

A soft voice – his mamma's voice – whispered in the back of Eddie's mind, telling him that the man was going to steal his saxophone. Telling him to run while he still could. Maybe it was the man's perfect suit or his very white face, or maybe the heat was finally getting to poor Eddie's head, but he shook off the feeling. There was no harm in showing his precious sax to a man on the side of the road, especially a well-dressed man. If he could afford a suit like that, he didn't need Eddie's sax.

Eddie unlatched the clasps slowly, especially the top one with the missing screw. He remembered his father's voice when he got the sax: "Ed, you're gonna go far with this, chil'. You gonna play like no one's ever played before. Like them greats, Armstrong and King, you gonna play. And we's gonna dance."

It was his tenth birthday, and the saxophone was as tall as he was. His lungs were too small to play a note and his fingers too weak to depress the keys, but he practiced and he played in his head. He wrote

symphonies in his mind and gave concerts in his imagination. He made music with his brain, and when he grew older and pumped out his first screeching trill, it was the closest thing to ecstasy he'd ever experienced. Music. Or something like it.

"She is a beauty, isn't she?" The man cooed as though speaking to an infant. He leaned in to touch the neck of the instrument.

"Don't touch it," Eddie barked. The words had slipped out before he could stop them. He dipped his head lower, but the man seemed to take it as a matter of course, moving on smoothly.

"Of course, of course." The voice

was pudding, silk on soft down. "Boy, I have a wager for you. I'll wager my silver fiddle for your precious sax, eh? I'll wager my silver against your brass that I can outplay you, boy."

In the man's hand there appeared a fiddle where there hadn't been one a moment before. Eddie, however, still bristling from the man's patronizing tone, barely noticed. Perhaps if he'd outright refused, packed his instrument away and hurried off, never glancing even once over his shoulder, he might have made it. But he didn't. Eddie licked his lips at that silver fiddle and imagined never playing jazz again. Spending his time in a cabin singing the blues, not a care in the world, money taken care of. A silver fiddle, real silver. Like any poor boy from the South, he knew silver when he saw it, and oh, did he want it.

The man's face split into a smile, sharp white canines peeking out. Without waiting for an answer, he said, "All right, boy, let's see what you've got."

Eddie took out that old saxophone as he'd done a hundred times. The white man smiled. For a moment, his face seemed to become black – but not black. Devoid. Empty of all things, all emotion, all purpose, all reason. Oblivion. Eddie took a breath, deep and true. And they played.

The saxophone's deep baritone set the stage, thrumming in and filling the great near-Southern air. Then the man snuck under the deep chord with a chilling note, sharp as a knife. They hesitated then, waiting for some great conductor to drop his hand, staring each other down over that patch of sand. The baton dropped. The man's

bow seemed to become liquid silver as it flourished beneath his chin, and Eddie's lungs heaved like the bellows of a forge. His cheeks puffed with air.

Eddie played the blues just like he was meant to, played his whole life's

story out. The man's music seemed to float and twist, merging harmony and melody into some bastard kind of beauty, and Eddie's notes held tight against them, losing ground when they could not gain. The great blue sky took their notes and flung them into the heavens. A single butterfly, caught in a swirling tempest, was buffeted by hurricane winds and flew on to fall as rain, lifeblood for the crops. Eddie grew and pounded back with his saxophone, raging against the man with every breath.

He knew, oh, Eddie knew, that he was fighting for much more than his father's saxophone. He thought he saw them then, his mother >>>

Eddie knew silver when he saw it, and oh, did he want it



Art by Eveline Liu, Naperville, IL

Don't Underestimate the Fly

by Lydia Wang, Novi, MI

Journal from the Tote Litarian Jail, who-knows-what month, who-knows-what day, 2045
How I Ended Up Here

The new police force was beautiful and efficient. We were told it'd be virtually unnoticeable – but, when noticed, just a bit annoying. The Flying Force buzzed in and out of public and sometimes private places with perfect 360-degree vision. They made the best police. At first, we didn't really mind the idea that they would invade our privacy. After all, we were told that they were only robots, not cameras.

After the ferocious attempt to unravel the brain's mysteries in the early 21st century, researchers yearning to win the \$5 billion reward started their experiments. Those who were already researching brain neurons stomped down on the gas pedal, and those who weren't changed their field. The common fruit fly, *Drosophila melanogaster*, was generally accepted as the ideal model organism for brain research. Neurobiology labs around the world were soon infested – and once the fruit fly's brain had been completely mapped out, robotics engineers got in on the action, too.

And just like that, we had robot flies buzzing around the world.

Most had gone along with the whole robot fly idea when it was first proposed, while a few others either wholeheartedly supported or dismissed it. Many thought that the flies would get rid of the problem of time delay for police arrival to crime scenes. The government assured us that the flies would not record videos unless they detected a crime, and when they did, we'd be able to tell; their eyes would turn red. Since a 66.7 percent majority supported the idea, the robot flies were soon released in black metallic hordes in a small ceremony attended solely by the president and the scientists directly involved in creating them.

But I soon regretted voting for the release of the flies. They quickly became annoying, with their constant buzzing and the twin white lights of their eyes. They were everywhere, from the park

to the grocery store, the bathroom to the bedroom. Whenever people did anything, they couldn't help thinking they were being watched, and whenever they did anything embarrassing, they whispered to themselves, "They don't know what I did. They don't understand," and watched warily to check if the flies' eyes had turned red and recorded them.

As time wore on, the flies' eyes seemed to flash red more often, even when I was simply taking my migraine medication. The newspapers reported that the government was starting to program the flies to be more sensitive to suspicious activity, to improve crime detection. But as the frequency of red fly eyes increased, I was starting to see red too.

One day, I was at a friend's birthday party. The leftover cake was sitting on the dining room table. I was preparing to cut myself a slice when I heard the all-too-familiar buzzing. I looked up and came fly-

to-eye with a red-eyed robot pest.

"Go away," I said. "I'm just cutting a slice of cake."

The robot fly scooted back a bit, but its eyes were still red. Just then, the host of the party walked by the snack table.

"When you're done with it, could you please bring the knife into the kitchen?" she hollered over the din of

the guests and music.

"Sure," I replied. I grabbed the handle and took a step toward the kitchen, only to find the red-eyed fly hovering in my face again.

"Are you taking a mugshot of me for carrying a knife into the kitchen?" I muttered. "Go away."

The fly didn't move. I took another step toward the kitchen, and the fly rammed its metal body against my forehead and gave me a zap.

"For heaven's sake," I exclaimed. "I'm just returning a knife to the kitchen!" I swatted at the fly.

The fly stung my hand, then started vibrating rapidly. I was so scared, I slowly reached out and placed the knife back on the cake platter. But the fly kept vibrating. I carefully walked away, only to find it following me. I felt cornered by that fly, smaller than my iris, hovering around my head. And so, in my fear, I laid my hands on the closest newspaper I

could find.

The fly seemed to understand what I was doing, and started spiraling above my head in an irregular pattern to avoid my blows. My arm swung up, down, right, left, diagonal curve up, figure-eight, but never did I get close to swatting it. The damn thing was just as deft at escape as a common housefly.

Soon I tired and sat on the floor, leaning against the wall, but the fly continued to buzz around my head. Suddenly, the lights in the room went off. Alarmed, I looked up at the ceiling to find a tightly packed army of rippling red dots. Wide-eyed with fear, I watched them loom closer and closer. I felt them sticking their legs in my hair, and I flinched. Immediately, thousands of blue-white light rays shot at my chest, and then everything went black.

Screw robots. And screw flies. ♦

People couldn't help thinking they were being watched

Blind Truth

That window is magic.
Every time I pull back the blue blind,
I look out into the parking lot, the truth,
lit by streetlights,
and my nose tingles and tickles
and the ice in my eyes melts.
I could leave, I could run, go AWOL,
but where to?
This isn't my home, this isn't Baltimore.
That window is magic,
I could open it and run,
but it freezes whenever I look through it,
like when I took ketamine, horse tranquilizer,
to get rid of the ice in my eyes.
That window is magic,
an unpassable threshold.
That window is magic,
pulling me in every night,
drawing me into panic.
And I'll keep staring at it,
staring at the truth,
'til I'm blind.

by Will Simoni, Cornish, UT

and father, standing outside the storm but cheering him forward, onward. "You can get 'em. Go get 'em, honey!" His father with his hands on his knees, his big black eyes twinkling with mirth. "Play, Ed, my boy, my man. Play!"

And he did like never before. That music would've been ineffable in the light of day and in retrospect, but then and there it fit like a jigsaw piece into a puzzle. They almost danced around each other, instruments held tightly in their grasps, knuckles white with exertion. Circling like boxers or predators around prey, their shuffling feet sending dust motes into the air. Until – with one final bellowing crescendo marred only by the fiddle's quick wit – it ended. The notes fell softly along the

great road, which seemed not quite so long nor as flat as a moment before.

The man smiled shakily and wiped sweat from his brow. "Well, boy, they told me you could play, and you can. But it doesn't matter now, does it?"

Hand over that saxophone. No reason to fret. I'll take good care of it."

He'd lost. Like so many before him. Eddie, his chest still rising and falling from his great billowing breaths, felt despair. He'd failed, and the Devil knew.

Then, like an angel rising from the setting sun, a dust cloud billowed toward the pair. Detroit rolling iron, a pickup truck, built and operated by

American hands, red like the bleeding sun it seemed to have been born from.

The man whirled around, whatever magic he had now broken. Eddie darted forward before he could think, grasped at something around the man's

neck, and yanked. Even he wasn't sure why he did what he did, but he felt resistance and pulled until it snapped like an overworked rubber band. Then he ran off toward the truck. He left behind his bags, his case, everything but his saxophone.

He ran as he heard the man yell after him, "The Devil take you, boy! The Devil himself! Get gone, but you'll never find what you're looking for!"

The man didn't follow though, and when Eddie collapsed gratefully against the truck, he wasn't behind him anymore.

The driver, a true Southerner, with eyebrows that sunk over his eyes and cuffs rolled up to his elbows, laughed at Eddie's fraught expression. "Why, you look like the Devil himself is chasing you! Need a ride? Where you going?"

Eddie's lungs heaved. He turned around, looking for a black suit in the middle of the road, and found nothing but the shifting sand. A smile touched his face as he glanced at the chain in his hand: silver, with a little pendant in the likeness of a fiddle.

"Me? Well, I guess I'm going South. South for a long time. Yessir. South." ♦

"The Devil take you, boy! The Devil himself!"

The Golden Glow

by Nicole Blackwood, Newburyport, MA

You'll know them when you see them. It's not that they really stand out – not in beauty, not in size. Some people expect them to have wings, God knows why, but they wear ratty sneakers instead. They take the subway like the rest of us, swiping their MetroCards with tired eyes, balancing their briefcases on their knees as they ride. Some have motorcycles, cars, even limos, but only the wealthy ones – those penthouse dwellers who bought their apartments back when Manhattan was all crime and no one



Photo by Kaylyn Turnipseed, Harrison Township, MI

wanted to be near Hell's Kitchen. They weren't afraid, though. Why should they be? They've been around for an eternity. They've seen it all. No one can touch them.

Maybe that gets boring. I wouldn't know.

No, the way you can pick them out in a swarm of people is by the tired golden glow that surrounds them, the drooping magic that weighs them down and makes them more and less than the rest of us. We don't resent them, and we sure as hell don't envy them. We know them as angels, and their job is to take care of us, to protect and guide this miserable melting pot we call humanity. It is what it is. We don't question it. We take advantage of it. We go to them with worries and crises alike.

No problem is too big or too small if you're desperate enough. When they're in a good mood, they'll pull a little vial out of their briefcase, we'll swallow the contents, and, just like that, all is as it should be. Or maybe we just believe it is. It's not an exact science. It's not science at all. It is what it is. We accept it.

When they're in a bad mood, though, that's when you have to watch out – when you have to look for the knife in the briefcase, the gun in the glow, the poison in the mind. I once saw a woman in a bar on 42nd – eyes frantic, hands shaking – make her way over to one of them.

He was a seemingly ordinary man, suited and exhausted. If you looked closer, however, you could see the purple bags weighing down his eyes, lines creasing his brows, and a glow surrounding him, the faintest I've ever seen. It fizzled and burned, alight with something dangerous and destructive. He looked as though he could shatter at any moment. She should've known better. She should've seen the inevitable.

The place was poorly lit, nearly empty. The bartender was washing glasses in the back; each wipe created a grating squeak. The angel clearly had worries of his own, judging by the way he kept muttering the same word over and over: *Mercy, mercy*. His perch on the barstool was precarious, as though he was ready to bolt at any moment. You don't ask for help from someone who needs it more than you. But what can I say? We're human.

"Help me," the woman commanded – we never ask, we play by our own rulebook – sliding onto the stool next to him. "My boyfriend's cheating on me. Fix it. Make him pay."

The angel huffed, downing the shot in front of him. He couldn't get drunk, none of them can – maybe he just liked the burn. I didn't ask. We never ask. "And I'm stuck here. So we're all living a goddamn tragedy," he retorted.

"You have to help me. I order you to help me." She lifted her chin, and

from there, the ending to her story was clear.

He just looked at her. It all happened in an instant, in the breath it would take to damn or forgive. Those are the only two options, from what I've seen. The world isn't black and white. These days, it's all black.

The woman doubled over, clutching her stomach, a scream erupting from her lungs as though it was pulled. Foam dribbled from her mouth, a kind of river filled with secrets and mercy, mercy. The angel smiled without humor, lit a cigarette. The bartender kept washing, each squeak matching another scream, tempo precise, and I just watched from a table in the corner. I did nothing. I'm only human.

That's the thing, isn't it? That's the kicker. My grandfather told me once that the world wasn't always this way. Before all of this, before these beings descended in the name of a hopeless cause, it was the humans who were suffering.

I took a walk through Central Park last night and saw only angels huddled under trees for warmth, only angels left convulsing on the pavement. They glare at you, with something more than anger and less than pity when you look at them. They see every facet of you. They see those dark shadows you're so eager to hide. I've learned to stop looking.

We've sucked the light out of them, I think. I don't know if I care. I don't know if anyone does. We never ask.

Apathy's a learned trait. It's easy to play a game without winners. ♦

We've sucked the light out of them, I think

Klepto

by Olivia Gordon, Rosemount, MN

Guilt is like syrup. It spreads fast, it's sticky, it's hard to clean, and it's overpowering. If only guilt were sweet like syrup too. Instead, it's bitter and nauseating. And so, so hard to conceal. But I've had a lot of practice. Like an acquired taste, it gets easier with time. What once roiled inside me, a beast clawing at my stomach with hot fury, has dulled into something tolerable. You get used to it, and before long, barely remember a time without it. And you can't miss something you never had.

Or so I tell myself.

Sometimes I want to confess. Sometimes I think it would make me feel better, but then I realize how silly that is. I am beyond forgiveness. Forgiveness isn't even in my rear-view mirror. I will do it again and again because I can't help myself. Forgiveness without repentance is just a point on a circle.

I think this as I stare at a little piece of plastic formed into the shape of a pirate dangling on a keychain. I glance up at the ceiling. There are no cameras, no employees around, but my hand still shakes. What am I going to do with a pirate keychain? I put it back on the spinning rack and walk away.

My heart pounds in my ears as I wander through the store. Everywhere I look there are shiny things and spin-

ning things and worthless toys. I clench my hands into fists as I pass these objects. I can feel the itch in my fingers to reach out and grab something. I make it around the whole store, and suddenly I'm back at the pirate. It sneers at me with a mouth full of golden teeth and a sword pointed at my face. I slip it into my pocket and leave the store.

Though my blood races through my veins as I walk casually down the street, I feel calm – I've released a pressure that had been building since two weeks before at a different store. I try to enjoy the loose feeling while it lasts, but my personal cloud rains syrup.

"Jesse!" I hear.

I turn around. "Lily!" I say. "Haven't seen you all week."

Her smile ignites mine, and I engulf her in a hug. She has gentle, caring eyes that sometimes make me want to smile and sometimes make me want to cry. What do those eyes see when they look at me? Surely such innocence burns when gazing so deeply into blackness.

"I went to New York with my mom." She tells me about her trip and asks about my week. She wants to know all that's happened since she last saw me. It's cold out, so we hunch into ourselves to ward off the chill. My hand wraps tightly around the plastic pirate as we speak. She listens to every word I say, never taking her shining eyes off of

mine. I feel ashamed to stare back into eyes so pure.

Maybe she would understand. Maybe she would hug me and tell me it isn't my fault. Maybe she would help me. If she could accept me, then maybe I've been looking back to see where I passed forgiveness when I should have been looking ahead to see when I'll reach it. I squeeze the pirate and its sword bites into my skin.

"Can I tell you something?" I ask, interrupting her story. She doesn't seem to notice my sudden seriousness.

"Sure, just hang on one sec." She swings her purse off her shoulder and digs into it, pulling out a mirror and a makeup brush and a sunglasses case. I take these things as she hands them to me, still searching. I want to fill my pockets, but I keep them in my hands because I know she'll ask for them back.

"Did you lose something?"

"Yeah, I'm looking for my ChapStick. It's my favorite flavor, and they've stopped making it. I haven't seen it in a while, but I really need it with the weather changing." She smiles and rolls her eyes like she can't believe she lost it.

A small tube with a pink label, it smelled both minty and like berries, I remember. It found its way into my jacket a few weeks ago.

"Oh well. You wanted to tell me something?"

I shake my head. "Never mind."

I kind of like syrup, anyway. ♦

I can feel the itch in my fingers to grab something

Ella's Fairytale

by Catherine Aragona, Middleburg, FL

Lady Tremaine held tight to the green-stoned top of her walking stick. Her somber-faced daughters sat opposite her, jostled side to side by the carriage's bouncy flight to the castle. Anastasia's red hair was smoothed into a practical bun, while her sister's was long and loose, wound in tiny spirals. They weren't attractive, Lady Tremaine admitted silently, but they were sensible girls, decent and well grounded. With the expensive trinkets ornamenting their necks and wrists, and their deep blue eyes, they had a chance – if the prince was a practical young man.

*Lady Tremaine
fell to the floor,
clutching her heart*

Her mind wandered back to her stepdaughter crying in the garden alone. The girls had helped her out of that shocking ensemble she'd sewn together, but it had broken her heart. Goodness, it had been dreadful. The child had found the girls' old patchwork quilts and stitched them into a hideous frock that she had draped around herself, with a necklace of rocks from the garden. The poor girl. She lived in a fantasy world where animals talked to her and her family despised her.

"It's my fault," Lady Tremaine lamented, lifting a hand to her mouth. "I shouldn't have let her read those fairy tales after her father died. They brought her comfort, but I didn't know they would lead to such delusions."

"No, Mama," Anastasia reached over to place a hand on her mother's knee. "Ella was always a strange child; her mother wasn't stable either, you know. It isn't your fault."

"She goes on as if she were a slave." Drizella shook her head, her painted lashes fluttering as she narrowed her eyes. "Yesterday I had to pull her up from the floor. She was singing and sweeping a hand across it. She was so distressed, crying that she had tried to do the job right, as if I'd insulted her."

"She is a sweet little thing, though, isn't she?" Lady Tremaine dared to smile a little.

"Yes, Mama, and thanks to you," Anastasia said firmly, clasping her mother's hand. "If one of us is chosen, I promise we'll make things easier for you. You won't have to spend all day trying to keep Ella from hurting herself. I promise."

"Yes, Mama," Drizella said, smiling brightly at her mother.

Lady Tremaine let out a shaky breath. If all went well, perhaps Ella could be brought round with help from the royal doctor. If things just went well tonight

• • •
"Announcing Anastasia and Drizella Tremaine, daughters of Lady Tremaine!"

Anastasia fussed with a wisp of hair that had fallen into her eyes, while Drizella straightened her bodice. Picking up their skirts elegantly, the pair walked forward together with placid smiles, eyes locked on the dark-haired prince. Anastasia noticed the way his eyes caught hers and the corners of his lips twitched. Goodness, was he laughing? Her cheeks burned, but she curtsied, maintaining her composure.

The prince bowed, and Anastasia saw his mouth open as if to speak. Suddenly he straightened with his mouth still ajar, staring at something beyond them. Anastasia turned to see what had caught his attention, and horror struck her.

"Ella," she moaned.

The delusional child stood in the entryway – with nothing more than Drizella's blue nightgown on her thin body. Her blond hair was matted with leaves from the garden, and the dog's collar was wrapped around her neck. Anastasia heard her sister sob beside her, but her own thoughts went straight to her mother. A chuckle made her spin around, and Anastasia cringed at the sight of the smile on the prince's lips. He was laughing out loud this time.

Lady Tremaine fell to the floor, clutching her heart. Anastasia grabbed her skirts and rushed to her mother, ignoring the tittering from the crowd. Glancing at her sister, Anastasia saw that Drizella was wrapped in the arms of a young gentleman, who patted her back with pity. Her running makeup had smeared down her face and leaked onto the gentleman's shirt.

Ella herself stood looking around at everyone with a bright smile. She began humming in a raspy voice and cooing softly to herself. Anastasia's face burned brighter than ever.

Perhaps the townspeople are right, she dared to think. Maybe it's time that Ella went to a place where she can be free to be the princess she imagines she is.

• • •
Lady Tremaine welcomed the rough-clothed man into the house with as much cheer as she could manage. However, misery came with the promise of relief. Eighteen years of caring for her stepdaughter had aged her more than anything in her life, and perhaps it was for the best that the chore came to an end.

"She will be well looked after," the tall man, Pester, assured her with a bob of his blond head. "Our mental institution is one of the finest in the area. You may visit, if you like."

"No," Lady Tremaine whispered. "I think it's for the best that she never sees us again."

Anastasia sniffled in the corner, wrapped in a soft blanket, while Drizella patted her face with powder. The young gentleman from the night before was coming to see her, and she couldn't afford to ruin another of his blouses, even for her stepsister's sake.

"Where is the girl?" Pester asked. He offered a handkerchief to the weeping young lady.

"Here I am," Ella's high voice chimed from the top of the stairs. "The prince has come, hasn't he? Oh, I knew he would!"

Anastasia started sobbing fresh tears, while Drizella stood with a huff and left the room. Lady Tremaine reached out to her stepdaughter, who recoiled fearfully. The girl's trembling hands held a glass ornament that caught the light shining through the window. The shoe-shaped sculpture was a gift her father had given her when she was a child, just before he passed.

Pester strode toward Ella and took her arm, which made the girl jump in fright and drop the glass ornament. It shattered on the floor.

Lady Tremaine waited for the girl to start crying, and even Anastasia stopped her hysterics for a moment to watch her stepsister's reaction. But Ella simply stared at the fragments calmly, with a smile.

"Oh, dear," Pester muttered, wiping his brow.

"Don't worry. There's another one," Ella chirped. Lady Tremaine somehow found the strength to

Funerals for the Rain

by Tanner Woods, Lewisville, TX

Raindrops pattered through the cord and out the receiver, drenching my eardrum with noise. I sighed wistfully, wisteria plants erupting from my ears, flowering down to my shoulders. I cut the cord, wrenching the phone from the hook, stowing it in my parka pocket. My shoulders sat parked under my parka, feeling clammy from the heat. My hands held the position of clams for a long while, calling out sea songs and seashells, reminiscent of the shore. Long, hollow tones bemoaned a susurrus of a gentle stream. My eyes glowed like firebugs, burning with anguish against the lapping of the water. Teeth gleamed like a battered cutlass under the raw cut of an oak pyre. Funerals for the rain, wakes for the oceans. Coffins for the lightning bugs, caskets for the caterpillars. Mortal imagery conjured in shards. Perceptions shattered by the midnight yards. Disjointed fastenings shorn from memory, gray matter scattering from wide-screen fields of view. Acacia lines patterned the drywall. Sheetrock and laminate littered my skyfall. Buzzards gawked at the height of my hiatus, vultures screeched at the altitude of my zenith. Rays of light cast off evil wards. Death recoiled, reeling from the beacon.

I hung up the phone. ♦

*Author's note:
"Abstract word-
play inspired by
e.e. cummings."*

smile.

"Yes, there's another," she said gently, her eyes on the fair young lady.

She reached into her pocket and brought out the gift her husband had given her, the match to his daughter's.

Pester plopped the glass bauble into the girl's hand with a grunt and led her out with his lips in a grim line. He saw the dark-haired girl greeting a young man on horseback, and shook his head.

"Such a nice family," he said once they had climbed into the carriage, more to himself than to the girl on the patched seat beside him. "It's a pity they had to put up with such a burden."

"Are you going to take me to the prince now so we can be married?" Ella asked. Her blue eyes widened as she looked at the strange servant. She was still shocked by the beautiful carriage, the seats stitched with golden thread, and the white horses leading the coach with pink feathers in their manes.

"Sure, sweetheart, you're going to marry your prince." ♦



Photo by Quin Tyler, Rochester, NY

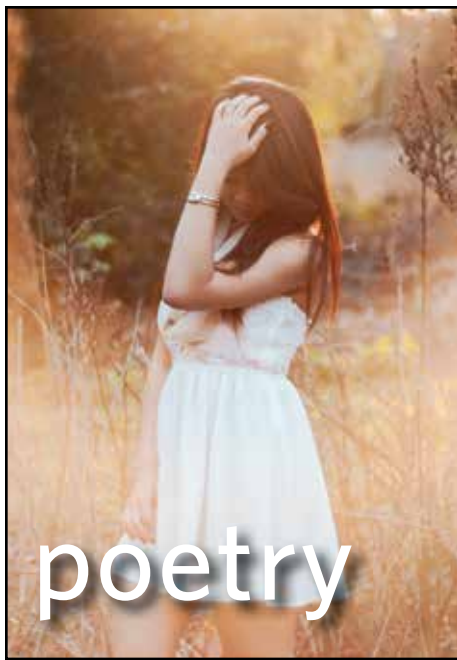


Photo by Anne Salas, Anaheim, CA

Deep Breathing

My lungs and my mouth and my hands
and my face
Pull on the purple balloon,
Inhaling.
I am under the canopy drawn from our
childhood comforters
Alongside this open fire, too free and feral,
And resting myself atop our melty hands
and melty feet.
I suck in the purple balloon because God is
moving too fast down here,
Under these blankets and in view of our
family's portrait hanging,
Posed as adjacent honor.
I drew in our balloon through my belly
Because of the boyish smirk in your eyes
And the muscles that were dancing shadows
up your back.
I breathed in my purple balloon, and
it's running green and orange and blue.
I felt my T-shirt fold yours up like an
accordion,
Playing the skin closing our chests and
stomachs.
Finally, we suffocate.
We were breathing deep under a pillow fort,
And I toyed with my copper-toned hair.

by Natalie Slopfern, Albany, NY

Writer's Block

"Two wrongs don't make a writer
Any better." I can hear my mother's nagging.
She's the one who would push me over
the cliff.
"You're never gonna be anything."
As she handed me a sweet bowl of
strawberries.
The first scoop reassured me of my
quivering potential.
The whirl of the breeze, the passing clouds,
Sweat dripping like cats and dogs,
As if a needle of adrenaline had been
injected into my skin,
Yet no voice to say what to write.

by Meghin Rollins, Bridgeton, NJ

Slice

Miss Scissor Blade Slice,
you scare the living daylights
out of me.
You
write to me about myself,
describing to me my own
paper heart, then you
tear it
a little
every time you stare at someone else.
Miss Ink Blotch Black Spot,
you lift me up into the sky
and drop me,
let me jump,
and leave me there 'til next time.
Miss Soft Grunge Social,
you flutter your wings against mine
in pretty words in ink.
You see, I've always ridden
on your wings:
blue high sky wide
soaring above my trough,
but I can fly now!
Miss Cracked Mirror View,
I like my view better.
But I think we
need each other
to fly swifter circles in the sky
and to compare notes.
Hold my hand,
but don't get too close –
I'm burning out
and you're liquid.

by Cassidy Southern,
Sewickley, PA

Dorie

I could write a poem that no one could
tell was for you,
or for anyone.
It would just be about your hula hoops,
streaked with glitter and dirt,
and children we passed –
showing off the elbow passes and chest rolls
you taught them.
It would be about hair dye –
staining my scalp and the cat,
crumpling a plastic bag to make up for
miscalculations,
running in with the motor humming and
bare feet.
It would be about blenders whining with a
thick, speckly Pure Green Goddess in it,
but with a half an avocado slipped in
because you are the Pure Green Goddess.
It would be about tarot cards,
the shapes of each archetype worn to
only silhouettes
in order to tell my tale.

by Isabella Murray,
Arlington Heights, IL

Asymmetric

The symmetric curves
Of your back looked prettier
When they weren't leaving

by Kennedy Shine, San Francisco, CA

Tea Stains

I stare at the couch
still fragrant
from the tea
I once tumbled
over it
and you said
because it was so sweet
the stain
would never leave.

I stare at the couch
as you sit there,
Mother,
sipping the best
Indian tea.
This time I've added
a few extra sugar cubes
hoping
even after they come and
tell me the couch is empty
and make me swallow
hard doses of
lies that make one
forget
things.
Have you forgotten so soon, Mother?
The tea is warm;
please,
don't leave.

by Ujjwal Khanal, Kathmandu, Nepal

Rangeley

As the sun came up I ran through fields
of lupines
Purple bells etched in its warm glow
Tall coarse grass scraping my arms
and ankles
I picked soft wild strawberries that survived
the mowing
daintily placing them in a blue speckled mug
Lunch was on the porch
The air bearing a fresh pine tree perfume
I ate a sandwich and chips listening to the
wings of a hummingbird zip back and forth
between pine trees and plastic flowers.
In the heat of the afternoon I chased
a butterfly
Black with white stripes and a furry body
It fluttered to the dirt road to soak up the sun
But my net was not fast enough
It simply left
gaining height and freedom

After dinner I'd sit on the dock
My legs swinging as my toes grazed the
surface of the water
sending wrinkles to mix with waves.
I jabbed a spoon in my mug
Smashed and blended the wild strawberries,
creating a Rangeley ice cream.
The wind picked up and blew across
the water
To hit my face as the sun
positioned itself in front of my eyes as it
Brightened and shifted numerous shades
of orange.

Blinded but content
I slurped melting ice cream from spoons
and watched the blue turn to black.

by Valerie Carpentier, Portland, ME

English Teachers

The problem with English teachers
is the way they strap words
onto paper
and try to torture a confession
out of them.

They take apart sentences
making sure they don't miss something,
isolating each line from its body
because everything is better
separate
right?

They force testimonies
of meaning
and purpose, and they never think,
not once,
if you asked politely,
it would tell you.

by Kenzie Brown, Lafayette, CA

Static

There are things I don't understand –
things I'll never be able to comprehend.
You are a perfect example.
Your face is a thousand glass fragments,
each gleaming with a distorted reflection,
of a man I may have known in a past life,
a soldier lost on a battlefield,
a man at war with the demons of his mind,
a ghoulish withered sheet-white skin,
a man who, if I squint my eyes enough,
vaguely resembles the hero you were to me.

Communication has been lost throughout
lifetimes;
I have hurdled the entirety of the universe
and the signal between you and me is
full of static.
I often don't understand what you're trying
to say –
you speak a foreign language,
one I can hear, clear as day, yet I
cannot register.
It's a language built upon noxious
nightmares,
and the terror that loosens your mouth
to profanities, apologies, prayers,
and pleading.
I hear you, but I can't understand your
garbled words –
your language of rage and desperation.

There are things I don't understand,
and while answers will come with time,
you will forever be incomprehensible to me
held together by duct tape, souring glue, and
the sunlight that molds your cracked edges
together,
into a frame of blinding, broken atrocities.

But I fear that one day your voice will clear
and the glass fragments will pull themselves
together
to form a beautiful pane framed with gold,
and you will reach out one trembling hand,
across space and time,
across the Universe,
and you will strain to hear my voice,
the one constant throughout the years,
and all you will hear
is static.

by Genna Coleman, Cherry Hill, NJ

Left Incomplete

I have dozens of unfinished poems hidden in between pages of my calculus notebook, folded messages on my nightstand; they drip down my foggy bathroom mirror, and are left behind in soggy tea leaves. An abandoned thought, longing to find its way back to its original source, in the hopes of coming out differently.

by Eleni Aneziris, E. Setauket, NY

Persephone

She'll be picking dandelions, and the sun will be high on his throne, leaning down to gently kiss her shoulders. The wind will be caressing her sunburned cheeks like her mother used to when she was a child. Her brow, dotted with pearls of sweat, will furrow; the meadow in her irises will spot a chrysanthemum, like a gold coin among copper. When she reaches for it, her determination will turn to surprise as she realizes she's holding my hand, as she realizes she's being pulled into my chariot, black like death's eyelashes, as she realizes the gentleness in my eyes. Then she'll grab a pomegranate and bite it, feeling the taste of a fireplace on her tongue.

by Calico Nevada, Spring, TX

Nothing Less Than Truth

The truth is, I fear

(that I threw away the keys, that my heart is locked, guarded by invisible prisoners, that you need more than a knife, to hack away thick thorns of judgment, that a patronizing stare leaves me emptier, more full of cold doubt than ever before.

that I stand an old vestige of pride, a wilted reminder of some gilded age, now marked by scarlet letters that imprint behind my eyelids so that even in Sleep, wrapped by mellow, star-studded blankets, swimming 'neath shallow childhood memories, the monster lurks in the closet upstairs and nothing is safe.

that I am not as shiny as my jeweled hairclips, that, stripped of cherry lips and puckered smiles, there isn't a person under armor, just fear – of losing a game I've gambled too much to play, of free-falling while running, 'til my feet can't catch the ground and I am lost again.)

nothing.

by Katie Tsui, New York, NY

Brown Leather

1. Worn. A tired cow laid down licking old wounds and stray hairs. Multiple slashings on a stained hide.
2. A smell – secret in the way that I find comforting. Maisha will tell me it smells like B.O. but to me it is summer.
3. In a different life it could have been a mother. Strong arms and warm hearts. A maternal love where no hats are needed to ward off the cold.
4. A cavern worked with loss. Pockets as tunnels, crumbs as boulders. You let me carry your keys, and it makes me feel special.
5. If it wasn't a jacket, was it a blanket? Could I have enveloped you inside to keep your teeth from grinding? I hadn't seen you shudder like that before.
6. She snagged this one from Goodwill and we all appreciate the buy, somehow an icon.
7. A sister's death is less definite if you find chewed gum in her backpack. That little ball of rubber had her DNA worked into it, and then it became sacred. I'm wondering if she smelled like summer too.
8. You couldn't make this jacket a coffin if you tried. Watch as you nail yourself in and still feel free. I'm sure this was my skin once.

by Eva Dregalla, Pittsburgh, PA

You Like Jesus, Right?

Happy seventy-third birthday mimi
I hope you like coconut
you should
you're cuban
if you don't
should we be surprised?

I like the wallpaper
mimi
is it new
do you know?

your blouse is cute
mimi

do you like ours
we are matching
to impress you
did you notice the cross
you like jesus, right?

by Liam Miyar-Mullan,
San Francisco, CA

to be read with the hand over the eyes

so here I am again, telling you all something you don't really want to hear and don't really care about
I'm spitting sparks at you to listen up, goddammit
because you've never listened before and you haven't heard and haven't seen and haven't felt or smelled the fire inside of the words I've laughed and drawled and yelled at you
and I wonder how you can nod and agree and forget and sit there glassy-eyed and do nothing
when all I know is this fire is going to burn me up like two candles
and there will still be a woman in a lace veil wrapping her arms around the cinders which spell nothing in particular because they spell too much and nobody will listen
A rainbow is what's left after everything else is drowned, and it's a promise that's empty but nobody ever listens to how hollow it is because they didn't fill up their lungs with the drops and words that matter and they know that they won't have to, but they didn't hear that they could breathe in a fire that scorches them right down to the cilia, put flint and tinder in their blood cells and leave them cinders too.
Sh'ma, people, because we're not one and we never can be, should never want to be, that olive branch passed you by long ago, if you're not part of the solution you're part of the problem
and I can't let you write this off as stupid. teenage. melodrama.

I might lodge where you lodge and go where you go but your people are not my people, and you can't make it that way and all you have managed to teach us about hate is that it can't kill love.

So I hope you're listening, and I hope a few sparks sting you and singe your eyebrows, because I am telling you that even when we burn up and you laugh and shake your heads and stop listening
you'll find us in the snowflake that refuses to melt on your tongue.

by Beatrice Waterhouse,
Santa Rosa, CA



Art by Kayla Smith, El Dorado, KS

Mark the Spot

Yes, there are x's lining the rim of my stomach and the inside of my thighs. My body is a map but that does not mark the spots where you may touch me.

I am an island unexplored.

You'll take that as a challenge – I have no intention for you to be the discoverer of the unknown paradise known as me. My irises were the hue of oak trees, so when I said no that night, you heard yes. Yet when your hand glided across what didn't belong to you, and you set flame to my eyes, you didn't think

to stop. You just kept lighting matches.

by "Chloe," Hagerstown, MD

Nautical

nautical is the depth of my affections and there are mountains under the surface if you'd care to look, and I'll bring a flashlight for the blackest and deepest parts (because I know even I get scared), and if you doubt your ability to swim up again, I'll help you breathe – air isn't the only thing that sustains us, but love

by Callie Zimmerman, Fishers, IN

Midday

A girl sits at a table staring at her plate of food. It's empty, and so is she. Cracks run along her skin exposing the dark hollow space within her, fracturing her body like porcelain.

Opposite her sits a boy gazing across the room but only seeing another face. His hands quake as they reach out while parts of his body flicker and morph. For a moment, the printed words are visible upon his flesh, reading "need" and "desire."

Between the two sits another girl river-like hair spilling over her limbs. She glances either way and sighs concern for others distracting her from her own burdens. Her locks change like grass thrown into a flame turning ashen, as she matures early.

At the doorway stands a woman skin steaming and swelling she can only watch the three children as the pressure expands inside her.

by "Holly," Pearland, TX

A Meal of Love

I'm having mercy for breakfast
And prudence for lunch
For dinner, I think that loyalty will more
than suffice
I'll spread tolerance on my bread
And have joy for a snack
But when it comes to peace, hold the hatred,
add some spice

by Katelyn Brown, Perrysburg, OH

The Definition of Losing Yourself

Thumbprint bruises pressed under his eyes.
Words make their way up his throat,
Stifling little white lies.
Cracked lips frame pictures of happy smiles,
Hung in bedrooms and hallways
And shown to family and friends.
Shaky hands smooth calluses down like
the corners of wrinkled sheets.
Blue veins crisscross like rivers under
cloud-colored skin, with bones like
mountains rising up under his wrists
and hips.

by Shelby Willis, Ashland, KY

There Is a Silly in This Logic

Advice-giver:

It could be worse.
Don't complain.

You could have gotten eaten by a
pineapple-sized
hippopotamus while your boyfriend
dumped you.

The pot of boiling water you spilled on
yourself
could have been filled with some of those
deadly venomous ladybugs.

The knife that cut off your thumb
could have also dyed your skin the color
of limes.

You could have been trampled by a zombie
cello after those guys mugged you.

You could have stubbed your toe
on a block of solid diamond
instead of a Lego castle.

Next time you think of crying
or being angry or upset
about something that happened to you
remember: you could have been mauled
by that cranberry-colored pillowcase
you love

then devoured by the Monopoly piece
that always makes you lose.

Think of what could have happened.
Doesn't it make you feel ...

Advice-getter:

... wonderful ...

by Zoe Webb,
Auckland, New Zealand

Seventy-Five Names lovely lady

Sometimes I feel like an acrobat with
seventy-five names.

Like I've been twisted and stretched,
Thrown and twirled,
And been in every bodily frame.

Sometimes it's hard to be everyone at once,
To love your neighbor
and impress your friends.

It hurts to be grabbed and yanked across
a stretch of air,
Have to tie up the loose ends.

My muscles throb, burn, and ache.
I only want to breathe,
but life wants to take.

All of the oxygen around my head is fading,
and blue fills my eyes.

Sister, daughter, friend, nerd, flute player –
Ahh! I'm not alive!

I'm Liv, just Liv.
So leave me be.
I like books,
I like fire and tea.

I like to be alone sometimes,
and pretend I don't have one single name.
I think, childishly, I don't take the blame.

Not Olivia, Liv, Livi, Elle, or Olive, I just
turn the key.
Because seventy-five names are way too
many for me.

by Liv Harris, Dardenne Prairie, MO

Sand

There's sand in my sheets
that I'm never shaking out
until you come back.

by Irene Enlow, Pohang, South Korea

Moment

To be hard as stone.
Destined to walk that road alone
Into the unknown with no fear shown
As your thoughts begin to cloud
Searching for a way out
Doubt closing in with each stroke of the pen
As it creeps, the floorboards creak again
Not even a board to float in this creek
from these creeps
But charity's not clarity
You only become what you prepared to be
Dare to be more than these heresies
Dare to dare, to be a nightmare for those
who don't care
To achieve greatness in the face of blatant
unbelief.

The fire to fight, it elates the night
A sight, as the truth draws the light
For the hope that you just might
Get the will to wake up each day
Unafraid of what anyone might say
To find a way away from doubt.
When you're on your knees, broken
I hope this token
Will help you in your moment

by Mike Jones, Minneapolis, MN

i must use utensils to be classy, i am told
as they sip champagne and talk politics
they're charming, bold
but nothing is as charming as a few hairs
out of place
frazzled and full of life, a smile on your face

i must be a lovely lady to sweep men
off their feet
as they dress like porcelain dolls, plastic
smiles when they greet
but nothing is as lovely as when skin
meets dirt
i would trade the love of a man for any kiss
of the earth

i must talk with eloquence, but only
when i'm told
for my looks are what matter, it's my
opinion i must hold
but nothing is as eloquent as the whispers
of the wind
nature doesn't dispute between me or "him"
but i am not that kind of lady who does
what she is told
and somehow, through that, i'm still
charming, bold
i will still be a lovely lady even with dirt
on my feet
for when it's me and the earth, who i am is
what you meet

by "Alexandra," Southold, NY

cosmopoloved

I am the coolest girl at the party:
Marks etched into my arms and
Back
Spears sitting in the flesh of my ears and
Tongue
(you can pretend the stretch marks on
my expanding thighs do not exist
if you wish)
I do not eat to live
Or sleep to wake
I consume to contest or do not
At all
Sleep to see something beyond
The bleak blurs of myopia
18 years and no one has asked what I am
or was
18 years I have been asked what I
will become
as though I will transcend the thin flesh
and brittle bones
to occupy some space between here
and death
that is larger than both
I've expended all of the life I have
Shrinking
Becoming less here so I could be more
Somewhere Else
I can only now bleed with
Someone else inside of me
(choke me
scratch me
remind me of my presence
(in your shadow)
I am the coolest girl at the party:
My body is the most
Silent

by Fadwa Ahmed, Safat, Kuwait



Photo by Karlin Jensen,
Three Hills, AB, Canada

Paper Pure

She's the clean sheet
of paper skin, unharmed
where fingers can only trace purity

But what about the rest of us
with the dirt under our nails
and hearts left un-mended
behind lowered eyes?

where our words ring bitter
networking blind
and our concerns rest in dollar signs
as Sabbath is ignored

We puff out our chests
and strive for the land of the living
spoiled with our fumes
and burners set on high
where love carries an interest rate
and the only worthy donations glorify

So that one day you can curse
the methods of selfishness
and the Creator of all that is good
for the lapse in scheduling

So our desperation clicks
and consequence is backed out, condoned
And you wait on that paper so thin
in that house of winners
where the cross of condemnation leads
you to say,
"No, I don't want to see,"

So we sink a little lower
behind those flashing ads
of what we want to be:
hidden in jewels and lingerie

So keep up your feet
on that smoked leather
to watch arms unwind
to dart eyes
and live in all you wanted
Nothing got in your way.

So you turn and see
her paper skin
and story unwritten
by coloring crayons

You sit and curse the world
for being so cruel
and all that was meant to be good
because here you sit
in the land of the living
but you definitely deserve more

And think of that paper pure
when consolation
is as easy as
what's in the hotel drawer

by Abbey Wise, Browns Summit, NC

dear damsel in distress

I don't believe in this "Do whatever you want, life is short" bull.

Your body is a temple with your brain as the ruler and your heart as the manipulable right-hand man. Kingdom and kingdom will try to invade and your heart will whisper cunning words to the king to convince him how much you long to be loved but don't be fooled because strangers can touch you and Your right-hand man will slip from his position as guardian of your heart and your castle will crumble but let the king rule your body and when a Knight – dirty and broken down, but honored by your grace and presence – comes knocking on Your door, your heart and your brain will for once agree that the timing is right and the temple is ready to be shared with someone who will treat it with kindness and respect and you will simply unlock the doors, roll up the drawbridge and let them in.

by Katie Witte, Pilot Point, TX

Escape

I keep my window closed;
the grief pounds against it.
Whiskey fills the air,
replacing the oxygen with drunken souls,
too far gone to ever see the light.

We pass the decaying trailers
where broken beer bottles scatter the lawn
and a chained bike lays against a dead tree.

My window cracks.

There are no children playing
or screams of laughter.
Only screams themselves.

A teenager hides in his hood
and cups his mouth.
Sparks reveal his scarred face.

Long greasy hair sways back and forth
while a man stumbles out of a bar,
screaming something about a jukebox
stealing his nickel.
Only a nickel.

An old lady pushes her grocery cart.
On one side her belongings only fill
it partially.
The other side, a dog whimpers,
unveiling its ribs with every breath.

My window shatters.

The depression sweeps in,
and I feel the full force of its power.
A deep throbbing begins inside me.
Every piece of joy is crushed.
There is no way to escape.

by Cooper Blunt, Missoula, MT

Lottery Ticket

on the side of the road
lying there
curled up from rain
faded numbers
a hope
a wish
knowing the odds
someone dreaming of something more
but it's not special
it's not the jackpot
or even five dollars
thrown to the ground out of anger
and frustration
but it just gently floats the way paper does
which really makes it more aggravating
sealed with the stamp of a sneaker
accused for being what it is
not a winner
just a worthless piece of litter
cast away
shriveling to nothingness
from the rain

by Kayla Fuller, Natick, MA

Athena

She burst out of, not the womb,
but ancient skull.
An enigma.
Like the frail kiss of the butterfly's wing
along
collarbone rounded by rushing river waters.

She walks in a daze,
looking below her at this fickle nation of
humanity, little children who pray to her
when she herself
dares not declare wisdom upon trembling
fingers.

She finds companionship in the owl,
this creature that they call a great hunter,
with the quickest of talons and sharpest
of beaks, yet
under the mounds of fluff and feather is
just another
coward, afraid of the all-knowing eyes
of the day.

And can she even call her father a father?
This great God
of a man who knew not her presence,
only the pain
that she caused, so sure and so strong that
he was willing
to bring ax unto his own head, expecting
nothing of it
but the welcoming blackness of eternal sleep
only to
wake with
her
beside him, fully grown without a childhood
to make her
mistakes in and fully garbed in clothes
that were
too long, too regal for her liking.

But yet
still she puts on the iron breastplate and
accepts the dead calf from below
this facade that she hopes will never be seen
by the all-knowing eyes of the day.

by Caitlin Chan, Closter, NJ

My First Doll

Hours after I
took my first breath,
my parents gave
me a doll.
She had a smile
sewn onto her
delicate face
and
no legs,
just a long
royal
blue skirt,
like the queen
that she was.
I protected her
from the oily hands
of the other children
who longed to
see her perfection,
for she was more precious
than the most
impeccably sculpted
diamond.

Yet years went on,
and her fluff began
to emerge
from the gaping holes
that time had
caused,
but she was
more
beautiful
than ever.
Her smile was
still intact,
like she was
fresh out of the store.
Her beauty did not
fade
with age;
it grew.

by Gabrielle Henig, New York, NY

Wastelander

You're a wasteland.
And you smoke through your lovers
Like a cheap cigarette.
With each glass of scotch
Comes a new regret.

Your arms are like a cage
And there are knives on your chest
That pierce me with your rage
And slay me at your breast.

But no matter what you do to me,
Threats or attack,
Something about the wasteland
Keeps calling me back.

by Caitlyn Rassa, New Freedom, PA

Seeds of Pomegranate

Tiny little pods
Like ruby kernels of corn
Cool explosions
Of sour sweetness

by Isabel Weber, Atlanta, GA

poet

an individual who
does
not fear the
darkness
of words that
may disturb
the common
man.
the poet is the
mapmaker of the
collective
unconscious.
the poet does not
live inside of
the rhyme
crime
but speaks
of the
blindness of life.
the magician of
words touches
what



Photo by Rebecca Huang, Taipei, Taiwan

cannot be justified
walking where
no path may lead.
for the poet always
knows that
the poetry of
the earth is never
dead. the angels
who speak of
the glistening
beauty in the
horrifying darkness of
many common souls.
to define the poet
one would have to
live off of the
ultimate thrill of
the bleeding ink of
a wondrous pen.

by Megan Tyler, Winnipeg, MB, Canada

Seashell

Her skin is thin, so soft, colorful, radiant
rolled over and over in boiling sea broth
for days ...
Her life consists of nothing
nothing but bitter saltwater, cold air, and
sand, so much sand, sand that scrapes
and claws,
sand that buries

by Elaina Youngberg, Goshen, IN

Advice for Humanity

Look to the stars and dream
of distant worlds and far-off places.
Dream of the stars, the tiny beams.
A universe full of smoke and steam.

Black holes, coup de grace.
Look to the stars and dream.
Sheltered within the seams
of the universe, hiding in deep space.

Dream of the stars, the tiny beams.
Things are more complex than they seem.
Everything is connected, everything
has a place.

Look to the stars and dream.

Maybe we're part of an interstellar scheme.
A dot in the cosmic lace.
Dream of the stars, the tiny beams.
It's all changing, there is no theme.

But the past is the past, you cannot efface.
Look to the stars and dream,
dream of the stars, the tiny beams.

by Kate Pixley, Clive, IA

Neighborhood Squirrels

It's the way they look
you in the eyes like they own
the place – so eat fast.

by Anaya Gorham, Colonial Beach, VA

Google Docs

Why can't Google Docs use English time?
All my documents make me look like
a raging insomniac
tortured genius
pulled from the comforts of bed
to chronicle prose and poetry
at 7:34 a.m. I'm not
one of those:
I write at perfectly reasonable times.
I just wish that Google knew that.

by Isobel Flower, Wantage, England

Recovery

A universe rushing from my veins,
Heavy pools of crimson.
Seeping from a wound,
It screams existence through a vivid shade.

The stream refuses to halt.
So much is lost.

Automatically replenishing,
You return to glide through me.
Swiftly reaching every internal corner,
Traveling through even the most
spidery passages.

With nothing left to surge through
my vessel,
Your absence would leave me as cold
and lifeless as Pluto.

by Emma Davis, San Antonio, TX



Photo by Rachel Bownik, Rogers, MN

The sun will rise soon.

It is 3 a.m. and I am feeling the bones of
my ribcage,
The way they try to burst through my skin,
Hipbone daggers and collarbone cliffs.
It is 3 a.m. and I am thinking about a boy
with smooth dark skin,
A knit hat that he wore even in summer,
The bright white stretch of his smile,
his smile,
How he smiled even as he was dying.
He was my friend and the cancer ate
him alive.

It is 3 a.m. and I am thinking about a girl,
The scars that nestle themselves into
her thin skin,
The way she devoured a bottle of pills,
The way she cut until she bled herself
near to dry,
The way she tried to vomit and starve
her way to oblivion.
And I love her, I love her, I love her.

It is 3 a.m. and I am thinking about myself,
How I was so sure I was ready to die
for the longest time.
How I starved until I was a whittled
skeleton,
How I went dizzy through days without
sleep,
How I cried and cried until I formed
an ocean.

It is 3 a.m. and I have seen death crawl
in through the window,
Chewing up and spitting out my laughing
boy and fearless girl,
Taking a bite out of me, testing.

It is 3 a.m. and I am thinking about
the years ahead,
And the friends whom I love with such
a ferocious love that it is

Bottomless and dark
And the girl whom I have the potential
to rip out my own heart for,
And the way my bones, my bones and
my flesh have become

Something like a home.

It is 3 a.m. and I want to live.

by "Kara," Fredericksburg, VA

Coursed Veins

If it's Tuesday night
and Calculus homework is shining red
flashes on your skin
But the tear ducts in your eyes
cannot seem to comprehend
Anything but tissues and coursed breathing
Do not stop.
Put down those goddamn tissues, and
rub those salted tears
on skin that smells of lavender
Rub off that orange mask and waterproof
eyeliner
Drown yourself in salted skin and rooftop
fetishes, not in him.
Chilled air will dry you out.
But remember, it can help you breathe again.
So for however long you need, on suburban
rooftops with only streetlights to guide
and remind you,
the deepness in your lungs and the loss
of feeling due to bare skin
Will strip you of suburban legends, and a
human will be reborn.

by Oona Sullivan, Boston, MA

Standing

There was a woman
who stood at the edge of the earth
People passed her, others watched her,
but nobody dared to stand next to her
For she was the only one who
truly made a stand
The sun rose and the sun set,
and she was still there,
standing
She shone even in the moonlight,
her eyes rippling a royal blue
People took pictures, trying
to capture her in her entire beauty
But a thousand words
could never be enough to show
what she is worth
Time would pass by, and
she would be right where she was
the day before
and the day before that,
just standing

But sooner or later she would
finally make a mighty sound
And that roar would be more thunderous
than any storm to roam the land
She would grumble with hatred, holding
her breath as she lifted her fists up to the
peaceful sky and smashed them
furiously into the sandy ground
And she would then return to a
peaceful, calm exterior
But nobody noticed her rage,
hardly even this woman herself

Life went on for this woman
No matter what went on around her,
she remained standing
People would notice the
beauty, the magnificence
of her appearance
But no pair of prescription glasses
could ever see the vile
image that began to lie beneath
this woman over the years

by Gianna Tunzi, Lemont, IL

Small Step in Heels

You remind me of the moon,
not because you're
"pretty,"
but because you steal others'
light and reflect it as your own,
paling the light of
true stars in glory
that was never truly your own.

by Tara Troiano, Frisco, TX

The Junkyard

The junkyard: filled with bodies of
once-used,
Now useless matter.
The essential potential now actualized.
The decay swift and excruciating,
What once could have been, became,
and now cannot.
What was once so pure, stained,
As it dissolves into the homogeneous ether
whence it came.
It shall cease to be, only to become
When potential comes knocking again.

by Christopher Chamberlain,
Apache Junction, AZ

Just Before Dusk

I asked God today if you were the sun.
If I had mistaken your enveloping arms
for rays wound around my body,
confused the warmth of your heartbeat
with the heat of a star
burning in its own brilliance
I thought nothing was as big as you,
nothing loomed so low come summer
yet seemed so far come winter
I think I mistook you for divinity itself.

How else could you rise
With my head from pillow
Fall asleep with me, five train stops apart
Following me into darkness
Waiting patiently to bring joy,
A harbinger of breath and bedhead
Like how some ancient cultures
Believed you were life itself,
Not just a blip on some solar system model
Of yellow modeling clay
In a forgotten planetarium

If I looked through a telescope,
I would see the planets scattered
like the freckles on your cheeks
(Only the latter I'd care to memorize)
See the entropy of existence
and name every last polka dot
Until my eyes grew teary with knowledge
That come dawn, your face
Would still be the only I'd see

How could I ever get over you
(By standing on earth you eclipse
every other forgotten face)
How could I ever get over you
(Morning, exultation, light, inhale)
How could I ever get over you
(Night, melancholia, murk, exhale)
How could I ever get over you?

by Isabel Meyers, Brookline, MA

Incandescence

There is an exquisite lightness in your eyes;
it settles in your crows feet and cuts a
high angle across your cheekbone,
sharpening on the arch of your brow
until it is
almost
solid, warmth radiating out like an aura
of risk
a forge ready to melt an outstretched
metal hand;
reform it into puddle of raw emotion and
skin traced with
a red caress.

by Livne Ore, Auckland, New Zealand

ladycritter

still they play the flesh game,
stretching into grotesque angles –
lace my fingers tired and gray
over the angry festering wound,
the indignant ferocious parting sway
of skin spilling saccharine veinwater,
my sweet ladycritter.
chickenwire royalty, the grimeprince
daughter.
hellbent on swamps of cigarettes seared,
ornate lagoons of loneliness,
i could hold her for a thousand years.
i wish you could see her –
rest your eyes like weary strangers
in beds of moss tumbling
from her cavernous throat,
float listlessly in the pools
of gasoline and soft four o'clock
she harbors in her eyesockets,
bend in paradoxical shapes
to accommodate the impossibly gorgeous
curvature
of her body so hewn from wandering
sidewalks,
all i want
is to sink my crooked teeth into her voice,
i want to bury myself in a shallow grave
beneath her nicotine-steeped tongue,
i want to become a thief
if only to liberate a lucky lighter from
her pocket
and hold a stolen flame
to the darkest tombs of my chest,
show her shelves of my cremated fears
to prove
i won't be too afraid to love her this time.

by Talia Rogers, Cedar City, UT

Two Broken Parts

Such delicate keys that unlock my heart,
The white traces the black in effortless art,
I give you my sorrow, my love, and
my stress
You thread elegant music from a
tangled-up mess

Your stubborn pedal and F out of tune
The flawless flaws that help me recognize
you
My fingertips dance with a touch
like a feather
Two broken parts that fit so perfect together

by Ellie McGlamery, Christiansburg, VA

What do you dream of?

Sometimes I want to feel beautiful and
appreciated and loved
But it's midnight
And the sun is around the world and I am
here and in the mud
I want to feel the breeze in my hair and
the snow on my lips
I want to feel what it's like to be kissed by a
boy who knows how to kiss
I want to dance but no one to see
To yell at the stars and tell them to shine
brighter for me
I want to look down and see my toes
in the sand
And a warm cup of coffee being held
in my hand
The hair that blows in my face, I want it
to shine
I just want you to say "you're doing
just fine"
But my emotions torment me, especially
late at night; they make me doubt
Who am I? Who are we?
I have no color, no animosity
But what I can do is say to you, that I have
tomorrow and we have forever
Because right now it's midnight, and like
the sun, I can only shine so bright
And those who can love me and appreciate
my being
Are cozily sleeping, and dreaming
and seeing
So free me, free you, free us, and when
you wake up, tell me
That I am all you'll ever need

by Alex Connor,
Bettendorf, IA

Icarus

Today I am Icarus
Heart of wings and mind of freedom
Soaring up to the heavens
Like God's treasured angels
Almost touching the sun and stars
Tips of feathered fingers caressing
gentle clouds
Floating on dreams and fantasies
I am lifted up
Wind blowing like the breath flowing
In my lungs
I stroke the warm sun
And unexpectedly I fall
Blissfully into the cool ocean
Blue waves sweeping over my head
Enveloping me
Embracing me
Sun still shining through the thin film
Happiness reflecting like a mirror
As all mortal troubles melt away

by Samantha Burke, New City, NY

Emotional Elephant

There it is, standing
Stomping on my hopes and dreams
It puts me back down

by Garrett Rainey, Winter Springs, FL

ethylene

i am the bearer of misfortunes.
saccharine sweetness melting into
my tangled unkempt hair,
smoke seeping into my epidermis
and cuticles. strangling
the nooses of logic;
analysis of every molecule,
atom, detail. probing of scientific
minds that ponder only upon
fate which twists like a dagger
and destiny which unwinds like
deoxyribonucleic acid strands
nucleotide by nucleotide
falters to mutations

sperm of an inebriated man
dreams too big for a
motherless child. contusions
violet like the stars, clustered
on the edges of the milky way.
nebulous on the fringes of
metamorphosis while
years melt into years like
copper crippling in the fl-fli-flickering
flame. summer bows down to
change, leaves flow away

one bad apple spoils the barrel and
i am the daughter of rotten and messy
waxy skin peels to reveal something
pale, nude, forgotten, inescapable
sewn together with torn tissues are my
muscles contracted
rib cages detached, jarring
heart rattled, shaken, deformed
barrel too minuscule for my burdens
perfume of forgotten snakes 'round me
logic dulls my senses
epitome that there are

exceptions

by Ellen Zhang, Troy, MI

Echoes (Echoes)

Anxiety's spirit has made a home
deep in the crevasses
I cannot reach down

I'm never truly rid of it

I may pretend to be the noble victor,
but anxiety doesn't die;

It travels as ripples,

returns in crashing waves
and resonates in the silence

by Sarah Bridgeport, Columbus, OH

Poison

Dark stormy clouds roll over
Mind full of uncomfortable thoughts.
Holding onto my little green clover,
Wondering when the storm will pass over.
Wind blows my long tangled hair.
I observe my collection.
Unlike others, three-leaf clovers
fascinate me.
As if we have a connection.

by Hailey Gillies,
Middleburgh, NY

Youth

I'm pretty young, and I don't know
much, but
I know that I used to be afraid of the sunset;
and I used to hide in the basement so
I wouldn't cry
in front of my worried parents.
It would fill the entire front room,
the popsicle-colored light,
brushing watercolors over our antique
furniture.
It lit up the specks of dust,
as they flew around the house.
I was stuck between the French glass doors,
I hid between them,
shadowed by the wood that held
them together.
In those moments,
I was afraid of a light the color
of my favorite popsicle flavor.

I know that
I watched my blue and red heartbreak
with front row seats.
As dark blue wrecking balls
tore our medicine cabinet to shreds.
And I watched
as the life I'd built up
shattered.
It spilled with the pills,
with the tears,
and with the stale ocean water.
And all I ever did was watch.

When I hear a song
and it can explain the pain I've felt,
I get a tingling in my palms.
I can feel my heart,
and it's never slowed down,
no matter how slow I've felt.
I can feel my breath,
and it's never stopped,
even at night
when my tears made black stains on
the pillows.

I am alive,
and every day I remember that,
I grow just a little bit stronger.
I'm not made of crushed stars,
I am made of me.
I am made of courage,
love,
and everything else that I am.
I am made of fear and of venom.
I'm made of storms
and of whittled-away friends.
But I am also made of
popsicle sunsets.

by Madeline Campbell, Sturgis, SD



Art by Maya Kendrick, Tucson, AZ

WAR NO MORE

Dr. King, I respect your legacy, sure enough
But right now I just wanna scream and
tear up some stuff
You preached
WAR NO MORE
But I can take no more
Like Othello was king of the Moors
I am black and royal, loved but blinded
by the kind
Of hatred that turns me against myself
and my kind
WAR NO MORE
Is the chant of those who seem afraid
to have their bodies laid
In plank formation on the streets like
our ancestors in the ships en route from
Mother Africa
How can I chant
WAR NO MORE
When every time I turn on my television,
My vision is stained with the blood of
my brothers and lovers and I cry
Their blood cries out from the concrete floor
of the jungle of NYC,
Thursday July 17th –
Eric Garner, rest in peace,
How can you say
WAR NO MORE
When my inheritance is a bull's-eye
on my chest,
When my birthright is the receiving end
of the second amendment? How dare
you say
WAR NO MORE
When you're born to contend with
the system
When my baby sister's skin is as black
as a clear midsummer night's dream
And a ceasefire is not enough to contain
the fire that burns in me
To fight for her,
To help her bear the burden she did not
ask to carry,
The burden of her broken crown seems
too much to bear,
When the wool of the Lamb of God is
the texture of your kinky hair,
Like my Savior of Whom you spoke,
Dr. King!
You preached peace in your pulpit,
Like Jesus we are to be silent on our way
to the slaughter,
His love is the remedy for the poison
injected into our self-image,
For we are terminally ill from a lack of
self-love.
WAR NO MORE
Sounds beautiful on Sunday,
But how do I bear the blood of my ancestors
on Monday,
As it flows through the streets on Tuesday,
Rumaine Brisbon
Wednesday, holding my breath in silent
prayer until
Thursday, Akai Gurley
Friday, Jordan Baker, Jonathan Farrell
Saturday, Mike Brown, Tamir Rice
Maybe one day WAR NO MORE will be,
But right now it is but a mirage in the
deserted being that is
Me.

by Tifara Brown,
Athens, GA

I Didn't Hear You

I spent the entire time we were together
imagining losing you,
dreaming about the way my heart would
figuratively crumble,
wondering how it'd feel to be alone again.
You were the prince, the charmer,
the quarterback who's also a nice guy,
and I was the lucky one who stole you from
all of the princesses and cheerleaders.

I crushed my thoughts in my jaw
like Skittles,
but I have always hated sour candy, and
likewise, this made my stomach churn.
I turned myself into a paper doll and
slowly cut off all the imperfections
but the longer I looked the more flaws I saw
and I cut and cut and cut and cut
until there was no paper left.

Now that you're gone I'm in this strange
state of euphoria,
I'm floating, but not like a feather;
I can't see myself spiraling back down,
and not like a cloud,
I can't see myself dissipating in the
next wind.

It wasn't that you weren't wonderful or
lovely or everything they said you were,
it was that you weren't the seconds
in between my heartbeat,
you weren't the laughs that interrupted
my speech,
you weren't the lyrics of my songs or
the last thing I thought of at night,
and until now you weren't even a line in
any of my poems.

It was that when I let my words escape,
you never knew what I was saying,
and I'll confess, I didn't hear anything
you said either.

It was that when I did smile, you never
knew why and certainly weren't the cause,
and I was too busy destroying myself to
generate any happiness for you.

I'm counting the days I'll spend by myself
and the midnights I'll remain unloved,
but I've realized I'm not made of paper
and I do not have to tear.
My heart is crumbling and I am so, so afraid
of being alone,
but I'd rather dream about love than fake it.

by Samantha Chang, Farmington, NM

Persimmons

I yearn for the taste
of the persimmon fruit
The one markets seldom carry
wanting the bitter sweetness
of the ombré orange-red
Not too harsh on the lips
just light enough to satisfy
like a sunset peering
over green hills and mountains
crimson light bright
squinting, staring, crying
at the dying warmth
of the rare red blaze
and the bittersweet taste
of tears

by Madeleine Gee, Oak Park, CA



Photo by Josh Traynere, Lemont, IL

Nine Red Water Lilies

Out of the memory-shaped unfurling
The light fell in germinating veins
So that the colors precipitated out into
the open air

I see the red flower
With the dragonfly in the middle of it;
Unsettled, hovering

Walking,
Thinking of the past
And those ghosts lying under the trees

The last red water lilies
Nine abreast, half transparent
In precipitous deliberation

Perhaps out of unnatural still
Making gestures like spirits of the dead
Nimble, yet fraught with desire

The memory-shaped pauses
Toneless and monotonous
Pressed down into the soft earth

I see orchids
And rain and vultures
Substance and color

Down under the shadow of the flowers
Where colors of all shapes wavered
And sought shade upon the horizon

The dissolving voices
Broke the silence, and turning,
Cried aloud

by Ramya Yandava,
Wellesley, MA

Cease

Every time I've taken a plane
or driven on an icy road
I'd picture my death
like a glorious
flash.
A resilient
shimmer
of me
ceasing to exist.
This is not
how I pictured
it.

by Ashley Webb, Glendale Heights, IL

Auto-Odium

Impulsive shell,
You empty dreamer,
Gently tapping that orange-white divide.
Life is the unwanted ashes
You leave on the gravel,
Narcotic smoke dribbling
From your clenched teeth, clenched-fist-
Protest, you pretentious rebel
In faux leather, leathery smile;
You're not fooling anyone,
Dear addict of Addictions.
Contradictions brand your character,
Searing through your true self:
That sniveling, snotty-nosed brat
Sniffing in the corner of your heart –
(Does a rehab program exist for
Existential crises?)
You murder that brat with each drag,
Brazenly dictating your death sentence,
And all in the name of
“Living.”

by “Opal,” Wesley Chapel, FL

Life in an Aquarium

It was spring of '89
when she left him stranded.
That saying,
“there are many fish in the sea,”
could not be more literal.
Surrounded by hundreds and thousands,
of beautiful “fish” and only wanting her,
though they are so easy to follow,
they will never leave him like her.
Wanting what had already escaped,
traveling at the same rate he was
submerging.
And why must the things you want most
be the hardest to get back?
With all these sayings
it seems he only spoke nonsense,
but where she left him stranded, he stayed,
waiting for her seal of approval.

by Rachel Thummel,
Lake Forest Park, WA

Silent Songs

My life is hidden with the breath;
my star shines bright as fireflies.
My life is hidden behind the words,
then my own lies.

I cry in the moonlight.
He held his own face in his hands.
I'm not a fairytale hero,
and I did not need anything.

I do not want a hero.
I did not need a happy ending.
I just need life
behind the small locked door.

Playing with the cat,
curious, intelligent.
Tea is medicine,
and I was sick of my birthday.

I need a moment,
I want my head on my neck.
I did not need a caterpillar:
I know who I am.

by Cassidy Short, Cadiz, KY

Cloudless Skies

He loves her now.

Those words rattle over and over
through my bones
And in between my very synapses
Like loose screws and the wavering chords
in a cloudless blue sky

I can see your hands still gliding
Like death over the ivory tusks of a piano
Heaven raining down in small bits of music
onto your head
And spilling like glass onto the floor
around you

My heart is pooling like liquid silver
And I can feel my brain turning to mush
because you look at me
With those cloudless blue eyes
The chords wavering in them, too

He loves her now

The four words are penetrating my very skin
Boring holes into passersby
As they hustle on their way like flecks
of trash on the wind
Like a spool of thread in a gust of air

I didn't think that it would end this way
But then again, who does
It always ends in the falling of snow
like quiet ghosts around you
Silent as death itself

It always ends in the wind rushing
through your head
In one ear and out the other
Shaking your mind until nothing makes
sense anymore
And we were the only thing that made sense

As cliched as this sounds, the vague
impression of your body pressed on mine
Was the only clue that you might have
loved me with half your heart
And all of your head
Instead of just half of both or all of one

So turn your lips to her ecstatic face and kiss
that sunlight from her gleaming mouth
She has the world in the palm of her hand
because you are her world
And she might be your universe but
something so vast can't be looked at
Through a beating heart

He loves her now

That may not be me but by God it's a
somebody with an ocean in their voice
That quivers whenever they speak
And seagulls flying in their hands as
they touch your face
With a foam breath that smells like
freedom and hope

She's not darkness
She's not a black hole that brings in all light
but doesn't ever give it away

She's the cloudless blue sky that you look up
at and take pictures of
Listening to those steady chords that play
like the world is just beginning

He loves her now

And that's okay

by Claire Boes,
Council Bluffs, IA

Shake

I am partial to poems about
hazy dreams, putting a face
to names of distant family.
Also the way fog rolls across
cracked streets and pools around
sighing tires,
eyes searching for the swimming
street sign.
Stained glass on Sunday mornings
creates a similar confusion.
Even the trickling light
cascades blurred mosaics on
the peeling pews ...
simplicities like this lost in a world where
phones and money conquer
words and love and just
listening to the foam from
lapping waves
fizzle out.
Try mishap Polaroids, rippled puddles,
looking into an unfocused telescope –
although I only have once –
bundled in blankets on a clear
September night
when I was five.
Treading below the lake's surface,
I open my eyes to the quiet
dullness, barely able to make out
my open hands and the bubbles
racing to smooth air.
My legs swing over the rocky drop,
eyes fixed on the sun's deep glow across
licking waves.
Orange is lazily woven into the
ripples, illuminating scattered stars,
peeking through a silk
curtain.

by Emma Campanella,
Arlington Heights, IL



Photo by Reed Phillips, Springboro, OH

red rock

Heedless as a red rock
Unadorned rough dirt
you,
Crimson character
Splashed on like paint
Over bruises swollen molten seethe
Bubbling into little cracks
Over crags and peaks

by Spencer Kopp,
Rochester, MI

“Where Do You See Yourself in Five Years?”

Ruling as queen in
A post-apocalyptic
World. Bow before me.

by Helen Pugsley, Jay Em, WY

Distance

Distance
is a kind of understated cowardice.
Tricks of the mind, one that
everyone
is capable of. Guarded and paranoid of
the truths that can be told through actions
and persuasion, it's one that
is
unseen even by 20/20 vision. It's a kind
of fear that everyone gets a kick out of,
but they are secretly
afraid of
it. It's like when you wake up at 2:00 a.m.
and it's still so dark outside, and your
mind wanders to the lurkers of the dark,
and suddenly you can't sleep because this
imaginary being you created is bigger,
stronger, intimidating. You're nothing,
when this creature is
something.

by Abbi Warren, Turner Station, KY

a slowly dying star

i.
as i lie here and listen
to the soft jazz playing
over the simple quiet
of my house,
i know.

ii.
what i know is that
i must write,
that if i didn't write
the tumbling words,
the words that come
pouring out of me like
water from the tap,
i would quietly combust and
explode, much like a
dying star.

iii.
i feel my words are
merely water from the tap.
transparent, a little dirty, sometimes
gritty, sometimes makes you
wonder if the government is really
slipping fluoride into it.
it always leaves a
metallic taste in your mouth.

iv.
i wonder at those
dying stars, the way
their light can shine
for light years.
i can only hope
mine does.

by Hannah Newcomer, Austin, TX

Hot Coffee

“Go on, take a sip”
\$5.00 Starbucks coffee lifts to my lips
You watched me with big eyes as
I attempted to hide
the shock jolting through my body
because the mug was too hot.

You made me wait ten minutes
before drinking again
but by then
the whipped cream hat had melted
and the sugar was clumped
at the bottom of the mug.

“Drink up,” you said,
“It's a \$5.00 cup”
My throat still burned
but now the brown sea was so cold
it made my lips hurt
“Go on”
“Drink up”

by Emily Dehr,
Louisville, KY

this is something that happens

Eye contact
with someone.
The kid next to you in math
a person on the bus that's stopped at a light
next to your car
or across from you at the crosswalk.
Checking that
they're still there
you can see them
and so are they
checking you, too.
And it's happening
and you're here
and it's all happening to them
and happening to you.

by Tess Felter,
Piermont, NY

Mommy

When your lace-kissed arms ensnared
mine, your hair cascading, forgotten
nightingales
plunging into my face, a feather-
light pillow for me to rest my
broken wings on, the lullabies you spun,
the melodies you fed into my blossoming
dime-sized palms remembered just
as the sting of your wedding ring carefully
scraping my heart is. I'm so sorry,
you cried,
seeds of angel's tears implanting around
the laugh lines, never the age lines,
that color your infinity, but not yet jaded to
the song of words, I giggled, reaching
out a hand to caress the emerald dewdrops
that tantalized me from the spaces
where your face met hair. Mommy,
I laughed, and the seeds sprouted again, and
the dewdrops rocked in the rain, and you
laughed, too, as you brushed the blue-
green beads off my face.

by Katherine Du, Darien, CT

The Lonely Lion Who Was Surrounded by Tigers

My lips ache
to kiss
the other side of the world
rustic buildings
colored sidewalks
exotic dances
I will never get the hang of
thick accents
freckled children

My lips ache
to kiss
a place set apart from
the waltz of office chairs
a town with no graffiti
and school buses that groan
along with their drivers
in this suburban
cage.

by Presley Hargis, Hebron, KY

Inside the Ocean

I carry the ocean inside me.
I drudge through cruel storms,
ride waves big and small.
I go in and out with the tides.
I boil, I freeze.
I carry beauty within me, as well as
horrifying creatures.
But I have yet to see the shore.
And I fear I will sink into the ocean inside
myself without ever stepping foot on land.
I carry the ocean inside me.

by Katie Rose, Mandeville, LA

The Next Day

The parking lot –
September afternoon –
The empty drainage pipe sits alone,
its paint cracked, splattered with tar.
The “No Loitering” sign stands defaced
by itself.
The rust from the bolts drips down
and soils the deep red trim
that lines it.
The solitary, black, twisted cable,
protruding out of its safe plastic shelter,
lies mangled in the wilting grass.
The wooden, slanted, rotting electrical pole
is struggling to keep itself standing,
fighting gravity.
The distant radio antennas
stand in the back behind the tall elm,
leaves torn off
by the mighty September winds.
The old yellow cargo truck –
coated in fading, cracked paint –
has just left. Pulled away.
Leaving nothing more than
mere tire tracks on
an empty road.

by Richard Lopes,
Arlington Heights, IL

Poetry

I have found you, broken-winged bird,
in a land where the ink never dries,
where eyes never open,
or simply where the sky is always black.

Where nighttime is an adventure and
daylight is a bore,
where we are all smoke dancing in mirrors,
or fragments of sunlight visible only for
a fleeting moment.

Where souls are like twisting wrought iron
statues,
beautiful, but too melancholy for most,
standing motionless and silent,
but oddly proud and perhaps a bit eager
in the light of the waning sun.

Where we speak with lingering looks
and smoldering eyes
like the embers at the bottom of an
ancient fire.

If you can read the language of the
hopelessly lost,
then I am delighted to invite you in
for a midnight cup of tea.

But if you feel that you have no business
amongst the wonderstruck,
then I wish you the best as you make
your way home alone
in the blackest, coldest, deepest of nights.

by Savannah Howe, Saint Ansgar, IA



Art by Samantha Uy, Tampa, FL

Bring Me Flowers

Around me is the night.
So bleak and unpredictable,
To these thoughts I am addicted,
I am constantly contradicted,
Over this with which I'm afflicted;
Bring me flowers.

My toes are fully numb.
The cold makes me unfeeling,
To this thing with which I'm dealing,
I don't see any way of healing
My deadened heart the bleakness stealing;
Bring me flowers.

I'm feeling so alone.
I don't know what I'm doing
What I need must be renewing
Are these my thoughts I am pursuing?
My current state is my undoing;
I need flowers.

by Tori Newitt,
Gilbert, AZ

Remnants of You

There is something there
so incredibly deep
peeking through the cracks of the decrepit
floorboards
buried beneath the layers
of soft hate
and burnt nostalgia.

by Linzy Rosen, Westfield, NJ

Monsters Aren't in the Closet

I know the monsters aren't in the closet.
I stood in the dark cold at the onset
of a storm staring into its abyss
waiting for a sign of them. Just darkness
answered my patience. Slowly, I close it.

Small child's arms hold dearly to the locket
given by his mother watching the sunset
on her life. Father leaves his homemade
mess.
The monsters aren't in the closet.

The grief-stricken cling to words of prophets
and scour the ground for change. Blue
and scarlet
and white are donned by those with prowess
in pinching spare change; none for
those with less.
No change for nation with empty wallet.
The monsters aren't in the closet.

by Alii Stewart, Las Vegas, NV

Flowing Free

I have never been straightforward,
Cowering in silence,
Hiding behind the comfort
Of sarcasm and cynical remarks.
But it is in messy scrawl
And smeared ink on wrinkled paper,
Thoughts moving quicker than hand,
That the truth cannot be held back.
Like a too-full glass
It spills onto the page.

by Charlotte Chui, Cupertino, CA

Childhood Memory

Heavy drops of salty tears, staining raw flesh
as a gentle breeze ran across
goosebump-sprinkled skin.
Echoes of silence played as a small light
shone on my head,
inside a home that hugged me to its chest
A foot placed on a damp board, wondering
where I will go

A white van designated for bad children,
a caring homeless with soup to share.
Only I didn't want soup
I didn't want to be engulfed by darkness
only to lead me to death
No longer did I want my cold foot upon
damp wood,
as I shut a heavy door leading to an familiar
but unknown world,
the soft hums of the house never ceasing

by Liv Benning, Pittsburgh, PA

Over You

Early morning coffee was always dull
But I'm no good at catching stars

Fire burns after the explosion
I forgot to pay the water bill

Overnight delivery from FedEx
Forward me your last known address

I have respiratory problems with a side
of overindulgence
The accounts owned by love are overdrawn

Late nights convincing myself it doesn't
matter
When you hung in the balance of my mind

Soon enough we all fall out of our trees
You never liked apples

Right now I can't forget that October night
When I fell down the black hole you made
just for me

My battery is at 100%
You always seemed to drain my patience

You were always better at math
I never got our variables

I drove 13 miles from the beginning
of nonexistence
I turned the corner

by Sydney Gabrielle Mayes,
Denver, CO

juices of July

honey-sweet, dripping
down the valley of my chin
summer nectarine

by Jaanvi Sant,
Pasadena, CA

Enough.

Run away.
All I ever do
Endless stretches of asphalt
Leading me to some new
Forgotten town
No place is enough
Far away enough
Exciting enough

So I keep running
until I find another
Motel cheap enough
Diner empty enough
To stop for a while
Try to find peace

But still I am pursued.
My problems
Fears
Doubts
Don't understand that
Enough is enough

Tucked between the sheets
At every motel
Waiting in the booths
Of each diner
So I keep running

I'll lose myself eventually.

by Hannah Bishop, Louisville, KY



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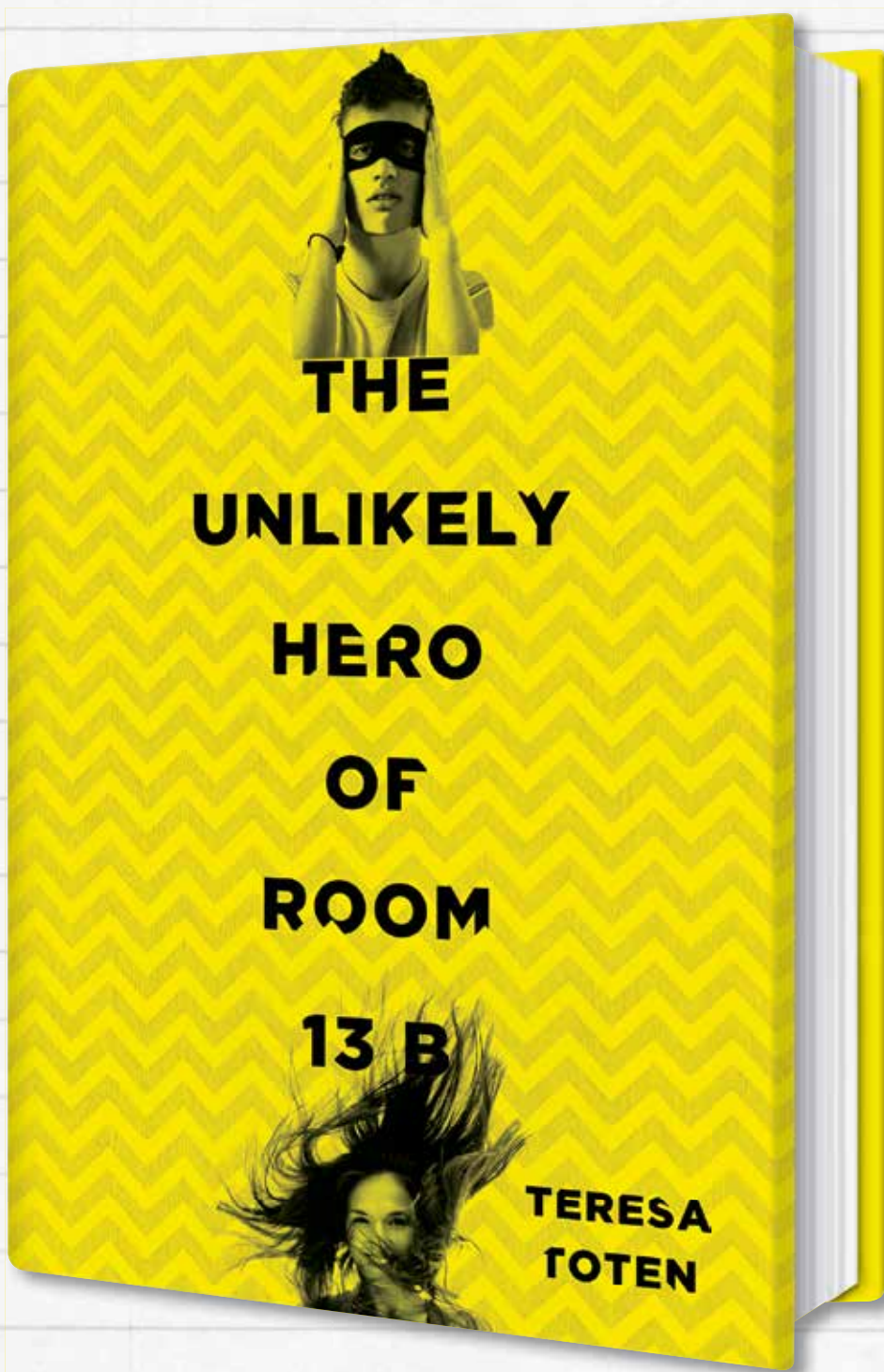
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How can he save her if he can't save himself?



Adam has his hands full confronting the everyday problems of a 15-year-old with divorced parents. Add to that his obsessive-compulsive disorder, and it's just about impossible for him to imagine ever falling in love. But when he meets Robyn, his whole life begins to change . . .

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